



## Lessons ISIS Is Teaching Us the Hard Way

The terrorist attacks in Paris in late November and in San Bernardino, CA a couple of weeks later prove conclusively two major points that critics of the Obama administration policy have been warning about for months, if not longer: 1) The cancer of ISIS and Al Qaeda has metastasized and spread to the West; and 2) current European and American immigration laws are inadequate to stop terrorists from entering Western nations to undertake direct attacks on our people. This cancer of Islamic terrorism is no longer confined to Syria and Iraq, Libya and Yemen, but poses a threat to the values and freedom found in Western societies. ISIS leaders proclaimed years ago that their goal was not only to erect a “caliphate” — a far-reaching Islamic government headed by a religious leader claiming succession from the prophet Mohammed — in the Middle East but also to destroy Christianity in the West.

War has been declared on the West by these fanatics. The latest terrorist attacks demonstrated that this war is real. The Obama military strategy, such as it is, of dropping a few bombs on ISIS targets has not contained the threat. A focused strategy is needed to protect our borders, wage ideological warfare and make the public aware of the potential for future mass attacks. This means awakening and educating the American and European publics about the nature of this threat. Our public officials need to stop minimizing ISIS as the “JV team” or politicizing the issue to promote their own agenda, whether it be gun control or assailing Republicans.

Our leaders should explain to the American public the ideology of Islamic jihadism, which unites ISIS and all the Al Qaeda affiliates. The differences between these groups are largely tactical. They agree on basic principles: Jews and Christians are the enemy and must be destroyed; Muslim governments in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are apostate regimes that should be eradicated; and there is a “clash of civilizations.” Our political leaders, pundits and academics who do not like to talk about the clash of civilizations — because it suggests religious intolerance toward Islam — need to understand that we are facing an enemy that sees

the world in black and white terms. Islamic jihadists are not afraid of hurting feelings or failing to appreciate diversity. They do not care about the diversity found in Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, Reconstructed), or the various Protestant denominations, or among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers.

We at the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation have not held our breath waiting for the Obama administration to articulate to the American public the threat Islamic jihadism poses to our society. For the last two years, the *Mindszenty Report* has extensively covered the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and Africa. In the March 2015 issue we detailed the ideological foundations of jihadism. In this issue, we examine the roots of Al Qaeda in Iraq, how it reshaped itself after it looked defeated, and its reemergence as ISIS. Before doing so, we look at the first step in stopping further attacks in the West: immigration policy.

### Stricter Immigration Rules Are Essential

Following the Paris attacks, Barack Obama on November 16 attacked Republican presidential candidates Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz for urging stricter limits on Syrian refugees entering the United States. Both Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz, joined by Marco Rubio, warned against accepting the President’s plan to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees to the United States. Instead, Bush, Cruz and Rubio said our first duty should be admitting persecuted Christian refugees. President Obama maintained that the terrorist attacks in Paris that killed more than 100 people three days earlier should not affect the intake of Syrian refugees into the United States. “Slamming the door in their faces would be a betrayal of our values,” he said during remarks at the G20 economic summit in Antalya, Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the administration’s proposal to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees was being outbid by Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. In a Democratic presidential debate and later on “Face the Nation,” Clinton asserted that America should do its part to alleviate the refugee crisis in

Europe by admitting 65,000 Syrian refugees.<sup>2</sup> She spoke of Syrian mothers with their children who need to be treated humanely by being given refugee status, whatever the financial and cultural costs of such a policy. She failed to note that *the great majority of these refugees were young men, many of them not even from Syria but instead from Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, Sudan or Pakistan*. Nor did she note that young women, even those with babies, can be terrorists as well. Such was the case of Tashfeen Malik, a well-educated Pakistani and mother of a six-month-old baby, who with her husband brutally murdered 16 innocent people and wounded 21 others in San Bernardino. There were only a few hints from her background in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that she might be a jihadist.

Those suggesting that opponents of the wholesale admission of Syrian refugees are heartless xenophobes unconcerned about the plight of war-torn and economically desperate refugees might consider the result of lax immigration policies that were revealed in the Paris slaughter by Islamic jihadists. The terrorists in Paris exploited Europe's passport-free zone.<sup>3</sup> The mastermind of the attack was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a 26-year-old Belgian national whose parents were Moroccan immigrants. He was joined by other Belgian and French nationals who grew up in Brussels and Paris in isolated immigrant communities. Two of the terrorists appear to have legally entered Europe via Greece as Syrian refugees.

These men were joined by Hasna Aiboulahcen, a daughter of Moroccan immigrants, who blew herself up when police tracked her down by tapping her cell phone. Later investigations revealed how these terrorists, and many others in the network, exploited permissive travel regulations, national hospitality toward refugees, and a European public concerned with religious tolerance and ethnic diversity.

Some of these terrorists, claiming to be refugees, entered Europe with the intent of murder. There they joined young radicalized Muslims who had been raised in isolated, unassimilated ethnic communities in France and Belgium, two nations apparently incapable of instilling in their Muslim immigrant communities Western values of religious toleration, pluralism and respect for human life. As a matter of survival, the U.S. and European countries must find ways to limit the immigration of Islamic radicals.

### The Defeat and Return of Jihadism

The terrorists in Paris were inspired by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and Al Qaeda. If ISIS and Al Qaeda can be defeated, they will inspire fewer terrorists abroad. Recent history shows that Al Qaeda can be defeated. Indeed, by 2010 Al Qaeda in Iraq had been contained.<sup>4</sup> After a masterful campaign led by Gen. Stanley

McChrystal, using American special operations troops supported by Jordanian and American intelligence forces and Sunni tribesmen, Al Qaeda in Iraq was destroyed by 2012. The death of Al Qaeda-Iraq's founder, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, in 2006 marked a turning point in the Iraq war. His death at the hands of an American airstrike provides an example of how the U.S. military used counterterrorism to defeat an enemy that had masterminded thousands of deaths of Iraqis—Sunni and Shia alike—and hundreds of American and coalition soldiers.

The resurrection of Al Qaeda came only after the American-backed Shiite prime minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, undertook to purge his government of Sunnis in his second term. At the time of Maliki's reelection in 2012, State Department and American military officials in Iraq tried to warn President Obama that Maliki was a tool of the Shiite government of Iran and that he would push Iraq once again into a civil war by his repressive policies toward Sunni tribesmen, who had finally joined Americans in defeating Al Qaeda in Iraq.

### Maqdisi's Malign Influence

Zarqawi came to Iraq from his native Jordan to battle American "invaders." A thug who had become radicalized in Jordan, Zarqawi moved to Iraq after fighting with Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in the 1980s. He was well known to Jordanian intelligence for his radicalism, which led to his arrest and imprisonment before he was released as a good-will gesture by the Jordanian government in 1999. While in prison, he came under the influence of a fellow prisoner, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a Jordanian-Palestinian cleric who adhered to a strict, fundamentalist Islam invented by him. Maqdisi called for jihad against corrupt governments in the Middle East and the destruction of infidels, including Muslims who professed a faith in democracy.

Under the spell of Maqdisi, Zarqawi came to see himself as a 12th-century warrior against European crusaders — an instrument of Allah to unify all Muslim countries from Syria to the Nile River under a caliphate. He entered the mountainous region of northeastern Iraq before the American invasion with the intention of setting up an autonomous regime. Here he recruited and began training a small ragtag army made up of Islamic extremists from across the Middle East and North Africa. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 gave Zarqawi the opportunity he had been looking for to wage war against America.

He masterminded terrorist attacks against Sunni and Shia alike to inflame tribal and sectarian hostilities and destabilize the American-backed government. He developed an extensive network of terrorists who attacked American troops. On

Islamic websites across the world, Zarqawi's exploits against the Americans made him into a hero. By 2005, Americans faced a full-scale insurgency coming from both Sunni tribes and Shiite terrorists backed by Iran. In the center of the insurrection was Zarqawi's Al Qaeda, now officially recognized by Osama bin Laden.

The turning point in the fight against Al Qaeda came when Zarqawi overplayed his hand by undertaking a terrorist attack to assassinate Jordan's King Abdullah II. Following the attack, the Jordan intelligence began cooperating with American military led by Gen. McChrystal. At the same time, King Abdullah called upon and organized Muslim clerics to denounce the killing of Muslims by other Muslims, exactly what Zarqawi was doing. These clerics rejected religiously inspired violence, issuing the Amman Declaration in 2004 against the ideology of jihad. It went generally unnoticed by the Western press.

### From Zarqawi to Baghdadi

Zarqawi's bloodlust finally alienated many Sunni leaders, who joined Gen. McChrystal in retaking villages and towns seized by Al Qaeda. Sunni leaders now worked with the Iraqi Shiite-controlled government and the American military in defeating Zarqawi. Zarqawi and his forces were on the run when American intelligence tracked him down and killed him. By the time President Obama came into office, after running on an anti-war message, Al Qaeda in Iraq was only a shell of its former self. The leadership of Al Qaeda in Iraq passed to Islamic legal scholar Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2010, who fled with a small band of followers to remote regions of Iraq. He transformed Al Qaeda in Iraq by proclaiming it as a representative of a new state, a caliphate, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or the Levant). He reached out to Al Qaeda in Syria, known as al Nusra. These two fraternal terrorist organizations, ISIS and al Nusra, soon found themselves in competition for new members and supporters.

Baghdadi had a few things going for him. He tapped into Sunni resentment against the Shiite regimes in Iraq and Syria. He incorporated into his organization former Iraqi Baathist military and intelligence officers who had been purged by Americans at the beginning of the Iraq War. In addition, he drew upon sophisticated propaganda techniques to spread his message over the Internet. Finally, he imposed an even stricter code among his followers and a willingness to undertake barbaric action against the supposed enemies of Islam, Christians and Muslims alike.

Baghdadi's timing could not have been better. The Arab Spring in 2011 changed everything. An uprising occurred in Syria against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, who responded

with a brutal crackdown on the opposition. Syria fell into civil war. The Syrian crack-up coincided with the final withdraw of American troops from Iraq. Iraq was convulsed with open fighting between the Shiite regime in Baghdad and Sunni tribesmen who had previously assisted the Americans in crushing Al Qaeda. Stepping into this strife was Baghdadi, whose ISIS forces now joined the Sunni tribesmen in a full-scale revolt against Iraq's Shiite government.

In Syria, ISIS also portrayed itself as a defender of Sunnis against the Assad regime, now supported by the Iranian Shiite government and Russia. ISIS's brutal takeover in Sunni towns and villages in Iraq and Syria shocked many of their Sunni allies. By 2015 the entire Middle East was in chaos. ISIS emerged as a deadly force in a mess of sectarian, tribal and international conflict. Grisly beheadings of Christians and accounts of sex slavery of Christian and Yazidi women horrified the world. ISIS's growing power and its brutality created a backlash even among some radical Islamic clerics who condemned the slaughter of fellow Muslims, especially the carefully staged burning of a captured Jordanian pilot. As ISIS grew in power, it rejected oversight by Al Qaeda, which initially disavowed any relationship with ISIS in February 2014.

### What Americans Can Do

At this point it is useless to debate whether America should have invaded Iraq in the first place, whether we should have backed Maliki for a second term or whether our troops should have been withdrawn. The United States is now at war with ISIS. Military strategists will determine how this war will best be won.

But this struggle will be more than a military struggle. It will be an all-out ideological struggle. In this struggle America must reclaim its heritage as a nation of religious tolerance, the rule of law, and constitutional republican government. This means that identity politics, promoted by the left and by educators in our classrooms from elementary schools through universities, should be rejected and replaced by an espousal of the values of Western Civilization that made America an exceptional nation. This ideological war can be won. It will take leadership, but also the will of the people themselves to reclaim their history, the present, and the future.

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- 1 Max J. Rosenthal, "President Obama Calls Rejection of Syrian Refugees a 'Betrayal of Our Values,'" *Mother Jones*, November 16, 2015.
  - 2 Samantha Lachman, "Hillary Clinton Calls on the United States to Accept 65,000 Syrian Refugees," *Huffpost Politics*, September 20, 2015.
  - 3 Rukmini Callimachi, Katri Bernhold and Laure Fourquet, "How the Paris Attackers Honed Their Assault through Trial and Error," *New York Times*, November 30, 2015.
  - 4 For an insightful and detailed account of Zarqawi and the emergence of ISIS, see Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of Isis* (New York, 2015).



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