

COMMENTARY

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Leaving No Escape Route for ISIS

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The gruesome and tragic beheadings of innocent US and UK citizens is excruciatingly painful, especially for the families of the victims. Other than making supreme efforts to free current prisoners held by ISIS by any means available, no compromises can ever be made with this extremist group. The nature of ISIS' menace necessitates an inexorable, merciless, and overwhelming military campaign to eliminate every trace of this horrid movement in and outside the theatre of war.

As long as ISIS exists, it will continue to behead innocent people and summarily execute thousands of others. They glorify death, as they see martyrdom as a fulfilment of God's sacred mission to which they have been assigned.

ISIS is a movement driven by religious fanaticism that rejects any other brand of Islam and defies any limits or constraints to achieve their perverse objective to establish a Caliphate encompassing Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and Kuwait.

Thus, they will fight to the last warrior in the name of God as they see themselves as having been ordained by God to wage their battles against non-believers and even those Muslims who do not conform to their twisted religious doctrine.

They will remain relentless, fearing nothing thrown at them. They are determined to spread their reign of terror, through which they believe they can realize their messianic mission to dominate the Arab states and ultimately make Islam the singular global religion.

No one should underestimate ISIS' strategy, which entails the use of brutal force, spreading terror and awe to intimidate their opponents, having no compunction of using civilians as human

shields, using a formidable public relations campaign to attract foreign fighters and local recruits, and being quick to adapt to any situation.

ISIS governs the territory it controls as a state with courts, internal security, prisons, and medical institutions. They provide social services and schooling, indoctrinating the young with extremist interpretations of the Quran.

They are selective in choosing Quranic verses to justify their atrocities. In Surah 2:190, Muslims are instructed to “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you,” but they conveniently ignore the second part of the verse that says, “But do not transgress limits; For Allah loveth not transgressors.”

Such a group cannot be deterred or degraded—they must be crushed. The battle against ISIS cannot be carried out incrementally; it must be overwhelming from the ground, sea and air, forcing them to be on the run and preventing them from regrouping to fight another day. ISIS is akin to cancer, because even if a small remnant is left behind, it will be certain to rise again.

For these reasons, the US and its allies must have a strategy to crush ISIS and be prepared for a long and protracted fight. The Obama administration has inadvertently contributed to the rise of ISIS by doing next to nothing to help stem the civil war in Syria early on.

President Obama should have heeded the unanimous call of his national security team more than two years ago to supply the Syrian rebels with all the aid necessary to accelerate Assad’s fall. He should have also made good on his vow to punish Assad if he crossed the “red line” of using chemical weapons against civilians.

At this juncture, the President must come to fully understand the responsibility of American power and indispensability in dealing with international crises.

Although President Obama has ruled out sending American ground troops, he must make it clear that this option is on the table. Moreover, he must seek wide bipartisan Congressional support to convey the message that the country is united behind him and will stop short of nothing to defeat ISIS.

The coalition assembled by the Obama administration to fight ISIS, with the exception of a few Western powers, is not up to the task but rather a mere facade to obscure the reality. The majority of these countries provide little more than lip service to this unprecedented military campaign not seen since the end of World War II.

Relying on Iraqi troops and training 5,000 Syrians rebels (or even ten times that) will not suffice. However awesome America’s and its Western allies’ air power may be, the US must make it

abundantly clear to the Arab states that this is their fight, they cannot be allowed to shirk their responsibility, and America is ready to lend them all the support they need.

As many military experts have said, this war cannot be won from the air alone, and the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, cannot buy their salvation with money alone.

In addition to Iraqi ground troops and some Syrian rebels, the Obama administration should pressure Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, along with Jordan, all under Egyptian leadership, to shoulder this responsibility and take the fight to the territory that ISIS controls.

Saudi Arabia is the custodian of Sunni Islam, and precisely because of that, the Saudi government must not allow Sunni Islam to be defamed and desecrated by the savagery of ISIS, and must therefore be in the forefront of this fight.

President Sisi has already shown his willingness and ability to crack down on Islamic extremism; for Egypt, fighting ISIS is even more critical than fighting the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt has formidable military power and regardless of how sensitive the domestic political environment may be, Egypt has to lead.

In connection, the US should not give Turkey a free ride by avoiding public exposure of President Erdogan's mischievous behaviour. Allowing Muslim volunteers from all over Europe and the US to cross Turkish borders on the way to Syria to fight shoulder to shoulder with ISIS is nothing short of a travesty.

Adding insult to injury, Turkish forces are standing idle while ISIS wages a deadly battle against the Kurdish city of Kobani, which is within sight of the Turkish forces stationed along the border with Syria.

Erdogan must choose which side he stands on. Instead of hallucinating about restoring the "glory" of the Ottoman Empire, he must fully support the campaign against ISIS by providing military and other material assistance.

Iran should be kept out of the coalition, and even though the fight against ISIS will still benefit Iran, Tehran's gains will be much less if excluded.

Iran has and continues to support Syria's President Assad with weapons, money, materials, trainers, and advisors, and finances terrorists throughout the Middle East. The presence of Iranian troops in Syria will only consolidate Tehran's position in the country, embolden Hezbollah, demoralize the moderate rebels, and give Assad a much longer lease on life.

The United States must learn from the bitter lessons of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, which unfortunately paralyzed President Obama as he pledged not to involve America in another war, especially in an Arab country. We are now paying for this paralysis.

Although President Obama was forced to finally intervene to battle ISIS, he knows that winning this war will be costly and wearing on America. He also knows that the longer it lasts, the greater the cost and sacrifices will be, and the more intractable it will become.

For this reason, the US with its allies must be resolute and rain hell on ISIS at a speed and with such firepower that will shatter ISIS in every direction.

This may well be Obama's last chance to change the widespread perception of being weak and indecisive, and restore America's image as the indispensable global leader because only the US can lead the battle against ISIS to a successful conclusion.

Note: This article is published in collaboration with Prof. Ben-Meir's web portal. **Web Link:** <http://www.alonben-meir.com/article/leaving-escape-route-isis/>

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