

Former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell said in an interview on CBS' Face the Nation on Sunday, "I think what we're going to learn is that these guys are communicating via these encrypted apps, this commercial encryption which is very difficult or nearly impossible for governments to break, and the producers of which don't produce the keys necessary for law enforcement to read the encrypted messages."

The use of encrypted communications by ISIS has prompted various former intelligence officials and media analysts to blame NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden for tipping off terrorist organizations to intelligence agencies' surveillance capabilities and for their "going dark" with their communications. Former CIA Director James Woolsey said in multiple interviews that former NSA contractor and whistleblower Edward Snowden "has blood on his hands," and the changes made by the Obama administration to surveillance as a result of the Snowden leaks and the changes that terrorists made in communicating with each other based on the leaks had led directly to the inability of the intelligence community in the US and in France to stop the Paris attacks from happening.

That blame seems a bit far-fetched, given that terrorist organizations have been using encryption of various sorts for more than 15 years at least. And additional details shared by officials since the attack suggest that metadata from the encrypted communications provided early warning that an attack in France was imminent. US intelligence officials warned the French government nearly two months ago that ISIS was planning an attack in France. The French Air Force struck targets in Raqqa, Syria—ISIS' proclaimed capital—on October 8, based on that intelligence, in an attempt to take out those planning and coordinating the attacks.

But while the use of encrypted "apps" to communicate may not have entirely screened the operation from the eyes of intelligence organizations, it may have had an impact on authorities' ability to act more decisively to prevent the attacks in Paris, which left 129 dead and hundreds more wounded. And that may spur another round of calls from US intelligence and law enforcement officials for restrictions on encryption without assured law enforcement access.