



ISIL is Not America's War: Other Countries Should Fight Islamic State

By Doug Bandow

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President Barack Obama now has a strategy for dealing with the Islamic State. He plans to repeat Washington's earlier failed interventions in the Middle East. Instead, the U.S. should leave the fight to those actually threatened by ISIL.

The Islamic State is flamboyantly evil. But that doesn't make it particularly dangerous to America. With the latest estimate of 20,000 to 30,000 fighters—after months of increased recruiting—ISIL is weaker than every genuine state in the region as well as the U.S.

The president deceptively contended that “these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States.” Secretary of State John Kerry expanded the deceit: “it's going to be a long-term counterterrorism operation. I think war is the wrong terminology and analogy.”

So far this is flatly false.

U.S. intelligence officials admit that they see in the group neither the willingness nor the desire to attack the U.S. Daniel Benjamin, a former Obama counterterrorism adviser, warned that administration officials are “all over the place describing the threat in lurid terms that are not justified.”

ISIL broke with al-Qaeda in large part because of the latter's emphasis on America. The Islamic State is deploying an army in an attempt to become something akin to a normal government. But conquered territory offers a return address which would allow the U.S. to retaliate massively for any attack.

The group's murder of two American journalists was grotesque, but these deaths do not threaten U.S. national security. In fact, the beheadings were the equivalent of waving a red cape at the American bull.

President Obama said he won't introduce ground forces for combat. But airstrikes are no

panacea. The president will face pressure to escalate if his initial efforts fall short.

Moreover, attempting to destroy the new caliphate would remove the most important deterrent to Islamic State terrorist attacks on the U.S. If the group blames its loss of “statehood” on Washington, the former might decide to make common cause with al-Qaeda and devote its ill-gotten wealth to terrorism.

The Islamic State does threaten Arab nations. The president admitted that America cannot “take the place of Arab partners in securing their region.”

However, under his plan the U.S. will be ostentatiously taking the public lead. By relieving those most at risk of responsibility for confronting a threat against them, the administration will discourage them from responding appropriately.

Washington’s efforts so far have yielded meager results. “Arabs Give Tepid Support to U.S. Fight Against ISIS,” headlined the *New York Times*. Even supposed allies refused to make specific commitments.

But there may be no worse visual than Christian America again attacking Muslims. This battle must be fought by Islamic nations. Countries in the region have more than a million men under arms.

Even so, cooperation will not be easy. Instead of attempting to dictate, Washington should rely on necessity, brought on by its refusal to intervene, to encourage antagonistic parties to work together.

Iraq must realize that sectarian misrule has drained effectiveness from both government and military. Baghdad must reach out to Sunnis and Kurds. Washington should not defend a regime which has squandered previous American support.

In Syria the administration should set priorities. The Islamic State is more dangerous than the Assad government. A few extra guns will not allow the weak moderate opposition to defeat the government and Islamic State. The administration should exit the Syrian imbroglio and leave bombing Islamist forces to the Assad government.

Tehran will act irrespective of the administration’s desires. There should be discreet bilateral discussions about how to most effectively cooperate against the Islamic State.

The Gulf States should arm friendly forces such as the Kurds and challenge ISIL’s theology. These majority-Sunni countries should engage Iraq’s government and Sunni minority. They also could contribute militarily.

Jordan and Turkey have capable militaries. Especially important is Ankara, which rejected a U.S. request to use Incirlik Air Base. With 49 Turks held captive in Mosul, Ankara worries about Islamic State retaliation. However, the region’s greatest Arab power with so much at stake in the current conflict should not remain immobile.

Finally, Washington should encourage the Europeans to offer weapons and training. Far more Europeans than Americans are joining ISIL's forces.

The Islamic State deserves the worst. But it poses little threat to America.

President Obama is following his predecessors down the path to endless war in Mesopotamia. Again U.S. officials are inflating threats, discouraging allies, creating enemies, wasting resources, and entangling America. The outcome isn't likely to be any better than before.

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