

## **ISIS and the Need for New Politics - « Jihadism may be the cancer within the dar-ol-Islam, but the Muslim world exists within a larger world-system »**

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Let me begin by saying how very saddened I am by the recent ISIS atrocities in Paris, Beirut, and on the Russian plane. The media and politicians have focused on Paris, as if there were a hierarchy of victims. But such hierarchy is in fact a feature of our world-system, which is what I want to focus my remarks on. When we analyze occurrences such as the ISIS atrocities, we need to take into account both endogenous factors and forces and exogenous factors and forces. That is to say, jihadism may be the cancer within the dar-ol-Islam, but the Muslim world exists within a larger world-system characterized by political and economic inequality, militarism, and battles over identity. My presentation highlights the repetition, over decades, of misguided foreign policies and their consequences, because history matters, too.

U.S. intervention was directly responsible for bin Laden and al-Qaeda just as it is for ISIS.

People who watch films or newsreel of the Middle East in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s are always amazed at the absence of veiled women in the urban settings, given that today the majority of women are veiled. Veiling came about with the rise in the late 1970s of Islamist movements and their subsequent expansion across the Muslim world in the 1980s. At the time, talk was of “Islamic fundamentalism” but “radical Islam” was also a term used. Jihadism was first supported by the U.S. in Afghanistan in the 1980s, where a tribal-Islamist rebellion fought a modernizing left-wing government, calling their rebellion a jihad. That particular jihad—also funded and supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—generated Osama bin Laden (later responsible for the 9/11 attacks) and the pathologically violent Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who brutalized Shia Muslims in Iraq after the 2003 US invasion and occupation. Other jihadists—who had been encouraged by the so-called victory in Afghanistan or who were products of the extremist Wahhabi ideology at Saudi-funded mosques in various parts of the world—went on to carry out attacks in Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Nigeria, France, England, Spain, India, Kenya, Tunisia, and elsewhere. In the 1980s, US policy-makers thought they could trust “their” jihadists in the battle against communism, and that the US alliance with Saudi Arabia was strategically smart, but “blowback” occurred with 9/11 and the other assaults in the 1990s and into the new century. Afghanistan today still lacks the literacy levels, modern infrastructure, and the social development of its neighbors.

If we can draw a straight line from the US support for the Afghan Mujahidin to 9/11, we can also draw a straight line from the US invasion of Iraq to the violent power of ISIS/ISIL/Da'esh, but this time via Western destabilization of the Libyan and Syrian regimes. When the leaders of the US, France, and UK decided in 2011 that Ghaddafi had to go and that Assad had to go, their decision—quickly endorsed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf sheikhdoms—had the following effects : it encouraged the armed rebellions and jihadists in both countries, overthrew the Libyan state, created chaos and misery for the people of Libya and Syria, generated spillover effects in

neighboring countries, produced the refugee crisis that EU countries are confronted with, and allowed ISIS to blow up the cultural heritage of Syria and murder innocent Shia Muslims in Beirut. In Benghazi in 2011, four Americans were killed after the “liberation” of Libya ; most recently, innocents in Paris were murdered and maimed.

After all this, former CIA director James Woolsey had the unmitigated gall this past weekend to blame Edward Snowden for the suffering in Paris, ludicrously claiming that Snowden “had blood on his hands” because his revelations led to restrictions on intelligence gathering and the like. Woolsey is really trying to deflect blame away from decades of wrong-headed US and European foreign policies and onto poor Snowden. Meanwhile other pundits blame Assad for the rise of ISIS. This is not political or historical analysis, this is sheer propaganda.

What have the “war on terror” and all the invasions, occupations, drone attacks, the NATO adventure in Libya, attempts to dislodge the Assad regime, and non-resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict brought about other than civilian deaths, the unraveling of development, and more recruits for violent extremism ? How have gigantic military expenditures benefited societal security, sustainability, and well-being, when what is really needed is reallocation of resources toward investments here at home in affordable healthcare and housing, infrastructural upgrading, decent jobs with decent wages, quality public schooling, and affordable university education ? Why do the US and UK prioritize military sales to countries like Saudi Arabia rather than development assistance to, and foreign investment in, peaceful and democratizing countries like Tunisia ? Why have Western policies on, and responses to, multiculturalism, conflicts, and refugees been so incoherent and inconsistent ? Is it any wonder that both extreme rightwing and far left-wing parties are winning elections in Europe ?

Our world-system is broken, the core countries are in disarray, and the hegemon can no longer lead, much less inspire. We need another world, one where conflicts, wars, and hyper-masculine rivalries can no longer be generated by arrogant powers ; a new globalization, more people-oriented rather than profit-oriented ; a world where citizens can live in peace, dignity, and prosperity in their own countries rather than be forced to flee whether as refugees from conflict or as economic migrants from unemployment or poverty. Let me end with my “variation on a theme” of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, famous I Have a Dream speech :

All countries would reduce their military spending to under 2% of GDP while increasing their budgets for healthcare, public education, and social provisioning. Diplomacy, dialogue, and cooperation would replace rivalry and aggression. Development assistance would increase to 1% of GDP, and the “Tobin Tax” on financial speculation would finally be implemented. Working mothers would be entitled to paid maternity leave of one year, followed by affordable and quality childcare and pre-school. Religious studies would be taught at high school and a second language taught from primary school onward so that youth would acquire cross-cultural competence earlier in their lives. And all countries would meet the Sustainable Development Goals, whether through their own budget allocations or through international development assistance.

Imagining another world is not an exercise in futility—it is a necessity, given the various crises our world has been facing. Here at Northeastern, especially in this College and certainly in the International Affairs Program, we encourage our students to “think outside the box” ; to ponder issues critically, creatively, and constructively ; to pose research questions, identify problems, and find solutions ; and to imagine a world in which human security, human development, and human rights are paramount.

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\* « SIS, the World System, and the Need for New Politics ». Solidarity. December 10, 2015 :  
<http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4539>

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