

Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper
“Inside The Mind Of ISIS: Understanding Its Goals And Ideology To Better Protect The Homeland”

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As prepared for delivery:

One of the most important jobs of our federal Government is to keep our people safe.

As the Paris and San Bernardino terror attacks showed us, ISIS and ISIS-inspired attacks remain a major threat. In fact, just last week, ISIS carried out attacks against U.S. allies in Turkey and Indonesia.

Today, we will look at ISIS’s ideology and how it hopes to achieve its goals. One of ISIS’s key strengths is its large number of recruits. Despite the heavy losses inflicted on ISIS by coalition forces, the number of ISIS fighters on the ground in Iraq and Syria remains steady thanks to a stream of new recruits flowing into the region each month.

ISIS also appears to have a significant online army that grows by the day. These ‘virtual’ soldiers may never set foot in the territory ISIS controls, but they are waging an aggressive social media campaign that calls on people to do the group’s bidding from thousands of miles away. These battlefield recruits and online-supporters are attracted not only to ISIS’s ideology but to its image, as well.

What is that image? It is one of a winner. Even as it suffers serious defeats on the battlefield and loses key leaders, ISIS still projects an image of indestructability. They do this through fictitious claims and propaganda on social media, and also by ignoring the truth about the progress coalition forces are making. This winner message appeals to many young men who crave fame, fortune, love, and increased social standing.

Just as troubling is the fact that ISIS has successfully advanced a twisted narrative that the United States is at war with Islam and that it’s the duty of young Muslims to defend their religion by attacking the United States and our allies.

But nothing, let me repeat that, nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me be clear: this battle is against ISIS, plain and simple. ISIS is a cowardly group of murderers who kill Muslims, Jews and Christians alike. They have no regard for human life. The estimated 30,000 ISIS fighters have nothing to do with the 1.5 billion Muslim men and women who peacefully practice their religion around the world and in our communities.

At the end of the day, this battle against ISIS is a war of words and ideas as much as it a war of military power and action. That’s why it is so important that we not only continue to crush ISIS on the battlefield but also counter their hateful message.

To this end, last month, I introduced legislation that would create an office at the Department of Homeland Security to counter the violent messages of ISIS and other terror groups. I welcome all my colleagues to join me on this important piece of legislation.

This fight against ISIS, however, is not solely the responsibility of DHS or any other federal agency. We all have a role to play. We have an obligation to say something if we something suspicious.

And we all – especially those of us in public office – have a responsibility to be mindful of the words we use when we talk about Islam and the 1.5 billion Muslims around the world who practice their religion peacefully. We must work to ensure that the rhetoric we use does not play into the hands of ISIS.

When we make careless comments about the nature of Islam or the need to keep Muslims out of the United States for political purposes, we feed ISIS's narrative that the United States is at war with Muslims.

We are smarter than that. Our country is better than that. We do not need to engage in demagoguery or run from our moral obligations in order to keep Americans safe.

I look forward to learning more today about ISIS's ideology and tactics and what more we can do to address the root causes of this difficult challenge.

Our thanks to you, the witnesses, for being here. We look forward to hearing your testimony.