

Washington vs Daesh: Who Is Winning The War On The Islamic State (IS/ISIL?)

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It was a strange article on the front page of the New York Times: A top US general, Michael K. Nagata, commander of American Special Operations forces in the Middle East, was admitting that the Pentagon is at war with an enemy that it doesn't understand, and has sought out expertise outside the military to help figure out what he is up against.

Says Nagata, "We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it," he said, according to the confidential minutes of a conference call he held with the experts. "We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea."

When was the last time you heard a top commander admit he is lost. even as the bombing of the Islamic State continues with more billions allocated to wipe out this menace that seems to be growing stronger despite all the U.S. power trying to destroy it.

How and why did President Obama declare war on an enemy that we don't understand? According to the "newspaper of record," officials acknowledge they have barely made a dent in the larger, longer-term campaign to kill the ideology that animates the terrorist movement.

One part of the government boasts that we are winning; another is not so sure.

As political scientist Michael Brenner explains, there is little logic at play given the realities on the ground. It is reminiscent of Vietnam where are officials contrived at "light at the end of the tunnel."

Brenner writes,

So why Washington's complacency and self-satisfaction? After all, it still must struggle with intractable realities represented by the following: an ISIL that will be a formidable force as far ahead as the eye can see; the attendant growing menace of terrorist acts; a Baghdad government that may no longer be endangered but whose writ runs over only a segment of the country; unresolved Arab-Kurd tensions; an estranged Turkey which under an increasingly audacious Erdogan is working both sides of the street; Assad ensconced in Damascus at once enemy and ally vis a vis ISIL; the marginalization of pro-Western democratic forces throughout the region; a Yemen in chaos that is less pliable to American demands; and, of course, the spiraling downward of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Yet Washington somehow seems satisfied with all this and sees no incentive to reach an accommodation with Iran.

Despite the all of the pretensions and arrogance at the White House, despite the fact this is a war that attracts support across the aisle, from pro-war Christian nationalists who condemn Islam on the right and Democrats on the Left” who are outraged by ISIL”s beheadings, progress is slow if only because airpower alone can do damage but not necessarily prevail.

We have been pounding Afghanistan for 13 years with bombing and droning, but that war is far from over. It has already gone on much longer than World War 11.

And what about the “war” with the organization that calls itself Daesh, a term you never see in the US press. To political analyst Gareth Porter, this “war” is political- not military:

“The US war on the ‘Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’ or ISIL, also known as Islamic State of IS – the single biggest development in US foreign policy during 2014 – continues to puzzle those looking for its strategic logic. But the solution to the puzzle lies in considerations that have nothing to do with a rational response to realities on the ground.”

In fact, it is all about domestic political and bureaucratic interests.

Ostensibly the US-led military effort is aimed at “dismantling” the “Islamic State” as a threat to the stability of the Middle East and to US security. But no independent military or counter-terrorism analyst believes that the military force that is being applied in Iraq and Syria has even the slightest chance of achieving that objective.”

The Daily Beast reports:

“The Pentagon just unveiled its program to train Iraqi troops to fight ISIS—and it’s only six weeks long. Even military officials concede the program is insufficient, reports Nancy A. Youssef. After almost a year, the U.S. is no closer to creating the ground forces needed to beat the world’s foremost terrorist group.”^a

At this point, the war is more symbolic than real, designed to demonstrate the “superiority” of our civilization to our “civilization,” which as Gandhi once said “would be a good idea.” Al Jazeera recently issued a report on the Daesh, even as the government of Qatar is also enlisted in the campaign to try to wipe it out.

Here’s the conclusion of their analysts. It certainly confirms the failure of our “war on terror” and makes clear that the killing of bin Laden—if that actually occurred did not kill off Al Qaeda or the Jihadi movement.

“Daesh is now a cross-border regional actor that controls large tracts of land and destroys international borders in order to connect the Syrian and Iraqi areas under its influence. It also possesses significant military arsenal, acquired mostly during its battles with the Iraqi and Syrian armies; boasts extensive military experience and combat efficiency; and has a military component that manages its battles with outstanding professionalism. Daesh has vast sources of wealth derived from the oilfields that it controls, adroitly dealing with the “black market” to escape the severe sanctions that have been imposed. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, it shrewdly exploits both the existing regional conflicts and the

conflicting interests of regional and global state actors while benefitting from the social cover produced by the spread of sectarianism, anarchy and gaping political vacuum in the Arab world.

Daesh is an ideological extension of al-Qaeda and the idea of global Jihad rather than an aberration or isolated case of extremism. While the two groups differ on certain procedural issues, especially in terms of the use of brutality, the reality is that both stem from the same foundation of fighting those who “stand in the way of ruling by God’s word”.

The Islamic State has made it clear, particularly after dropping “of Iraq and Syria” from its name and announcing a caliphate, that it plans to extend its influence beyond the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. In fact, traces of this can be seen in IS’ activity in the Caucasus and Central Asia, with Chechen and Azeri members making a commitment to not only fight in Syria and Iraq but also to reach their home countries in due time. Russia and Iran, as well as China, are particularly concerned about the implications this will have on their security.

One single approach cannot be used to explain Daesh’s emergence. In other words, this dossier found that the group’s origins cannot simply be attributed to the typical explanations such as contextual factors, the religious texts on which it is premised, socio-psychological factors or the proposition that the Islamic State is an anomaly in the history of global jihad. Rather, any researcher hoping to understand this group must take into account local, regional, historical and international factors to trace the group’s impact as well as understand where it is headed in the future.”

No one in the American national security apparatus sees The Daesh as a real threat to the US. So why are they so hot to trot to get engaged? Gareth Porter argues, it is for bigger budgets and institutional growth;

“Before ISIL’s spectacular moves in 2014, the Pentagon and military services faced the prospect of declining defense budgets in the wake of a US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Now the Army, Air Force and Special Operations Command saw the possibility of carving out new military roles in fighting ISIL. The Special Operations Command, which had been Obama’s “preferred tool” for fighting Islamic extremists, was going to suffer its first flat budget year after 13 years of continuous funding increases. It was reported to be “frustrated” by being relegated to the role enabling US airstrikes and eager to take on ISIL directly.”

Bottom line: It is as much about money as anything else!

Danny Schechter made the Film *WMD (Weapons of Mass Deception)* about the 2003 war on Iraq. He edits [Mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org). Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.

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