

STANDING UP TO TERROR: Experts offer insight

Experts offer insight on attacks, best ways to combat ISIS

By Garrin Marchetti

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Jon Fabrice and his son Clement, join a vigil outside the White House in Washington on Saturday to pay tribute to the victims of the Paris attacks. Multiple attacks across Paris on Friday night have left scores dead and hundreds injured. | Photo: Manuel Balce Ceneta

Joel Day, an assistant professor of security and global studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, had a lot on his mind as he sat in his office Friday afternoon.

He was thinking about the drone strike that probably killed ISIS leader "Jihadi John."

What was on Day's mind was how the Islamic terrorist group would retaliate against the U.S. and western allies in the wake of the air strike.

Minutes later, the answer to his question came across the news feed on his cell phone: Paris, the capital of France, was under attack.

"I was sitting in my office and wondering what game-changing events might happen. I saw the alert and I immediately said, 'This is ISIS,'" Day said Saturday. "I saw them as (ISIS) trying to show strength while they are backed against the wall."

As France and the world continue to comprehend the attacks conducted by ISIS in various locations throughout Paris, foreign security and international relations experts in the Merrimack



Valley are pondering what the next move should be for the U.S., as well as calling for citizens to remain strong and fearless in the face of terrorism.

Despite its losses of recent territories and deaths of several prominent members, the ISIS strike against Paris was a clear action to "communicate to the world they are serious and will still find ways to attack," according to Day, who also serves as a research associate at UMass Lowell's Center for Terrorism and Security Studies.

Zachary Simmons | Photo: Allegra Boverman

Day said precise execution of ISIS's attack was "indicative of prior training," and the terrorist group was ready to strike when the time was right. Rather than focusing on how such a horrific act could be committed, officials and citizens should continue to show resiliency in the wake of the attacks.

"There are already high levels of resiliency being shown, from everyone singing the French national anthem as they left the soccer stadium (near bombings) to the support on social media," Day said. "People are gathering with one another. That is the most effective signal of why we are going to win and why ISIS will lose."

Haverhill High School teacher Zachary Simmons shared Day's sentiment Saturday. An international relations teacher and moderator of the high school's Model U.N. team, Simmons said the "silver lining" in the Paris attacks was the outpouring of support for Paris coming from around the world.

Simmons heard about the Paris attacks from his 13-year-old daughter. Simmons had just returned home from work Friday when his daughter told him "something really bad was happening in France."

"She asked, 'Can you explain (what was happening) to me?'" Simmons said Saturday. "I went to look at the television and I was horrified. Dumbstruck, really. Just dumbstruck."

Simmons discusses ISIS often in his classroom to help students understand that the extremists don't represent a religious group, but a group hungry for power.

Both Simmons and Day agreed the U.S. should increase its opposition to ISIS, but not by declaring another war. Simmons called for more dialogue between the U.S. and foreign countries impacted by ISIS to further understand the leaders and perpetrators of ISIS and ISIS attacks, respectively.

According to Day, the U.S. should not engage in "World War III" as an act of vengeance for Paris, but rather smaller, precision, targeted attacks because a large scale battle would give ISIS the headlines to recruit more members to its cause. The goal of attacks, such as Paris and 9/11, are to lure the U.S. into "wars of attrition," and Day said the U.S. needs to adopt a policing operation to end the ISIS threat, not a war operation.

"If these Paris-style attacks are going to be committed by ISIS and ISIS fan groups in other places, that doesn't mean the U.S. can go and put boots on the ground everywhere," Day said. "Boots on the ground might sound like a good idea, but we've learned this lesson before. We need to be very careful our response does not serve as recruitment for future terrorist or attackers."

Day acknowledged the level of fear ISIS instills in many, including his students. He tells his students to continue to live life as they have always lived: without fear.

"America needs to be mobilized and stand resilient in the face of terrorism. The best thing we can do is go to class, think about studying abroad. To live our life as free as best as we can," Day said. "That is standing up to terrorism. If we can stand up and communicate that we intend to be resilient and be free, that's the best form of counter-terrorism out there."

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