

## Ways and Means to Defeat ISIS

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### Abstract:

*From several decades to the present day, the asymmetric fighters continue to be underestimated. This began at the time of civil war in India, the rebellion and insurgency in the Philippines, the war of Vietnam, the Russian and American campaigns in Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq from 2003 to the present, the insurgency in Yemen, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Nigeria etc. The West has had more success in intelligence gathering to find, capture or kill terrorist groups in Iraq, but has failed to understand what they (terrorists) possess that we do not have.*

**Key words:** counter terrorism strategy, Islamic State, military campaigns, asymmetric warfare.

I have been modestly trying to explain in the last three books: "In the Labyrinths of the Islamic State", October 2015; "The Army of Terror of the Caliphate - Strategy and Tactics", September 2016; and "Special Forces and Asymmetric Warfare," June 2017; what are the best ways and means to defeat the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, Syria, Libya and everywhere. What Should US do better? How can US take a leading role in this campaign and apply an aggressive war against such a dangerous enemy that does not follow rules, along with other NATO partners, so as not to allow the destruction of the Middle East and transforming its states into

a chaos that can make it more vulnerable to IS? I think that the most effective response against the IS, is the application of asymmetric warfare- the same war and in the same way that IS apply against our forces. Unfortunately, even today, IS has gained and is gaining continuous advantages from this war since the beginning of this campaign. They never had the goal of creating a large army in numbers, with national structures and infrastructures like standing armies. They need only the "Holy Quran", a weapon, ammunition to attack western countries, and when attacked by major enemy forces and their aviation, they continue to strive for asymmetric and guerrilla warfare.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since the last century T.E. Lawrence (a British military who has lived in Saudi Arabia) stated that the Arabs are not suitable for the creation of large armies, but only for guerrilla warfare, that is to attack quickly with rifles on top of camels. This seems ridiculous if you think it happens in 2017: a terrorist riding on a horse, waving a sword and his rifle, leading a group of people with black hoods fighting against Western armies, with F22, F35, F15, F16, SU30, SU35 MIG29, PAK50, helicopters MI35, MI24, Apache and modern tanks.

From several decades to the present day, asymmetric fighters continue to be underestimated. This began with the time of civil war in India, rebellion and insurgency in the Philippines, the war of Korea, Vietnam, the Russian and American campaigns in Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq from 2003 to today, the insurgency in Yemen, Chad, Somalia, Sudan, Mali , Nigeria etc.

The West has had more success in intelligence gathering to find, capture or kill terrorist groups in Iraq, but has failed to understand what they (terrorists) possess that we do not have, such as the strong ideology that they “fight for god”. They are

the kamikaze of Islamic sacrifice cult and have embraced this role with great passion

## **2. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY THAT IS CURRENTLY BEING USED AGAINST IS.**

The West is facing the threat of IS not in the right way. Likewise, the strategy of the global war on terrorism was a poor strategy. This misguided strategy raised them to the status of national fighters and greatly increased their western recruitment rate to as many as 19 people caused the deaths of 3,000 innocent civilians.<sup>1</sup>

This led to the American invasion of a wrong place, Iraq. This invasion would cause the creation of IS. One of the most successful ways to face IS, is to “play their game”: to use asymmetric approach to our advantage. President Obama after 2014 began taking some positive measures against IS terrorist groups, measures that recently forced IS to keep the initiative only in the media. Since September 2014, IS has had only one ground offensive in the city of Palmyra, Syria, but since then they lost about 30% of their "caliphate". The fact is that its fighters prefer attacking their own developed targets and don't fight in the open. Now that their "state" is under great pressure from continuing attacks by the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Hezbollah, they are extending their operations to Libya, Yemen, Egypt, and Afghanistan.

The White House and the State Department have already clearly understood some components of the asymmetric warfare that if IS, is seeking a large amount of force on the ground, they are doing everything they can to avoid this decision. if IS requires a grounded confrontation on the ground, it must be countered by the effective use of air forces. It is known that IS hated maximum Shia, Kurds, Alawit, and Yazidis. I find that our strategy must be training, support with

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<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Nance, *Defeating ISIS, who they are, how they fight and what they believe.* New York, N. Y.: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016, p.406.

weapons and ammunition and the direction of these fighters in a ground offensive against the IS.<sup>2</sup>

The American Department of Defense has so far carried out thousands of air operations, more actively including the forces of special operations. If such campaigns / operations with the use of domestic forces or groups (those that do not pose a future national security risk to US and NATO) the cooperation of special forces, air forces and their active engagement in the future will constitute a serious threat to IS and accelerate the destruction of its capabilities. Deploying a substantial amount of SOF with all the appropriate support elements would have been far more successful and would have a greater impact than the idea of invading Syria or the re-occupation of Iraq with 150,000 US troops.

From July 2015 to November 2016, the Pentagon and the Russian Defense Ministry logged that over 38,000 IS fighters were killed in combat by the Americans and 4900 from the Russians. This is a very small number of terrorists killed compared to 19,000 air strikes carried out by NATO forces and over 30,000 Russian military airstrikes (for only one year of involvement in the conflict)<sup>3</sup>. This number at first looks very high and constitutes half of the total amount of foreign fighters fighting in Syria and Iraq. The IS has lost most of its best fighters since 2016, and most of the current fighters have been dragged into the task of protecting objects, guarding bridges and checkpoints along the highways. They have lost the initiative in the attack that characterized them in 2014-2015. Only in 2015 IS lost about 20% of the territories under its control; by November 2016 it lost 20% of the other territories. The only exception is to say in 2015 where they commenced a major offensive in the historic town of Palmyra, Syria, in which they were again stopped and failed to achieve their objective. The attack by the Russian, Iranian, Syrian, and Hezbollah

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<sup>2</sup> Dritan Demiraj, *Special Forces and Assymetric Warfare*, Tirane, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Associated Press News, <https://apnews.com/> 13 november 2016.

forces forced them to go to defensive positions<sup>4</sup>. Also from an IS year is lost every day and more territory and in December 2016 was forced to release the city of Aleppo, which is under the control of the Syrian Arab army.<sup>5</sup>

Any combat operation without a global rejection against IS would be worthless. Wahhabis / Salafis terrorists funded by Saudi Arabia have had fighting space available to them for more than a decade. The defeat of IS is the promotion at the highest level of the Muslim world in order to exclude "corruption" and extreme misuse of the Qur'an.

IS has so far shown that asymmetric power works in both ways. IS tried to rupture the Kurdish defensive lines in December 2015, using their armored vehicles, Toyota 4x4, filled with explosives but again failed. This offensive was completely overthrown though it was a battle that lasted 13 hours in which 187 IS fighters were killed by the use of the Reaper attack Drones, AC-130 attack aircraft. In the same month, IS used over 200 suicide bombers and was again defeated in Ramadi, Nineveh Province, Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and the Kurdish defensive lines. Another very strong offensive occurred in the Kobani, a city in the border area with Turkey. Syria's Kurds under US aviation support defeated IS in this area. This development forced the Turkish army to enter with Special Forces, artillery and tanks in the depths of the Syrian border in order to prevent the Kurds from crossing the border area with Turkey.

### **3. FULL STRATEGY OF COMBAT OPERATIONS AGAINST IS**

When the West decides to attack IS with asymmetric terms, it must first reformulate its efforts and use the asymmetric nature of special operations and intelligence agencies on a

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<sup>4</sup> Sputnik International, "One Year On: What Russia achieved in Syria in 12 months", 27.09.2016 (accessed 27.09.2016), <https://sptnkne.ws/cqSa>.

wider scale. All this should be channeled through all government components from defense, diplomacy to communication. This type of strategy can be called "Full Strategy of Combat Operations against IS".<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the news broadcast by our televisions, USA, Europe, and the Middle East, the idea is that the West is carrying out a full military, political and intelligence campaign against IS, but the truth is different. NATO continues to use only a very small part of its air force assets an even smaller amount of "soft power" of diplomacy, intelligence and communication. USA are involved in this war but their European counterparts are not involved and the asymmetry of the Western alliance is not being taken into consideration and is not being used at all, which has made the USA have somehow tied hands and solved any problem alone. USA is limited not only to the rules of engagement and concern for not damaging innocent civilians, but also from indifference and incompetent governance of some federal government agencies or institutions.

Almost half of Americans thought nothing would happen until their presidential candidates win the elections. With these limitations and without the authorization of military use, the US president will engage in the fight against the IS from the air and will not allow intervention with ground troops for the sole reason that IS wants to face a multi-troop campaign on the ground. With all these limitations, the USA and Russia have again caused considerable damage to IS. But IS fighters have a feature, they are patient and are looking forward to the upcoming developments. What is important to understand is the organizational ability of this organization to bring to attention the lessons learned from the last 1436 years of history and their rapid application in battlefields. In contrast, the American public and its news media have long forgotten that the United States fought for about 8 years against the

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<sup>6</sup> Dritan Demiraj, *Special Forces and Assymetric Warfare*, Tirane, 2017

commanders and lieutenants of the group now called Al Qaeda in Iraq, who today are the highest commanders of the IS.<sup>7</sup>

What is supposed to happen is that, as soon as possible, an asymmetric approach should be planned and implemented, which I think should be relatively easy to apply in practice and of course less costly and compared to a conventional invasion from the ground. The highest levels of national security institutions need to formulate a comprehensive strategy that includes the application of a set of enforceable measures of soft and strong power in order to destroy this powerful terrorist group.

We should not hit IS only with air strikes but at the same time dislocate an unconventional land force designed to take all the initiative in all the territories that IS governs, in order to force it to understand that IS will be destroyed. All forms of IS capabilities must be hindered to recreate a diplomatic and financial cultural event in each area where it operates, with the aim of reassuring its power and livelihood in these territories.

The application of the full combat strategy of IS (FULLSPEC-CIWO)<sup>8</sup> will help not only attack terrorists by carrying out special operations and air force attacks, but also by achieving robust diplomatic alliances and agreements. Important is the engagement of American and European diplomacy for the Middle East after President Trump's election with a different approach from the one that has been applied in recent years.

As far as the State Department is concerned to be more successful, all its staff and Western European diplomacy should address the Muslim countries with the words "join us all together to defend Islam and destroy IS, all over the world where IS operates".<sup>9</sup> Defense Department Operations, its intelligence and anti-ideology missions should be part of the

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<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Nance, *Defeating ISIS*, ...p.408.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Nance, *Defeating ISIS*,...p.409.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

overall strategy with seven major military elements: detect, deny, degrade, disrupt, defeat, deceive and discredit. The Muslim world is composed of 1.8 billion citizens who are looking for the best economic opportunities<sup>10</sup>, better homes, healthy families, and better future for their children. They trust in their Lord and in every government that ensures stability of respect and representation.

They have lived in peace for 14 centuries in their world, have made spectacular scientific discoveries, and have an extraordinary culture, have invented scientific inventions ahead of Europe, Asia and the rest of the world. Islam is a religion born of tribal warriors in the desert which then became a religion of peace and coexistence with the rest of the world that is now at great risk. IS state is challenging all these century-long achievements of art, culture, and tolerance. In extreme misuse of the outward form of this religion, IS is a cancer that is spreading its metastasis across the world. The truth is that in the USA, Canada and a large part of the developed countries of Europe, Islamic radicalization has caused hatred and blaming innocent people for this "cancer" piece that we all need to remove. When we hear the news on NBC, CNN, BBC, FOX News, ABC News etc. we see that politicians, analysts and many personalities from the west simply state that IS needs to disappear and urgently but nobody talks about who, what, when, where and how? The IS has it's in the roots centuries before the existence of the Ancient Muslim Empire existed. The complex phenomenon that created borders and the empire would vanish in flames and be covered with blood.

If we analyze the situation in the US in 2014-2016, the US Congress has not given the right authority to President Obama to order a stronger and more intense battle (and President Obama himself has not been determined in this

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<sup>10</sup> Dritan Demiraj, *The Army of Terror of the Caliphate - Strategy and Tactics*, tirane: Albpaper, 2016, p.21.

regard).<sup>11</sup> at the same time, the US Congress sought active action by the leadership but on the other hand refused to approve the costs of bombing, fuel, additional deployment payments that were collaborating with the Kurds in Iraq and Syria and the opposition groups in Syria just because they President Obama is searching for him. For him, the demands of this president should not be met for the reason that they did not want to give the historical chance to show good leadership.<sup>12</sup> That's why IS is not attacked with the right amount of force and is strong in Raqa and Mosul.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS: REORGANIZATION, AS A NECESSITY TO DEFEAT IS**

The US must lead this campaign so important to the world and not let Russia take the lead in this campaign. It must lead a high-intensity campaign which must be a full military, diplomatic, and ideological battle. This war is not directed against a particular state or nation but against the fanatics who use inhuman crimes against humanity in the name of a very peacemaking religion and is using people as a bomb in the name of creating an extreme religion.<sup>13</sup> The West should join a coalition that is completely asymmetric: a coalition is adaptable to the region that enables rapid movement and uses all the tactics used by our opponent with the exclusion of human crimes. More Special Forces units should be deployed and with highly active and well-coordinated airborne support. This would enable us to simultaneously exert pressure on all fronts at a much higher intensity. This kind of campaign must be followed immediately by a force ready to advance further, and finally we must make it understand that IS is at the bottom of the opportunity to use their "blitz" strategy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Authors note, February 2017

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Nance, *Defeating ISIS*, ...p.410

<sup>13</sup> Dritan Demiraj, *The Army of Terror of the Caliphate*, p.731

<sup>14</sup> Dritan Demiraj, *Special Forces and Assymetric Warfare*, Tirane, 2017

#### **4.1 Intensive military operations**

Western armed forces, especially NATO armed forces must apply the same terms, tactics, techniques and procedures that IS uses, such as “the Gazwah” or “high-speed attacks”. These missions have begun to be applied by US SOF but not in the amount and intensity needed as there are still very few special operations today. While the US Special Operations Forces Command, US State Department and other agencies continue to support Kurds and other moderate opposition groups with training, armaments, finance, and life improvement projects, another approach involving larger troops would immediately give the war a completely new dynamic. At the same time, a greater amount of air operations should be undertaken, in order to support the mission and force out the IS outside the cities of Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, and finally from Raqa, in their "caliphate" in Syria, as well as their removal from the second largest city in Iraq, Mosul, in cooperation with all allied forces that are against them.

#### **4.2 Psychological operations**

Social media, public diplomacy, information warfare, psychological warfare, and anti-ideological struggle should focus like "missiles" against the false story of IS that "they speak in the name of Islam and that they fight for the people of Islam. All our efforts: the anti-ideological struggle, information warfare and our propaganda should focus and be concentrated in order to degrade their social media activities and destroy the power of their global information space in order to present it as a false cult and very dangerous to democracy, not only in the Middle East but also in the wider world. At the same time, more efforts must be made to assimilate into the society of people who have been mobilized to the IS through enforcing.

### **4.3 Fast, precise and well-coordinated diplomatic actions**

A global coalition with all nations must be established with all religious beliefs involved in order to create a strong impact against IS and its threats to global stability for one of the world's greatest beliefs. Above all, the West must be ready for a post-IS in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen and Sinai.<sup>15</sup>

Political theorist George Kenan, has developed a multidimensional diplomatic plan for what he calls "organized political war." He defines this as ... "logical application of Clausewitz's doctrine in peace time".<sup>16</sup> This is related to all aspects of open and hidden actions, pensions and political financing, propaganda that is made in order to confront the political systems of the opposing party. In Kenan's time, the biggest opponent was communism, while today is the IS. A revival of the Kenan politics should not be seen as radical but rational. Here is his deep belief in the policy of talks and dialogue with our opponents, in this case not with the top IS leaders but with Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas. Negotiations with these opposing political parties can prove and be critical because IS has strongly emboldened each of these states / organizations to eliminate them altogether or by destroying in particular Hamas and Fatah in Palestine. This is a serious regional threat that changes with the potential consequences of the devastation, which the world and Israel must take seriously.

### **4.4 Financial support**

Today the West spends billions of dollars on the procurement of weapons systems, intelligence, and so on, with unnecessary

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<sup>15</sup> Dritan Demiraj, *"How to fight ISIS, the greatest Global Threat"*, speech at *Conservatives and Reformists on the NATO parliamentary Assembly* meeting in Tirana, June 4th 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Gergorge Kenan, *On organizing political warfare*, April 30, 1948. History and Public policy Program Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320>

contracting procedures, for which the Pentagon is not able to start tendering procedures. The funding of this campaign should be made as soon as possible before the enemy is completely shifted to a new strategy that completely nullifies the original goal. *The Full Strategy Of Combat Operations Against IS* (Full Spec-CIWO) should include all aspects of governance and should fully fund this strategy. These were some conclusions and suggestions about the ways of defeating the Islamic State.