

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT



Does ISIS really differ from other terrorist groups; if so, how does its singularity complicate US efforts to defeat it?

IN THIS ISSUE

Mark Moyar • Pete R. Mansoor

Raymond Ibrahim



Contents

FEBRUARY 2016 · ISSUE 29

Editorial Board

Victor Davis Hanson, Chair
Bruce Thornton
David Berkey

Contributing Members

Peter Berkowitz
Max Boot
Josiah Bunting III
Angelo M. Codevilla
Thomas Donnelly
Colonel Joseph Felter
Josef Joffe
Frederick W. Kagan
Kimberly Kagan
Edward N. Luttwak
Peter R. Mansoor
Walter Russell Mead
Mark Moyar
Williamson Murray
Ralph Peters
Andrew Roberts
Admiral Gary Roughead
Kori Schake
Kiron K. Skinner
Barry Strauss
Gil-li Vardi
Bing West
Miles Maochun Yu
Amy Zegart

BACKGROUND ESSAY

Typologies of Terrorism
by Mark Moyar

FEATURED COMMENTARY

Why ISIS Is Different—and Why It Matters
by Peter R. Mansoor

ISIS: The Latest Phase of the Jihad
by Raymond Ibrahim

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Discussion Questions

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.



Typologies of Terrorism

Mark Moyar

The term “terrorism” is commonly understood as political violence outside the norms of conflicts between states. Terrorism’s victims can be innocent civilians, or they can be political officials or even soldiers. More controversial is the term “terrorist.” Individuals who commit acts of terrorism are often said to be “terrorists,” but that definition can be disputed on the grounds that terrorism is usually a tactic rather than a defining feature of an organization, and hence it makes no more sense to refer to a political movement that employs terrorism as “terrorists” than it does to refer to a country that employs conventional warfare as a “conventional war state.”

The term “terrorist” best fits organizations for which terrorism is the principal or sole activity. Examples would include the Bader-Meinhof Brigade and the Weather Underground. Such organizations usually have political motives, but their exclusive reliance on terrorism is usually too limited in its impact to cause serious harm to their enemies or to attract large numbers of supporters.

Non-state organizations that use terrorism as one of several military and political instruments are most often termed “insurgents.” The most famous exposition of the broad spectrum of violence employed by insurgents came from Mao Zedong, based upon his own experiences in waging insurgency in China. Mao delineated three categories of insurgent violence: terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and conventional warfare. Terrorism typically targets a smaller number of victims than guerrilla warfare, and is more likely to target civilians. The line between the two is sometimes blurred; the bombing of a police station by a paramilitary group might be said to be terrorism or guerrilla warfare or a combination thereof.

According to Mao’s theory, insurgents rely heavily on terrorism when they are at their weakest. Because terrorist strikes are small and covert, they do not expose the insurgents to large-scale retaliation. When the insurgents become stronger, they can turn to guerrilla warfare, which can inflict more damage, while its concentration of lightly armed fighters increases their exposure to governmental countermeasures. Guerrilla warfare on its own rarely suffices to overthrow a government. Insurgents who seek to overthrow a government typically aspire to conventional warfare, for it is usually required to defeat the government’s conventional military forces. It is also most vulnerable to the government’s countermeasures, for conventional forces must mass, which makes them easier to

detect, and they cannot melt into the population as easily as guerrillas. ISIS has made use of all three types of violence as described by Mao, its biggest victories as well as biggest defeats taking place in the realm of conventional warfare.

Some insurgent organizations have relied on a small group of dedicated adherents to attain their objectives. Others have attempted to mobilize large segments of the population. Those that succeed in mobilizing the population are generally the most effective of insurgents, since they can bring more political and military strength to bear and can more easily intermingle with the civilian population.

ISIS can be characterized as both terrorists and insurgents. Their record of brutal terrorist attacks has few rivals in terms of both the number of victims and the gruesome nature of the attacks. ISIS is also an insurgent group, waging wars of insurgency in both Syria and Iraq. It has mobilized significant numbers of Syrians and Iraqis, without whom their impressive territorial advances would not have been possible. How much of their success in mobilization results from fear of terrorism and how much results from religious or ideological appeal in Iraq and Syria is far from clear, given that no polling organizations operate in territory held by ISIS, and the cities from which ISIS has been driven—such as Tikrit and Ramadi—were depopulated during the liberation process. The number of foreigners who have flocked to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS, however, indicates that the messages and accomplishments of ISIS have a strong positive appeal with some Muslims.

During the past year, ISIS has carried out terrorist attacks in close to twenty countries, in much of the Middle East and North Africa, and as far afield as Canada and Australia, demonstrating a global reach without a parallel in the history of terrorist organizations. Some of those strikes have been aimed at intimidating or overthrowing governments, which is typically how terrorist attacks are conceived. Others, such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks, appear intended mainly to portray the movement as a defender of Islam. Another highly unusual feature of ISIS is its ability



Hoover Institution Archives Poster Collection, 2002c71_001

to inspire individuals to acts of terrorism in distant countries without any direct contact with those individuals, as for instance in the recent San Bernardino shooting spree.

When enemies of a government occupy large amounts of territory that the government purports to govern, the rebels often claim statehood. Those claims gain in force when the rebels are capable of governing the population themselves, a task that rebels often find a much more daunting challenge than fighting. ISIS purports to be not just a state, but a caliphate, and its claims are given some credibility by ISIS control and governance of cities like Raqqa and Mosul and other populous territory.

Organizations that often employed terrorism in gaining power discontinued its use once they obtained power. But such is not always the case. Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Communist China made lavish use of terrorist violence against their own citizens and millions of foreigners. The Khmer Rouge killed more than one million of Cambodia's people in pursuing their vision of a Communist utopia. Iran's revolutionaries have carried out terrorist operations on a smaller scale, using proxy forces in order to conceal their hand. The fanaticism and barbarism of ISIS give every reason to believe that terrorism would continue if ISIS were to gain control over Syria or Iraq.

External support is usually a critical factor in the ability of an insurgency to withstand attack. Most insurgencies that have succeeded have received external support, in the form of material assistance, manpower, expertise, and/or sanctuary. Most insurgencies lacking in such external support have failed. ISIS appears to be receiving extensive support from Sunni countries, who may not care for ISIS's ideology but view them as a preferable alternative to Iran and its allies in Syria and Iraq.

The extent of fanaticism within an organization and its followers is also a major factor in its vulnerability. Germany's Nazi Party had millions of devoted adherents who maintained fierce resistance to Allied attacks until their army had been completely destroyed and their capital burned to the ground. By contrast, Afghanistan's Taliban contained a small core of dedicated leaders, but many of its military commanders were opportunists who were willing to abandon the Taliban in 2001 when the Northern Alliance attacked the Taliban with the help of US air power. The incidence of fanatical devotees and opportunists within the ranks of ISIS is one of the most important questions on ISIS for which solid evidence is scarce.

In contrast to most insurgent organizations, ISIS is dispersed across a multiplicity of countries. ISIS affiliates have established themselves across a wide arc of territory that includes most of the countries from Algeria in the west to Pakistan in the east, as well as Nigeria and Somalia. Although they have suffered some recent military reverses in Iraq and Syria, they appear to retain a high degree of strength in those countries, and no foreign power or coalition has as yet mustered the ground forces that would be required

to evict them from their Syrian strongholds. The collapse of central governance in Libya and Yemen and the deterioration of Afghanistan's security apparatus following American troop withdrawals have afforded opportunities for ISIS to fill governance voids. Vanquishing them will therefore require efforts in multiple nations, some of which are lacking in viable local partners.

Destroying the leadership of an organization may suffice to destroy its ideology. The destruction of Nazi Germany put an end to its ideological appeal. Destroying the leadership of ISIS would destroy its prestige, which is a key element of its appearance, but would likely not destroy its ideology. The internet has given ISIS an unprecedented capability to sell its ideology to the world's population, and its messages will continue to circulate even after the crafters of those messages have been killed.

Ideologies can be defeated over time through containment rather than through destruction, as occurred in the case of Communism. The bankruptcy of Communism eventually became clear to the elites within Communist countries, and the ideology died a natural death. Containing ISIS could conceivably result in such an outcome. But it will require a willingness to tolerate ISIS attacks like those in Paris and San Bernardino for a prolonged period, and there is no guarantee that it will succeed. The West's current approach to ISIS is closer to containment than to destruction, but that will change if the depredations of ISIS become painful enough.



MARK MOYAR is a Senior Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University, and author. He holds a BA, summa cum laude, from Harvard and a PhD from Cambridge. His books include *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (Yale University Press, 2009); *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Naval Institute Press, 1997; University of Nebraska Press, 2007). He is currently writing a book on national security strategy during the Obama administration

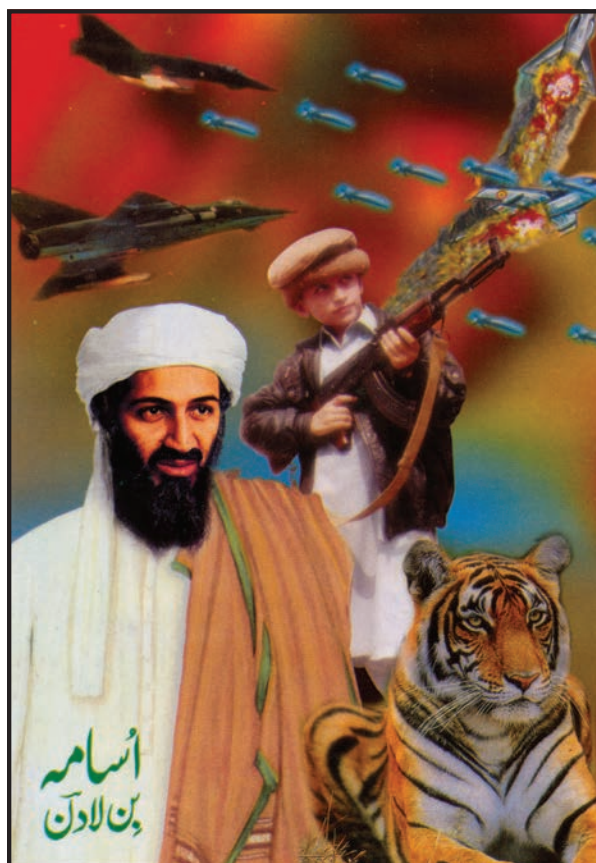
Why ISIS Is Different— and Why It Matters

Peter R. Mansoor

The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is the modern face of terror. Unlike al-Qaeda, the Irish Republican Army, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Maoists in India, the Shining Path, and other traditional terrorist organizations, ISIS refuses to lurk in the shadows. Unlike Hezbollah, Hamas, the Tamil Tigers, or the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, ISIS is not content with controlling a limited amount of territory confined to a single nation-state. Osama bin-Laden was willing to wait for a future day when al-Qaeda, having destabilized the Western world and defeated the dictatorships of the Middle East, would emerge to claim its rightful place as the governing body of the Islamic caliphate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is unwilling to postpone that destiny. He and his followers are in a hurry—to establish an Islamic caliphate, to continue its spread across the Islamic world, to battle the Crusaders and Jews, and to bring their brand of justice and Shari'a law to the entire world. They have seized territory in Iraq and Syria larger than the size of Israel and Jordan combined, formed a government, fielded capable armed forces, and established branches in nine other countries, with sympathizers in dozens more. ISIS is a force with which to be reckoned.

ISIS is the archetypal hybrid threat, combining elements of conventional armed forces, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and criminal activity to form a potent challenge to stability in the Middle East and a threat to security worldwide. It cannot be defeated

by addressing just one aspect of its power. Attempts to contain it have already failed due to the organization's ability to spread its radical ideology over social media. The group has extensive monetary assets and an ability to tax its subjects that make targeting of its finances problematic. A counterterrorist strategy to defend against attacks at home combined with the targeted assassination of ISIS leaders overseas has proven to be insufficient to seriously degrade



Hoover Institution Archives Poster Collection, 2002c71_0003

the ability of the organization to continue its reign of terror. Airstrikes over the past eighteen months have killed more than twenty thousand fighters, but new recruits have more than compensated for these losses. Attacks against ISIS territory have had some success in Tikrit, Baiji, Sinjar, and Ramadi, but the core of the Islamic State remains intact.

Defeating the Islamic State requires a holistic strategy to deal simultaneously with all of the various aspects of ISIS power. Elements of such a strategy are in place, but by themselves they are insufficient to defeat ISIS in an acceptable time frame. Good intelligence and robust homeland defenses are absolutely required to deal with ISIS-inspired terrorism. Airpower and special operations forces will continue to degrade ISIS command and control and logistics, including its lucrative oil smuggling business. More can and must be done in each of these areas. Intelligence agencies must apply more resources to track people who have travelled to the Islamic State and then returned home. The air campaign needs to be expanded and overly restrictive rules of engagement loosened to increase its effectiveness.

But to defeat the ISIS narrative that its victory is inevitable and eliminate its attraction as a base for

Islamist terrorism, its armed forces must be destroyed and its territory occupied. This can only be accomplished by ground operations in Syria and Iraq. Several factors complicate any such campaign. Iranian control over Baghdad inhibits the ability of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to accept further American assistance, especially the introduction of US ground forces or combat advisors into Iraq. Kurdish forces are capable, but are unlikely to be enlisted to attack areas outside their region. The use of Shi'a popular mobilization forces would alienate Sunni Arabs, without whose support any long-term solution to the governance of currently held ISIS territory is impossible. Syrian rebel groups are divided, partly under Islamist control, and more interested in defeating the forces loyal to Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad than in destroying ISIS. This leaves the possibility of a US-led air-ground campaign to destroy the Islamic State. Forces could come from the United States, NATO allies, and Arab regional partners, using Turkey and Jordan as bases of operation. Assembling such a coalition requires overcoming a number of obstacles beyond domestic political opposition, primarily the fashioning of common policy regarding the future of Syria, crafting local governance arrangements that Sunni Arabs can accept, and managing the complications of Russian and Iranian involvement in the conflict.

Skeptics counter that crushing ISIS requires defeating its ideology, absent which any military success would be fleeting. But the existence of the caliphate feeds that ideology; indeed, it is its essential foundation. If the caliphate is overrun by Western, Arab, and Turkish military forces it will no longer seem to be riding the tide of fate. ISIS and its ideology will be tarnished beyond repair, and it will then enter the dustbin of history where it so rightly belongs.



PETER MANSOOR, colonel, US Army (retired), is the General Raymond E. Mason, Jr. Chair of Military History at Ohio State University. A distinguished

graduate of West Point, he earned his doctorate from Ohio State University. He assumed his current position after a twenty-six-year career in the US Army that included two combat tours, culminating in his service as executive officer to General David Petraeus in Iraq. His latest book is *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*, a history of the surge in Iraq in 2007–8, which was published by Yale University Press in 2013.

ISIS: The Latest Phase of the Jihad

Raymond Ibrahim

The best way to understand the Islamic State (ISIS) is to see it as the next phase of al-Qaeda. All Sunni Islamic jihadi groups—Boko Haram, ISIS, Taliban, al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda, even Hamas—share the same motivations based on a literal and orthodox reading of Islamic history and doctrine: resurrecting a caliphate (which existed in various forms from 632 to 1924) that implements and spreads the totality of sharia, or Islamic law.

Accordingly, ISIS's notorious atrocities—beheading, crucifixion, sexual enslavement, and destruction of non-Sunni places of worship—are being committed by other jihadi groups (e.g., Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, both of which pledged allegiance to ISIS) and even by some Muslim governments (e.g., Saudi Arabia) and individual Muslims around the world.

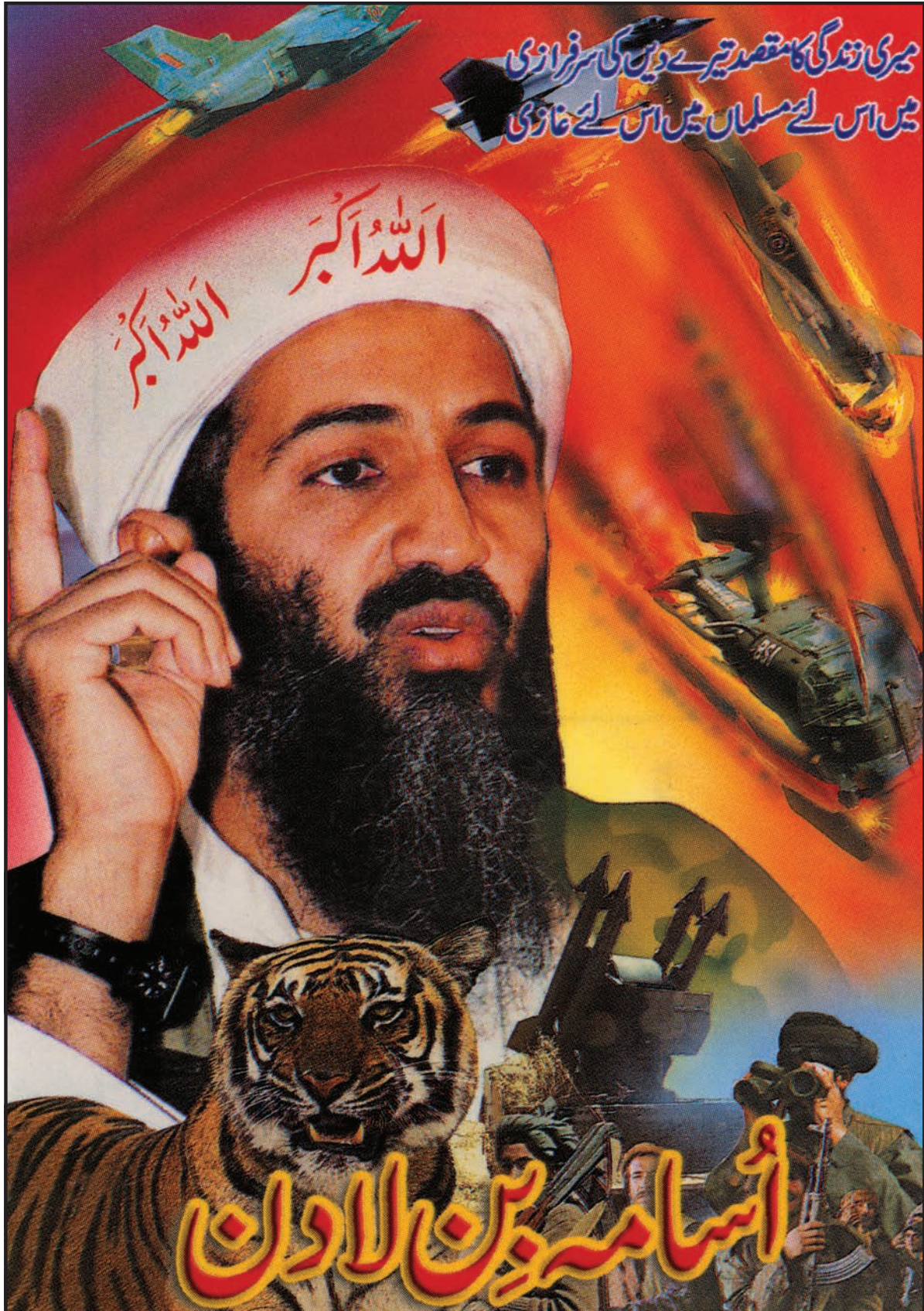
Conversely, although al-Qaeda (AQ) adheres to the same sharia that ISIS implements, it has long waged a propaganda war against the West. AQ portrays all terrorist attacks on the West, including 9/11, as mere payback for the West's unjust policies against Muslims, including support for Israel and Arab dictators.¹

To maintain this "grievance" narrative, AQ knows that the innately supremacist and violent aspects of *sharia*—for example ISIS's destruction of churches and subjugation of "infidel" Christian minorities—need to be curtailed or hidden from the Western world. Otherwise AQ's efforts of portraying jihadis as "freedom fighters" resisting an oppressive West risk being undermined.²

Regardless, AQ's strategy of turning Western opinion appears to have borne fruit in one pivotal area: canceling longtime Western support for secular Arab dictators. In the context of the "Arab Spring," the Obama administration turned its back on America's Egyptian ally of 30 years, Hosni Mubarak; helped ISIS-affiliated jihadis overthrow Libya's Gaddafi (even though he was complying with Washington); and continues supporting ISIS-affiliated "moderates"³ to overthrow Syria's Assad. Idealists in both government

POLL: WHY HAS ISIS GROWN SO RAPIDLY IN COMPARISON TO OTHER RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORIST GROUPS?

- It is the first Islamic terrorist group to gain direct control of oil revenues.
- It upped the level of medieval violence through sensationalized barbarity.
- It brilliantly appealed directly to disaffected young Muslims throughout the Western World.
- It was a creation of Western indifference, especially the recession of the United States from the Middle East.
- It is a passing phenomenon, not much different from other mostly forgotten Islamic terrorist outfits.



and media forgot a primary reason the United States had formerly supported secular Arab dictators: They single-mindedly opposed the jihadis.

The result has been a new and emboldened phase of the jihad, a.k.a., ISIS. Born and entrenched in precisely those nations that US leadership brought “freedom and democracy” to—Iraq, Syria, and Libya—ISIS (or al-Qaeda 2.0) is now indifferent to Western opinion. By widely broadcasting its savage triumphalism in the name of Islam, ISIS forfeits the “grievance card” but plays the “strength” card, thus inspiring millions of Muslims. According to the Pew Research Center, in 11 countries alone, at least 63 million and as many as 287 million Muslims support ISIS.⁴

Yet even ISIS works in stages. When criticized by Muslims for killing fellow Muslims and not attacking Israel—the supreme enemy—ISIS responded by saying it was following the pattern of the historic caliphate founded in 632.⁵ Then, Caliph Abu Bakr beheaded and crucified tens of thousands of Muslims for apostatizing. Only after the rebel tribes were brought back into the fold of Islam were they set loose to conquer European/Christian territories during history’s early Muslim conquests (634–750). Indeed, it is believed that ISIS’s caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took this name to signify his focus, that is, terrorizing all “hypocrites” and “apostates” until they unify under the caliphate’s banner.

It still remains to be seen whether ISIS’s strategy—inspiring Muslims but losing Western opinion—will succeed. According to polls, “Islamophobia” is on the rise in the West, especially after the rise of ISIS, prompting several politicians to speak more candidly about the catalysts for terrorist violence.

The Obama administration’s weak responses feed into AQ’s narrative that Islamic terrorism at least in part reflects Islamic grievance; and it refuses

to connect the actions of any jihadi organization—whether ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, et al.—to Islamic teaching.

Time will tell whether the next administration will remain willfully ignorant of the nature of its jihadi enemy—which is fatal in war according to Sun Tzu’s ancient dictum “know your enemy”—or whether reality will trump political correctness.

1 See “An Analysis of Al-Qa’ida’s Worldview: Reciprocal Treatment or Religious Obligation?” Also, *The Al Qaeda Reader*, which separates the organization’s communiqués into two groups: “Propaganda” messages to the West portraying jihadi terrorists as mere freedom fighters, and “Theology” messages to fellow Muslims, preaching the same Islam of ISIS.

2 See “Al-Qaeda: Defender of Christians?” for a more elaborate explanation of this theme.

3 For the Syrian Free Army’s role: “Largest Massacre of Christians in Syria Ignored.”

4 “Pew poll: Between 63 million and 287 million ISIS supporters in just 11 countries.”

5 “New Islamic Caliphate Declares Jihad on ... Muslims.”



RAYMOND IBRAHIM, a 2013 Hoover Institution Media Fellow and expert on Islamism, is author of *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam’s New War on*

Christians and The Al Qaeda Reader. His writings have appeared in *World Almanac of Islamism*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst*, and *Middle East Quarterly*; he has appeared on MSNBC, Fox News, C-SPAN, PBS, Reuters, Al-Jazeera, NPR, MSNBC, Fox News, and many other media. Formerly a reference/linguist specialist at the Library of Congress’ Near East section, Ibrahim is fluent in Arabic, provides expert testimony for Islam-related lawsuits, and testifies before Congress. He currently holds fellowships at think tanks including Philadelphia’s Middle East Forum and L.A.’s Horowitz Freedom Center..

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DOES ISIS REALLY DIFFER FROM OTHER TERRORIST GROUPS; IF SO, HOW DOES ITS SINGULARITY COMPLICATE US EFFORTS TO DEFEAT IT?

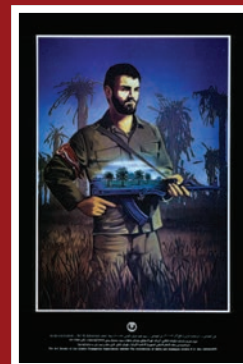
1. What is the relationship between Sunni nations in the Middle East and the growth of ISIS?
2. How has the new relationship of the United States with Iran influenced the American effort against ISIS?
3. Can or should the United States work with the Russians to bomb ISIS assets?
4. Is ISIS-inspired terrorism inside the West a greater threat than that posed by al-Qaeda?
5. Who are ISIS? Al-Qaeda veterans? Ex-Baathists from Iraq? Former Free Syrian Army renegades? International Muslim radicals?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (St. Martin's, 2015).
- Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* [2nd ed., rev.] (Potomac Books, 2005).
- Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (Doubleday, 2015).

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

AFTER THE END OF SANCTIONS BY THE WEST, WILL IRAN SUCCEED IN ITS EFFORTS TO FIND STATE LEGITIMACY WITH EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES?



Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



The publisher has made an online version of this work available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license 3.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0>.

Efforts have been made to locate the original sources, determine the current rights holders, and, if needed, obtain reproduction permissions. On verification of any such claims to rights in the articles reproduced in this book, any required corrections or clarifications will be made in subsequent printings/editions. Hoover Institution assumes no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Copyright © 2015 by the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University

Hoover Institution, Stanford University
434 Galvez Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-6003
650-723-1754

Hoover Institution in Washington
The Johnson Center
1399 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
202-760-3200

