

Washington DC Peace & Security Forum: “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: Return of the Caliphate?”

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Washington DC, USA - The U.S. Secretary of Defense recently gave classified testimony on Capitol Hill and declared that “ISIS [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] is a clear and imminent threat to the security of the United States.” He noted “they are very well funded, are militarized and now hiding in plain sight as a self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria.”

Although President Obama has ordered more than 1,000 troops into Iraq and conducted more than 100 airstrikes, these limited tactical measures will not reverse the momentum of ISIS to spread what the President calls a “cancer.” Officials and experts agree that what is needed is a combined political, economic and military strategy. However at the UPF forum, “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: Return of the Caliphate?” held on August 27, moderated by former U.S. diplomat and U.S. Senate staff member James Jatras, an additional component was emphasized —ideology.

A former al-Qaeda affiliate fighting against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, ISIS controls large parts of Iraq including the city of Mosul and the predominantly Sunni areas near Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. In addition, ISIS has reportedly seized over \$400 million from Mosul’s central bank, as well as gold bullion, in addition to potential oil revenues from fields in Syria and Iraq.

Although recent U.S. military operations in Iraq appear to be of help, notably the U.S. airstrikes which allowed thousands of Yazidis, a minority which was threatened with genocide, the President admitted that “we don’t have a strategy yet,” only short-term goals. ISIS has applied a ruthless set of policies, seemingly designed both to demonstrate its ideological bona fides and to terrorize its enemies: crucifixion and beheading, forced conversion of Christians and people of other religions, and destruction of Islamic shrines.

The Office of Peace and Security Affairs of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in Washington, D.C., convened this forum with Washington-based scholars, diplomats, government and civil society representatives, and religious leaders to examine the current situation in Syria and Iraq, and to gain clarity on what steps are needed to stabilize the region in order to achieve lasting peace.

The following is a transcription and summary-synopsis

The host of the forum, Dr. Antonio Betancourt welcomed the participants. The Islamic State (IS), he said, now controls an area across Iraq and Syria about the size of the American states of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, plus the District of Columbia. IS has been very effective in recruiting idle human resources, mostly men disillusioned with the promises of a better life under democratic ideals.



“Masses of people in the Middle East and other regions cannot have opportunities to advance in life,” according to Dr. Betancourt, “The U.S. has failed in bringing the democratic ideal into those countries because America has still not realized that political democracy with an ongoing economic plutocracy will not work in this modern world of the 21st century. Eventually the U.S. has to make the decision to lead the world in opening and making the market economy accessible to the masses, not just as laborers for hire but as owners of the new economy of those regions where the U.S. seeks to bring democracy. Violent labor for hire is one of the biggest employers in today's world, some with a component of ‘religion’ or leftist ideology, and others with human and drug trafficking, illegal weapons markets, etc.”

Moderator James George Jatras pointed out that when he wrote an article for *Chronicles* magazine in 2005, entitled, “Is There a Khilafah in Your Future?” the number of hits on Google were merely in the thousands, but ten years later, the hits exceed a million per day demonstrating the growing importance and relevancy of the issue. As a source of information, he recommends the website: <http://www.khilafah.com>.

Jatras said the essential question is a practical one —what do we do about this? “We’ve heard talk that this is a ‘substantial threat’ and an ‘immediate threat’ to the U.S. and the West, but I also ask the question: Is there threat-fatigue in this country? Saddam Hussein was a threat so we mobilized to get rid of him. Osama bin Laden was a threat. Al-Qaeda is a threat, and now ISIS. How do we deal with the complexities of these issues and coordinate with the local players? There is something quantitatively different about this group as opposed to Al-Qaeda. Unlike Al-Qaeda and Nigeria’s Boko Haram that operate within a state —ISIS claims to be a state. It controls people and resources so by most conventional definitions, it is a state-like entity.”

State Sen. Richard H. Black, 13th District, Virginia said, “America suffers a profound lack of intellectual clarity in its policy regarding Syria. We are torn between the urgent need to halt the explosive growth of ISIS and the desire of policymakers such as Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, and John McCain, to vindicate their flawed Mideast strategy. Syria is the bulwark of defense between radical Islamic forces and the Western world. Were Syria to fall, ISIS would seize Damascus. Jordan and Lebanon would collapse within weeks, and the victory of ISIS would profoundly radicalize Turkey – a nation that is already moving rapidly into the jihadist orbit.

“President Obama has authorized surveillance overflights in Syrian airspace, yet he refuses to coordinate attacks with Syrian forces. Syria has the finest battlefield intelligence and the capability of employing ground forces to exploit successful airstrikes. It is foolish to degrade the effectiveness of American airstrikes because of a petulant refusal to cooperate with Syria.”

The Senator said, “Unless we seize this moment, we risk facilitating the next great clash of civilizations between Islam and the Western world. Having unleashed a demon in the Middle East, it is incumbent upon us to crush it now. Doing so without the active assistance of Syria’s President Assad will be impossible.”

James G. Zumwalt (Lt. Col., USMC Ret.) was not able to attend but submitted his article, “Even A ‘Do Nothing’ Foreign Policy Eventually Can Be Right,” which appeared in *Family Security Matters* (July 29, 2014). He said, “The 9-11 Commission emphasized a key lesson, No sanctuaries for terrorist groups. Geographic sanctuaries (like pre-9/11 Afghanistan) enable terrorist groups to gather, indoctrinate, and

train recruits, and they offer breathing space in which to develop complex plots (like the 9/11 attacks)."



In a follow-up study, the Commission noted, "ISIS now controls vast swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, creating a massive terrorist sanctuary... That nightmare scenario may now be coming to pass" as gains by ISIS have caused the group to ramp up recruiting efforts to send combat-hardened jihadists to the U.S. An ISIS victory would leave Iraq as an incubator for future terrorist acts against the U.S.; however, its defeat would leave Iran in control of an Iraq to be used for the same purpose. Thus, the U.S. has to balance any action it takes in Iraq that enhances the success of one side over the other since, regardless of which prevails, U.S. influence in Iraq will not be enhanced and the terrorist threat will remain."

When asked by Jatras if the Caliphate has attraction in Egypt, expat Nabil Makar said, "Only a minority, the fanatics, the rest of the people are not attracted. We are Muslims and Christians. We live as neighbors. We have a common history and identity. The fanatics have twisted the traditional beliefs of Islam."

Cynthia Turner, Executive Vice President of Medical Service Corporation International, posed the question: "Are we responding to ISIS the same way we did to Al Qaeda? If it's a state wouldn't it be easier for Congress to deal with them and to take more aggressive action to minimize the infiltration of ISIS into the surrounding areas?"

Senator Black responded, "We looked at al-Qaeda and 9/11 as a police action rather than a military action.... How do we stop the explosive expansion of ISIS beyond where they are today? They have moved through Iraq like a knife through butter."

Norman Kurland, President of the Center for Economic and Social Justice, steered the discussions towards the need for a moral perspective. "Those who are attracted to ISIS begin with the proposition that the United States is the great Satan." Kurland suggests the need for "a counter offensive on the moral level, not ignoring the military, but looking at the moral side." He calls this a "Just Third Way," to ensure that all people have equal opportunity, full access and full participation in the free market as workers and capital owners. This is a strategy that might be suitable for neutralizing the attractiveness of ISIS.

Dr. Betancourt feels that "America has evolved over the past century. Without being perfect, America was a secular state but a moral state. The American philosophy, unique and different from other nations, is embedded and born from three documents: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These documents created what we know as 'American Manifest Destiny,' and a historical morality in the public sphere. Also it created fundamentals for a proper balance between the 'American ideal' (democracy) and the 'American enterprise' (the economy).

"However, in more recent years, specifically after the fall of the Soviet Empire, there has been a shift in balance. American ideal has been subordinated to the American enterprise. Today there is an ideology of winners and losers and the winner takes it all. American magnanimity has been surpassed by the worship of power, and as Lord Acton, the British historian said: 'All power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.' America needs to search for her soul again and find the traditional balance between American idealism based in public morality and the pursuit of its economic interests around the world."

Dr. Ann Marie Look, President of We Can Education and Development Strategies Foundation, offered two points: (1) About the experience in dealing with terrorists in her homeland of Colombia, "We've had

guerrillas since the 1950s, and even earlier, and in my opinion it is not possible to get rid of them by only military means. The only way we are going to have peace is through dialogue and to work with those who have a different opinion than ours. (2) The Islamic extremists want to conquer the world, not just build a state and they are ready to do whatever is necessary including sacrificing their lives. What does the West have to counter this zeal?"



Jatras agreed that “these extremists are following what they consider to be religious duty, but expressed concern that the Gulf states “helped create this monster,” and that ties to Washington have also “contributed to the problem.”

Christopher Adkins, DC Stop Modern Slavery, addressed the issue of legitimacy. He said, “This is an issue that needs to be taken on by Muslims around the world. Muslims in America and around the world should denounce ISIS, their theology and tactics. Education about what ISIS believes and religious theological pronouncements are needed to stop them.”

Sen. Black pointed out that politics are driven by passionate minorities. “I know many, many Muslims who will not associate with ISIS, but remain silent. This is a worldwide phenomenon.” He described it as “an asymmetric war in which the attack weapon of the enemy is religious fervor. The Western countries are partially secular. In our country the federal courts maintain an aggressive pressure against religion. There is a constant pounding down of our moral and religious strengths, and as a consequence, the more vulnerable we become and the more powerful a force like ISIS can be.”

Mehrunisa Qayyum, Founder-CEO of PITAPOLICY Consulting, remarked, "I don't blame the U.S. for ISIS taking over in Syria. It began as an opportunity to get rid of Bashar-al-Assad but when ISIS came to power it was co-opted by a so-called "religious" few. It's all about power. These are single men of all races who are caught up in the fervor, but it's not because of any grand or noble statement. ISIS has been good in translating their message and in backing it up with salaries. It's about opportunity and power."

Senator Black observed, “We need to recognize that the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is an extremely bright individual. He is no fool and it would be a mistake to look at him as some sort of radical hothead. He is a very deliberate and extremely dangerous person. He is dangerous precisely because he is not mad.”

Michael Marshall, Communications Director of the Global Peace Foundation and Editor Emeritus of UPI, offered two points. (1) It is not correct to say that the broader Muslim community is keeping silent. Muslims around the world are engaged very intensely on the issues. There has been a lot of discussion generated on the Internet, social media and blogs against the radicalization of Islam and the perversions of the Koran's teachings. (I'm originally from the United Kingdom) Young British Muslims have been traveling east for some years even before 9/11 including young Britons going to Afghanistan for training. This is an ongoing problem that the UK government has recently responded to with very mixed success, obviously. One of the things that they have initiated is to engage in spiritual counseling, talking to young men who are at risk. Arguing the religious points vs. the military approach. (2) Everyone is quite amazed by the apparent sudden emergence of ISIS onto the scene, not sudden in the sense that people in the

business weren't aware, but with such apparent success running over the Iraqi army in various places and even giving the Kurds a very difficult time militarily. The Kurdish *peshmerga* also lost ground to ISIS, including for a while the vital Mosul dam. There seems to be much evidence that ISIS is well-equipped, but what is the source of the funding?"



According to Jatras, “the funding comes from the Gulf States —wealthy donors in Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. There seems to be some finger-pointing among the allies of the United States. Prior to the forum, I was interviewed by Orient TV (Television al-Mashreq TV, a Syrian satellite television channel based in Dubai, UAE). The interviewer was awfully keen to blame it all on Qatar. I don't think anybody really knows what's the bottom line.”

Dr. Betancourt said, “A lot of today's radical Islam is man-made. It's origins can be traced back to the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states when fighting the Cold War and the expansion of communism particularly when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The U.S. felt that they didn't have an Islamic ideological critique to communist ideology, so they came out with the idea to revive fundamental Islamic ideas of centuries past. The Madras schools of Wahabism was born and sustained in South Arabia and then expanded to the Gulf States and other parts of the world. This is the monster we confront today.”

“There is a common denominator for all religion and that is the concept of justice,” Dr. Kurland said. “The Preamble of the US Constitution says, ‘We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice.’ He said, “America is a place where everyone can be an owner, with some historical exceptions such as African Americans and Native Americans. Where there is equal opportunity, there are owners.”

John Kukor, former Air Force intelligence, recalled the vision of Ronald Reagan who described America as the “shining city upon a hill.” He questioned why “America has allied ourselves with Saudi Arabian oil instead of working towards self-sufficiency? We are a good country and should stand up proudly for what we have done in the name of peace.”

Everette Hamilton, member of the Tea Party Patriots of Central Pennsylvania, raised the topic of Turkey and its response to ISIS.

Senator Black said, “Since ISIS captured the Iraqi city of Mosul, which is near the border with Turkey, I have been watching for their response. It's very interesting that Turkey has not launched an immediate large-scale troop movement to protect the border. Jordan has fortified its positions along its 225-mile Syrian frontier. That Turkey has not taken steps tells me that perhaps there is some cooperative action between Turkey and ISIS, but that's pure speculation.”

Louis Johnson, a Maryland-based peace activist to the Muslim community, said, “I grew up in the largest Muslim country in the world in the 1960s, Pakistan. I've visited many mosques in the world, and have been working with the local Muslim community for more than 30 years. The root of the problem, in my opinion, is the war of words or ideology. I call upon the conscientious people of the world to put ideological pressure on the Muslim community. Contact the imams, the leaders, and the moderate followers. Call on them to stand up and say: ISIS is wrong. ISIS is an affront to the Prophet Mohammed. ISIS is twisting the teachings of the Koran. We should begin at the grassroots level, then to the national and international levels. We need to put pressure on these radicals and encourage them to turn away from

violence.”



Jatras posed the pivotal question, “What is to be done? The U.S. has sent military advisers to work with Iraqi and Kurdish forces against the ISIS, and earlier this month, the President authorized limited airstrikes on ISIS targets. However a lot of people are skeptical of an air campaign without the support of a ground role. What about the neighboring countries? We need a mix of diplomacy, military, and ideological strategy. We need to mobilize in a way that does not precipitate something even worse.”

Dr. Betancourt shared about experiences a few years back when more than 20,000 pilgrims went from around the world to Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. “We brought the two sides together in a dialogue for peace including thousands of religious leaders of all faiths. We met with key members of the Knesset of Israel and the Chief Justices of the Palestinian Sharia Courts. We gave reports to the State Department, the Justice Department, and even the White House on our efforts to help bring about peaceful solutions to the region’s problems. In the end, they weren’t interested. In my opinion, it was because there are so many vested interests that change cannot come about, because any step that is taken will step on someone’s interests who is more interested in continuing the problem instead of solving the disputes.”

Senator Black said, “As a nation we need to look to stability rather than being the revolutionary force that goes in and overthrows governments. In the case of Iraq, I know a lot of many sincere people who believe that it was a great thing to overthrow Saddam Hussein, but in retrospect, what do we see today? Nothing less than the total disintegration of the country, the destruction of its infrastructure, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, and the complete collapse of the balance of power in the Mideast.”

John Kukor said, “We need to see a U.S.-led international coalition with the military capability to win this war. I didn’t support the war in Iraq, but this is different. A combined political, economic and military strategy is needed, and the time is now.”

Senator Black said, “It is imperative to recognize that we cannot fight ISIS and defeat Syrian President Assad at the same time. That would be a losing strategy. You cannot fight both sides. You must pick one. I choose Syria against ISIS. We need people on the ground who can light up the red and green smoke to guide our bombers.”

Dr. Betancourt thanked the moderator and all the participants and offered the following closing words, “America needs to soul search and UPF is trying to help.”

UPF has been a leading exponent of track two diplomacy, with particular emphasis on the role and responsibility of religious and spiritual leaders. The UPF proposes an ideological counter proposal and praxis that would: (1) expose the ideological fallacies of Islamic radical thought, (2) oppose all forms of violence as contrary to the laws of God, the parent of all humanity, and (3) propose a universal ideal of a future society characterized by interdependence, mutual prosperity and universal shared values, ideals which transcend all national and religious boundaries.

Host: Dr. Antonio Betancourt, Director, UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs

Moderator: **James George Jatras**, Former U.S. diplomat and U.S. Senate staff member

Participants:

Christopher Adkins, Member, DC Stop Modern Slavery

Tetiana Anderson, Guest producer, Alhurra Television

Dr. Mark P. Barry, Advisor, UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs (via Skype)

Hari Bindal, Past president, American Society of Engineers of Indian Origin

Sen. Richard Black, State Senator, District 13, Ashburn, Virginia (submitted paper)



Hayvi Bouzo, Washington, D.C. Bureau Chief, Orient TV

Joseph Burns, Board of Directors, The Winchester-Underwood

James D'Itri, Jr., Defense Legislative Researcher, Office of U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein

Prof. Diane Falk, Research writer and editor

Everette Hamilton, Member, Tea Party Patriots of Central Pennsylvania

Col. George Jatras, USAF (Ret), Former U.S. Air Attache to Moscow

Louis Johnson, Peace activist to the Muslim community in Maryland

Walid Kildani, Foreign Policy Liaison, U.S. Department of State

John Kukor, Former intelligence officer, U.S. Air Force (Ret)

Dr. Norman Kurland, President, Center for Economic and Social Justice

Dr. Ann Marie Look, President, We Can Education and Development and Strategies Foundation

Nabil Makar, Art Instructor, Letcher Art School

Michael Marshall, Communications Director, Global Peace Foundation

Min. Chi Mauuso, Minister, Afrikan Women's Networking Group

Mehrunisa Qayyum, Founder-CEO, PITAPOLICY Consulting

Samantha Schifrin, Legislative Correspondent, Office of U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein



Dr. William Selig, Deputy Director, UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs

Colombe Taillandier, First Secretary, Embassy of France

Pavel Talyzin, Third Secretary, Embassy of the Russian Federation

Cynthia Turner, Executive Director, Medical Service Corporation International

Patricia Villa, Lawyer (Colombia)

Andreas Zbinden, Academic Associate, Office of the Defense, Embassy of Switzerland

Lt. Col. James Zumwalt, USMC (Ret.) journalist (*submitted paper*)