

# 43 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

## Uzi Arad

Professor, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy  
The Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel

The American Council on Foreign Relations' Center for Preventive Action drew attention to the fact that of the dozen contingencies classified as high priority (in terms of the harm that they could cause), two-thirds are related to events unfolding or ongoing in the Middle East.

Because of their geo-political reach, ideological and military power and their employment of new tactics, it is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Qaeda, and other jihadist groups which not only pose the greatest challenge, but also demand the most urgent response.

### Tackling jihadists of all stripes

The 2016 Munich Security Report recently defined ISIL as 'the best-financed terrorist franchise in history [that] poses an unprecedented threat to international peace and security'. ISIL organises and leads networks of militants and establishes connections with other radical jihadist groups through which it strikes not only in the Middle East and Africa (MENA) but also in Europe.

Furthermore, ISIL operates massively and effectively in cyber space and it is often through social media that it harvests support in radical circles in Europe. Moreover, its large territorial base means that it is indeed a terrorist group of a different order and magnitude.

In the UK's 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (which could be appended to the EUISS publication 'Towards an EU Global Strategy: Background, Process, References – 2015'), terrorism leads the list of top-tier risks. The British document underscores that a number of Islamist terrorist groups are active across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, with growing reach into Europe.

The review also indicates that the emergence of ISIL and its unique brand of violent extremism has significantly increased the threat that terrorists who are directed or inspired by the group pose to European security; that some groups, especially ISIL and al-Qaeda, will also try to acquire chemical, biological and radiological capabilities; and that ISIL has exploited the internet

and social media to distribute large quantities of often sophisticated online propaganda intended to radicalise and recruit large numbers of people in the Middle East and beyond.

Indeed, the international influence of ISIL beyond the Middle East is most menacing. The attacks in Paris or the shootings in San Bernardino are just two examples of ISIL's capability to inspire jihadists across the world. Against this background, the British conclusion is that 'the significant threat posed by terrorist groups makes it all the more important that we invest to tackle this issue head-on at home and abroad using the full spectrum of our capabilities.'

To adequately confront ISIL, blunt its advance in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and curtail its influence elsewhere, it is essential that a united front is formed, which pools its resources and capabilities, to undertake a campaign that employs extensive power projection, as well as new means and tactics. The immediate task should be to degrade ISIL in the Middle East and reverse its advances in Syria, Iraq, and Libya.

However, down the line this will also call for action beyond the Middle East and for the use of a variety of ways to stop the organisation's funding, decapitate its leadership, disrupt its international operational connections, and to fully defeat its military forces.

Thus far, the US, several European countries, and others have been actively engaged in this effort, primarily through air strikes in Iraq and Syria. But it is essential to do more to roll back

ISIL and work towards the goal of defeating it before it metastasises further.

There are three other Middle East-related challenges of importance to Europe. First, engaging and containing Iran – so as to see it comply with the nuclear accord it reached with the P5+1 and

curtail its support of terrorism in other parts of the Middle East such as Hizbullah in Lebanon.

Second, bringing order to Syria, Iraq, and Libya is also important, so as to re-establish stability and peace in these warring areas.

Third, pursuing an Israeli-Palestinian peace through a restored international process with greater regional Arab participation and aiming at a solution for 'two states for two peoples'.

All these entail international efforts, mostly diplomatic, political, and economic, but not necessarily military ones. It is, however, the mission to degrade and defeat ISIL (as defined by US President Obama), which is not only the most urgent, but also the most demanding task in terms of concerted military cooperation and action among members of the Atlantic alliance. It should be viewed as the highest strategic priority for the EU, too.



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