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NEGATIVE BRIEF: Islamic State – not a problem

By Vance Trefethen

**This brief can be used against any plan that calls for the US to do more against the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL or IS)**

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE – Islamic State is not that dangerous

Islamic State can’t expand much further: The conditions that led to their current expansion don’t exist elsewhere

Ramzy Mardini 2014. (nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.) The Islamic State threat is overstated, WASHINGTON POST 12 Sept 2014 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-islamic-state-threat-is-overstated/2014/09/12/acbbebb2-33ad-11e4-8f02-03c644b2d7d0_story.html>

This hardly means the Islamic State is in a position to topple the next city in its sights. Rather, the borders of its territory have, more or less, reached their outer potential. It’s no coincidence that the militants’ gains have been limited to areas populated by disenfranchised Sunnis eager for protection from Shiite forces. It would require far greater power to hold territory populated by a sect that didn’t support their presence. The group’s rapid growth has occurred in its most compatible regions — as a species proliferates within its natural habitat. It is thriving in the midst of sectarian cleavages, established insurgencies, and weak or nonexistent state institutions. Hence, its support in Iraq and Syria is not the rule, it is the exception. The combination of these conditions does not exist in much of the greater Middle East.

Recent Islamic State successes don’t prove much: They’re weak and have no sustainable end game.

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According to a new [Washington Post-ABC News poll](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/poll-public-supports-strikes-in-iraq-syria-obamas-ratings-hover-near-his-all-time-lows/2014/09/08/69c164d8-3789-11e4-8601-97ba88884ffd_story.html), 90 percent of Americans view the Islamic State as a serious threat to vital U.S. interests. But Americans are misreading the recent Islamic State successes, which speak less to the group’s invincibility and inevitability than they do to external factors beyond its control. Despite its territorial gains and [mastery of propaganda](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-attempts-to-combat-islamic-state-propaganda/2014/09/07/c0283cea-3534-11e4-9f4d-24103cb8b742_story.html), the Islamic State’s fundamentals are weak, and it does not have a sustainable endgame. In short, we’re giving it too much credit.

Islamic State isn’t developing support with local populations, making it vulnerable

Ramzy Mardini 2014. (nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.) The Islamic State threat is overstated, WASHINGTON POST 12 Sept 2014 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-islamic-state-threat-is-overstated/2014/09/12/acbbebb2-33ad-11e4-8f02-03c644b2d7d0_story.html>

Despite being in its infancy as a declared caliphate, the Islamic State’s extreme ideology, spirit of subjugation and acts of barbarism prevent it from becoming a political venue for the masses. It has foolhardily managed to instill fear in everyone, thus limiting its opportunities for alliances and making itself vulnerable to [popular backlash](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/09/11/to-some-in-the-middle-east-the-islamic-state-is-a-joke/). For example, between late last year and early this year, its militants lost territory in the Syrian provinces of Aleppo and Idlib because of grass-roots resistance and insurgent competition. The key for a group like the Islamic State to survive and flourish is a deep connection with local populations. The Islamic State’s core fighters are certainly devoted and willing to die for the cause, but its potential support across the region ranges from limited to nonexistent.

Islamic State threat is exaggerated: There is no credible evidence they plan to attack the U.S. homeland

Micah Zenko 2014. (the Douglas Dillon Fellow with the Center for Preventive Action at the Council on Foreign Relations) FOREIGN POLICY, “Exaggeration Nation” 21 Nov 2014 <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/21/exaggeration-nation/?wp_login_redirect=0> (Brackets in original)

Government officials [routinely](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137279/micah-zenko-and-michael-a-cohen/clear-and-present-safety) mischaracterize and inflate the threats posed to the United States in order to catalyze public opinion and ensure congressional acquiescence to the latest foreign military intervention. Yet neither the public nor members of Congress should accept such language, because it is both deeply misleading and factually wrong. Of course, the United States has faced any number of threats that were far more sophisticated, well-armed, better funded, and larger — the Soviet Union is one notable, superpower-sized example. It is also completely incorrect to contend that IS is an imminent threat to every interest, or even directly to the United States itself. As several U.S. intelligence officials have now declared: "We have no credible information that [the Islamic State] is planning to attack the homeland of the United States."

Islamic State is not an existential threat to the U.S., not even a huge nor menacing threat

Daniel Benjamin 2014. (was ambassador-at-large and coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department from 2009 to 2012. He is now director of Dartmouth’s John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding) Hawks exaggerate Islamic State threat to the United States, BOSTON GLOBE 17 Aug 2014 <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/08/17/hawks-exaggerate-isis-threat-united-states/yICJ0bpzRhoK88GtauyHLO/story.html>

Stoking the panic has been a very excitable press. On CNN last week, I was asked if Islamic State fighters represented an “existential threat” to the United States. Set aside that absurdity; no terrorist group threatens our existence. (America has faced one existential threat in modern times — the Soviet nuclear arsenal — and that is it.) But is the Islamic State a huge and menacing terrorist threat? Certainly not to the United States today.

Don’t panic: No U.S. cities in flames from an Islamic State attack. They don’t have the ability

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Consider the details: The Islamic State has never carried out a significant attack outside of its neighborhood. In 2005, when its operatives were still part of Al Qaeda in Iraq, operatives carried out hotel bombings in Jordan and tried and failed to attack an American warship in the Red Sea. More recently, four people were killed in an apparent lone-wolf attack at the Jewish museum in Brussels by a young man trained in Syria. In other words, we’ve seen no demonstrated ability to carry out the kind of complex international strike that kills dozens or hundreds, let alone engulfs a US city in flames.

INHERENCY – Status Quo is already taking action against Islamic State

4600 troops so far: U.S. sent 3100 troops to help fight I.S., and members of U.S.-led coalition are sending 1500 more

Mary Casey-Baker 2014. (editor of Foreign Policy’s Middle East Daily Brief, as well as the assistant director of public affairs at the Project on Middle East Political Science ) U.S. Allies to Send 1,500 Troops for Train and Advise Mission in Iraq, FOREIGN POLICY, 9 Dec 2014 <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/09/u-s-allies-to-send-1500-troops-for-train-and-advise-mission-in-iraq/>

Members of the U.S.-led coalition combating Islamic State militants have pledged to send about [1,500 additional troops](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30388718) to Iraq to help [train and advise](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/08/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-troops-idUSKBN0JM20420141208) Iraqi and Kurdish forces. The soldiers would add to the [3,100 committed](http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-allies-pledge-1-500-military-trainers-for-iraqi-forces-boosting-coalition-effort-1418078458) by the United States, according to U.S. Lt. Gen. James Terry, who is commanding the coalition’s operations. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel has [arrived in Baghdad](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-baghdad-hagel-underscores-us-role-in-iraqs-fight-against-islamic-state/2014/12/09/38fa6ed4-7f7e-11e4-9f38-95a187e4c1f7_story.html) to discuss the operation with [Iraqi officials](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/12/09/369554606/chuck-hagel-lands-in-iraq-to-meet-with-officials?utm_medium=RSS&utm_campaign=storiesfromnpr). He is the first U.S. defense secretary to [visit](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/09/chuck-hagel-arrives-baghdad-iraq) the Iraqi capital since President Barack Obama ordered the withdrawal of troops in 2011. Speaking to U.S. soldiers, Hagel noted the United States has a role to play in training and assisting Iraqi troops, though he stressed that the Iraqis “have to lead.”

Local/Regional powers can solve – the U.S. should simply use diplomacy to encourage them

Ramzy Mardini 2014. (nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.) The Islamic State threat is overstated, WASHINGTON POST 12 Sept 2014 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-islamic-state-threat-is-overstated/2014/09/12/acbbebb2-33ad-11e4-8f02-03c644b2d7d0_story.html>

While some military action is necessary to defeat the Islamic State, that effort should be driven by regional actors, not a Western power. The United States is far better positioned to assume an active diplomatic role, facilitating consensus and cooperation among local and regional players. If the common threat could compel these actors toward local collaboration, national compromise and regional rapprochement, there may emerge an opportunity to bring them together to finally settle the civil wars plaguing the Middle East.

Islamic State’s oil revenues have been cut

DPA International 2014. (German press agency) German intelligence: Islamic State oil revenues «widely exaggerated 7 Nov 2014 <http://www.dpa-international.com/news/international/german-intelligence-islamic-state-oil-revenues-widely-exaggerated-a-43225458.html> (brackets added)

Oil was previously thought to be the militants' main source of income, the paper said, with a US treasury official last month saying that Islamic State militants had been earning 1 million dollars per day by selling oil on the black market since June. But the BND [German intelligence agency] analysis, using data from the non-governmental organization Iraq Energy Institute, refutes such reports. More than 50 per cent of Islamic State militants' capacity to produce oil could have been destroyed by US air strikes, the German report says, and the group also lacks the international experts necessary for oil production. Germany's BND believes that Islamic State oil transactions currently bring in less than 100 million dollars per year, or 270,000 dollars per day - an estimate that they say is probably still too high.

SOLVENCY – taking action against Islamic State won’t help

Conflict will happen eventually – in the meanwhile, over-reaction won’t make us safer

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Yes, we probably have a confrontation with the Islamic State — a group with a desire to kill Americans in its DNA — in our future. It’s a good bet that within a year or two, there will be extensive American intelligence operations throughout Iraq, and US drones flying its skies. As we head toward that eventuality, however, we should remember the critical advances (despite Edward Snowden) in US intelligence gathering since 9/11. We can’t stop every solo operative who gets his hands on a rifle or even gunpowder and ball bearings — but that reality doesn’t threaten our existence. And hysteria and missteps in the field aren’t going to make us safer.

DISADVANTAGES – to increased US efforts against Islamic State

1. Iraq disintegrates, leading to more terrorism

If U.S. takes ownership of fighting Islamic State, it will reduce pressure on Iraq to form a stable government, leading to Iraqi disintegration, leading to exponential increase in terrorism risk

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More importantly, to deal with a terrorist group like the Islamic State requires local partners, and those partners will have to be Iraqis. That’s why it is vital that a new government is formed in Baghdad with a renewed effort at inclusiveness among Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds. As the White House recognizes, if that effort fails, and the sectarianism persists, Iraq will disintegrate. And if the United States takes ownership of fighting the Islamic State, Iraq’s common security problem, there’d be little incentive for cooperation. Ultimately, a more fearsome civil war will occur, and the danger to the West will expand exponentially. Terrorists thrive in conflict zones.

2. Hyping the threat makes it worse

Sir Richard Dearlove, former director of MI6 (British Intelligence) says: Ignoring Islamic State would be a better strategy than giving them more publicity

Richard Norton-Taylor 2014. (journalist) 7 July 2014 THE GUARDIAN (British newspaper) Islamist terror threat to west blown out of proportion - former MI6 chief <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jul/07/islamist-terror-threat-out-proportion-former-mi6-chief-richard-dearlove>

Unlike the threat posed by al-Qaida before and in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks 13 years ago, the west was not the main target of the radical fundamentalism that created Isis, (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), Dearlove said. Addressing the Royal United Services Institute, the London-based security and defence thinktank, he said the conflict was "essentially one of Muslim on Muslim". He made it clear he believed the way the British government and the media were giving the extremists the "oxygen of publicity" was counter-productive. The media were making monsters of "misguided young men, rather pathetic figures" who were getting coverage "more than their wildest dreams", said Dearlove, adding: "It is surely better to ignore them."

U.S. intervention gives Islamic State more motivation to fight America. They used to be focused only on the Middle East

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A more accurate assessment would be that U.S. military intervention has tremendous propaganda value for [the Islamic State](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-the-islamic-state/2014/07/03/f6081672-0132-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html), helping it to rally other jihadists to its cause, possibly even Salafists who have so far rejected its legitimacy. Moreover, to the extent that the group poses any threat to the United States, that threat is magnified by a visible U.S. military role. Obama’s restraint in the use of military power in recent years has helped keep the Islamic State’s focus regional — on its efforts to establish an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East rather than on launching attacks against the United States. It’s only with the U.S. military’s return to Iraq and the prospect of U.S. intervention in Syria that the group’s focus has begun to shift.

3. Recruiting propaganda

US intervention helps Islamic State by creating propaganda to rally more fighters to their cause

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In [his prime-time address](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/full-text-of-president-obamas-speech-outlining-strategy-to-defeat-islamic-state/2014/09/10/af69dec8-3943-11e4-9c9f-ebb47272e40e_story.html) Wednesday, President Obama said that U.S. airstrikes targeting militants in Iraq over the past month “have protected American personnel and facilities, killed [Islamic State] fighters, destroyed weapons, and given space for Iraqi and Kurdish forces to reclaim key territory. These strikes have also helped save the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children.” A more accurate assessment would be that U.S. military intervention has tremendous propaganda value for [the Islamic State](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-the-islamic-state/2014/07/03/f6081672-0132-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html), helping it to rally other jihadists to its cause, possibly even Salafists who have so far rejected its legitimacy.