

December, 2014 / May 2015 update

Addressing ISIS

Cost/benefit analysis of destructive and constructive responses



A War Prevention Initiative Research and Advocacy Briefing by Tom Hastings, Ed.D. (Professor at Portland State University); Patrick Hiller, Ph.D. (Director War Prevention Initiative); Dana Ghazi (Graduate Student Portland State University and Expert on Syrian Civil Society)

Addressing ISIS

Cost/benefit analysis of destructive and constructive responses

Introduction

This matrix demonstrates that a single massive response—bombing and arming—has short-term benefits as well as short-medium and long-term costs.

The underlying and little-noted problem of the conflict industry—a problem well known in the field of Conflict Transformation—is one that needs to be highlighted more and more if we are to effect an adaptive change in our basic approach to foreign policy, especially toward hot conflict areas. The conflict industry phenomenon is that too often the agendas of the policymakers are hijacked by those who benefit in money, status, or by a creation or continuation of a certain level of destructive (including shooting) conflict. This problem needs the disinfectant of sunlight in media and on the floor of the US Senate and House. Only then will we inoculate against that ‘unwarranted influence,’ as Eisenhower termed it in his Farewell Address in 1961.

New leadership needs to rise to this festering and destructive problem, an invisible hand that is choking the American taxpayer, killing Syrians and Iraqis, and generating hatred of the US. No one likes ISIS and no one likes the US acting like the reigning royalty of our world. New options are needed. We are at a point in history where nonviolent, constructive alternatives to dealing with war and violence are abundant and proven to be more effective.

- The resultant costs of bombing and arming any faction in Syria are too high and will not lead to the expected outcome
- There are many constructive nonviolent alternatives which should not be mistaken for inaction
- Immediate strong steps are: arms embargo, support of Syrian civil society, pursue meaningful diplomacy, economic sanctions on ISIS and supporters, support local ceasefires, and humanitarian intervention
- Long-term strong steps are: withdrawal of US troops, end oil imports from the region, dissolve terrorism at its roots

Presenting problem - ISIS land grabs and brutality

DESTRUCTIVE RESPONSE	RESULTANT COSTS	RESULTANT BENEFITS
Bombing	Civilian death produces more hatred for US and more terror recruits	Terrorists slowed
	Counterproductive to US's stand against the Syrian regime as it allows the regime to crack harder on dissidents while they bomb ISIS, giving the impression of cooperation between the regime and US.	
	Syrian and Iraq civil society struggle to find a civil-based mechanism to address challenges when their institutions, schools and their physical security continues to be targeted.	US's perceived commitment to War on Terror is emphasized
	Blatant flouting international law ¹	War profiteers gain again
	US taxpayers lose ²	
	blowback ³	
Arming and training FSA	Disempowering the method of negotiation to mediate differences thus resulting in culture where guns speak louder (culture of warfare) instead of emphasizing rights and duties based on citizenship and social contract (culture of peace.)	US is perceived to stand with the Syrian people in their struggle against Assad.
	blowback ⁴	War profiteers gain again
	US taxpayers lose ⁵	

¹ Missing key elements in international law are: UN Security Council Resolution; Consent by Assad regime to use force against ISIS in Syria; self-defense

² According to the National Priorities Project, every hour taxpayers in the United States are paying \$ 312,500 for the cost of military action against ISIS. (October 7, 2014; <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/>)

³ Crowley, Michael. 2014. "Experts Warn of Terror Blowback from Iraq Airstrikes." Time.Com 1. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed September 26, 2014).

⁴ Baker, Aryn, Patrick Michels, Conal Urquhart, and Massimo Calabresi. 2014. "Blowback." Time 184, no. 1: 34-38. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed September 26, 2014).

⁵ According to the National Priorities Project, every hour taxpayers in the United States are paying \$ 312,500 for the cost of military action against ISIS. (October 7, 2014; <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/>)

CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE	RESULTANT COSTS	RESULTANT BENEFITS
Stop arms transfers to region / pursue arms embargo	Lower profits for arms manufacturers and arms dealers ⁶	Reduced destruction and death; increased economic opportunity to shift funds to civil society aid
Support Syrian civil society like Madani Organization or Syrian Nonviolent Movement	Requires research and investing in alternative solutions and methodology to solving conflicts; rebuilding of schools, hospitals, shelters, and recreation of jobs so that people are able to start over and resume their lives; creating local organizations and centers for addressing war-trauma for adults and children; centers that address gender-based violence trauma.	Gains in respect and admiration and gratitude from Syrians and others; in theories of conflict resolution, this approach is called the Appreciative Lens approach, where working with locally led effort catalyzes conflict transformation and stabilization
Impose economic sanctions on ISIS and all ISIS supporters⁷	Efforts to attain international consent	Terrorists slowed
Take leadership with UN	Invest in multi-level international negotiations and collaborations that require high diplomacy skills	US recognized as a legitimate leader for international efforts
Support UN proposal of so-called “freeze zones” to suspend fighting in some areas in Syria		Deployment of humanitarian aid; space for initiation of political processes with local population (growing to national level); population exposed to democracy and peace in a safer environment
Massive aid to Syrian refugees	Humanitarian aid costs (instead of military expenditure)	Reduced destruction, human suffering and death
Pledge no use of violence	Lower profits for arms manufacturers and arms dealers	Reduced destruction and death; increased legitimacy for outside parties; trust grows
Pledge no aid to violent parties	Lower profits for arms manufacturers and arms dealers	Recognition of US as legitimate mediator; trust built
Withdraw US military from region		Immense savings on tax payers money; justification for terrorism reduced; loss of civilian support base for terrorists; strong US public support for withdrawal of troops
Support international nonviolent conflict workers	Risk for nonviolent conflict workers; funding for nonviolent conflict workers	Evidence that the world cares but will use nonviolence, not violence
Support transitional justice initiatives	US might reconsider its membership to the International Criminal Court so that more countries see the value of international justice efforts and follow its lead	Resources for nonviolent approach

⁶ A study shows that the employment impacts of military spending versus the same amount of money spent on clean energy, health care, education and tax cuts are straightforward: \$ 1 billion spend on each of the domestic spending priorities will create substantially more jobs within the US economy than would the same \$ 1 billion spent on the military. Pollin, Robert; Garrett-Peltier, Heidi. 2011. The US Employment Effects of Military and Domestic Spending Priorities. *Political Economy Research Institute*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. (http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/PERI_military_spending_2011.pdf accessed October 7, 2014)

⁷ See for example statement by UN Security Council: “The Security Council reminds all States that they are required to ensure that their nationals and any persons within their territory not engage in any commercial or financial transactions with or for the benefit, directly or indirectly, of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat Al-Nusra, notably with respect to oil in Syria and Iraq. Accessed at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2014/sc11495.doc.htm> October 7, 2014

Support a launch of ICC proceedings against ISIS leaders or any parties indictable for violations of international law	Slow, long proceedings	Internationally recognized legal body to deal with war crimes and criminals
End all oil imports from the region		Investment in clean energy technology and infrastructure; employment opportunities in growing renewable energy sector; step toward addressing climate change
Accept the sovereignty of the region in redrawing its own boundaries	Reduced influence by former political colonial powers	Further drawback from destructive political colonialism; increased participation by indigenous populations; demonstrates respect for peoples' sovereignty, which engenders mutual respect for US
Apologies for internationally proven misconduct	Recognition that human and economic cost has occurred	Allow for the possibility of renewed and improved relationships
Create Marshall Plan for MENA	Perceived high costs	Comparatively low costs when juxtaposed to expenditures for military campaigns.
Pursue meaningful diplomacy / exert diplomatic pressure	Difficult, due to hostility to Iran in US Congress	Increased chances for success with Iran involved; benefits also for negotiations on Iran's nuclear program
Support citizen diplomacy		Empowering citizens results in a more stable and law abiding society
Apply an appropriate conflict resolution response to terrorism by creating a multi-layered policy framework		Addresses root causes of terrorism
Firm but caring humanitarian intervention		Address refugee problem, internally displaced people, and infrastructure destruction
De-authorize war on terror (AUMF)		Congressional powers re-instated
Renewed diplomatic push to end civil war in Syria		Negotiated political settlement opens space for lasting peace processes; local ceasefires achieve immediate relief for population
Forge more inclusive governance in Baghdad		Grievances of Sunni Arab communities addressed

Disclaimer:

Insanity: Doing the same thing, over and over, and expecting different results” (Albert Einstein)⁸

The overwhelming number of “experts” in mainstream media outlets will justify violence as inevitable to deal with threats like ISIS. There is a huge disparity in voices advocating viable nonviolent alternatives and pro-war voices.⁹ Our aim is to counter this disparity. The nonviolent alternatives presented here are a combination of our original analysis of the crisis and analyses by other peace and conflict experts.

We do not need any more experts arguing for the [need to pull together a ground component to match the air campaign](#), limited military engagement, [bases closer to the battlefronts to be deployed more quickly](#), or an [invasion of Syria by a combined Arab army](#) to name a few.

The War Prevention Initiative promotes strategic and principled nonviolent solutions over any kind of armed conflict. This approach is grounded in the approaches developed and examined in the field of peace and conflict studies. It is a scientifically proven assumption that nonviolence is more effective than violence.

While recognizing that the nonviolent options are limited at the height of violent escalation, it is futile to justify any form of military interventions in light of the numerous opportunities for nonviolent alternatives addressing the root causes of violent conflict, during latent conflict, during conflict escalation, and in the post-conflict phase.



⁸ Commonly attributed to Albert Einstein, but there is no evidence that he ever used it

⁹ The organization [Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting](#) found that over a period of time “205 sources appeared on the programs discussing military options in Syria and Iraq. Just six of these, or 3 percent, voiced opposition to US military intervention, while 125 (61 percent) spoke in favor of US war. On the high-profile Sunday talkshows, 89 guests were invited to talk about the war. But just one, ..., could be coded as an anti-war guest.”