

# ISIS is the New Imperialism

One of life's imponderable problems is to decide whether the glass of water we've been drinking is half full or half empty. The same problem arises in deciding on the present condition of ISIS, whether it is declining or remaining a potent terrorist force.

In his press conference on February 4, 2016, White House spokesperson Josh Earnest told his questioner that new U.S. intelligence reports estimated that the number of ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria had declined from about 31,000 two years ago to 25,000 today. This decline is said to have occurred because of battlefield casualties, desertions or defections to other groups, financial problems, the enhanced performance of Iraqi security forces on the battlefield, and the campaign by the U.S. led coalition, now supposed to number sixty six countries, that has attacked and damaged the infrastructure of the oil fields in Iraq. ISIS has also lost some of the territory it held, perhaps 25 per cent, largely due to the successful attacks of the Kurds and Iraqi forces.

The White House assertion is that the growth in the ranks of ISIS fighters is declining, slowly, but declining, and that ISIS is having more difficulty than they have had before in replenishing their ranks.

Yet this is only part of the story, and unfortunately the lesser part of the story. The condition of the glass of ISIS is more than half full. It is premature to claim as the Obama administration has done that ISIS is less significant today than it was a year ago. There are two factors involved. One is that ISIS still maintains considerable territory in Iraq and Syria and has a well organized administrative and efficient structure. Moreover, the terrorist group is trying to recruit people around the world to replace those of its military who have been killed, and has achieved a degree of success.

The other factor, now more threatening and one that the Obama administration refuses to recognize, is that ISIS has become an imperialistic power. The terrorists are bold and assertive in their declarations as they are in their actions. ISIS is no longer merely a terrorist group but a Caliphate, and one that is expanding its influence. There are now nearly 50 affiliate groups of ISIS in 21 countries.

All countries, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, are threatened, particularly the European countries which have been lax in their protection and security. The organizer, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, of the November 15, 2015 attack in Paris that killed 130 people and injured hundreds, boasted that he and 90 other operatives had entered Western European countries, starting through Greece and the island of Leros, Bulgaria, and Romania, by pretending to be refugees from Syria. They had all gone from Syria through Turkey to the EU border.

The EU is belatedly considering border controls on Greece, a country that has not been checking passports carefully or fingerprinting refugees. This is particularly important because ISIS is now proficient in printing false passports.

European countries are now troubled by the number of terrorists pretending to be refugees. Germany arrested on February 2, 2016 one of two Algerians, a couple who were members of ISIS, and trained by the group, at a refugee shelter in Attendorn, Germany. The couple possessed a handgun and a large quantity of weapons and ammo, and was planning a terrorist attack in Berlin. Two days later in Germany, three others were arrested for the same reason. It is clear that many more have come into the country under false pretenses. All claim to be Syrians fleeing the civil war. The Germans fear the likelihood of a terrorist attack. To be sure, they closed a soccer game in Hanover, and on New Year's eve closed stations in Munich.

German Angela Merkel perhaps now regrets her open door policy

for migrants. By 2015, Germany had taken 1.1 million migrants: in January 2016 it took 91, 674. It is now recognized that this is an unacceptable situation in itself. But also it is simply not possible to process accurately the thousands of applications for asylum, and would be terrorists have escaped detection.

France has been troubled by ISIS adherents for some time as the massacre in Paris showed. Most recently in Lyon, on February 6, 2016, six people, five men and one woman, were arrested for planning to attack French nightclubs, and then leave the country. They, all of whom were converts to Islam, had already bought tickets to join ISIS in Syria.

ISIS imperialism was demonstrated in the same week of February, in Sydney, Australia. Two 18 year converts to Islam were arrested on suspicion they were going to commit terrorist acts. The wife of the couple, without consulting Warren Beatty, boasted they would be the Islamic Bonnie and Clyde. The Australian authorities have already reported that in the 7 months until February 2016 they had arrested 312 persons suspected of having links with the Islamic State.

The present regime in Egypt has long been concerned with the Muslim Brotherhood. Now it has to deal with the ISIS training camp, the Abu Hajr Al-Masri camp, in the remote desert of Sinai in which terrorists, wearing black robes and a mask, are training with weapons and getting fitness training. Egypt has already been the scene of various attacks, in Luxor in 1997 (62 killed), Sharm el Sheikh in 2005 (88 killed), and October 2015 when 224 passengers were killed by a bomb on Airbus A321 passenger jet. Few tourists now want to risk going to the familiar attractions, Luxor, Aswan, Abu Simbel, or the Valley of the Kings.

The political chaos in Libya, divided by tribes and regions, has been worsened by the large number, 5 to 6,000 of fighters affiliated with and being advised by ISIS.

The ISIS empire has even reached to Indonesia which suffered an ISIS inspired attack on January 14, 2016. Terrorists attacked several places in Jakarta, killing eight people and more than 20 wounded.

Within the Obama administration there are divisions on the course of action to combat the Islamic State affiliates in Libya, an oil rich country. President Barack Obama has approved air strikes, and help to Libyan fighters given by small groups akin to the Special Operations forces in Syria. But Obama, not wanting to get involved in any considerable activity, and hoping that a national unity government can be created in what is now a failed state, and one with warring factions, has rejected, as of now, the advice of Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and General Joseph to use American ground troops.

Saudi Arabia says it is willing to take part in a ground operation against ISIS in Iraq and Syria if the US and other countries will do so. Saudi Arabian Brigadier General Ahmed Asiri spoke of putting "boots on the ground."

The haunting question is, will the US join Saudi Arabia especially since the Obama administration is not likely to intervene unilaterally or put "boots on ground? The task of the American president, now and in the future, is to prevent any possibility that ISIS may purr, "We'll always have Raqqa."