

An effective anti-ISIS strategy must include all regional powers

“We are not at war with Islam, which teaches peace...there are millions of American Muslims who are part of this country. I reject the idea of a clash of civilizations,” said the President of the United States, Barack Obama, addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations. Obama carefully chose this ‘peaceful’ framework to urge international support for action to weaken and destroy the Islamic Caliphate (ISIS). Obama also reassured Americans, most of whom have had become rather weary of US interventions in the Middle East, that he would not be sending American ground troops, limiting the intervention to air raids against ISIS positions. From a military standpoint, the best that such a strategy can achieve is to contain the ISIS offensive and advance in some areas and the advance of militants. The New York Times criticized the recent air strikes in Syria launched by the President of the United States, Barack Obama because he has unleashed the offensive without a public debate and because the attacks indirectly help Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, who has been confronting Islamist rebels since the start of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’. However, neither Obama nor the NY Times are correct.

The fact that the West’s current anti-ISIS strategies have not included Iran and Syria are more problematic. Iran and Syria have been fighting against ISIS and other radicals for the past three years. ISIS has gained considerable strength over the past few months after returning to Iraq, overwhelming the regular troops and stealing heavy military hardware, a good deal of which supplied by the United States. ISIS has also taken over oil production facilities, robbed banks and grown into a very wealthy organization that has attracted over

15,000 foreign fighters alone. The US military leadership has expressed skepticism over the probability of a swift military victory against ISIS. The two most senior American military officials, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Chief of Staff Martin Dempsey presented a rather pessimistic report on the Obama administration's chances of success in the fight against the Islamic Caliphate, listing various obstacles. They expressed doubts about the ability of Iraqi military forces to restore order and to become an effective force against the Islamic State. The military leaders were also concerned about the suggestion to train Syrian armed rebels, who would likely turn their efforts more against the Syrian regime's forces than ISIS. It should be noted that President al-Asad poses no threat to the West while ISIS could be more dangerous than al-Qaida itself. Gen. Dempsey suggested that American ground troops may be deployed after all, namely in the guise of advisers on urban combat to the Iraqi army.

ISIS was not born out of thin air. Some regional governments and Western support for the Syrian rebels have helped ISIS grow tremendously. Now, the West and its Middle Eastern allies, Saudi Arabia in particular, will be bombing the geopolitical 'Frankenstein' that is ISIS; yet the bombing would not be enough to eradicate it. Iran should have been invited to the international conference held Monday in Paris, because it could play a central role in the fight against the jihadists. Moreover, where ISIS is concerned, it is absurd to accuse the Syrian regime in Damascus for turning a blind eye to the abuses of these jihadists in order to weaken "the moderate rebels". The fact is that the moderate rebels are a very small minority; many are not so moderate, having several radicals in their midst. Ultimately, the United States and its allies are playing a double game, in one moment claiming to be acting to achieve the Caliphate's destruction while refusing to cooperate with the States directly concerned by this threat, which include Iran and Syria – among others. There is also another, more existential problem to the current anti-

ISIS strategy.

ISIS did not emerge in isolation. The group expresses one of the fastest growing trends of Islam in the Middle East and beyond. ISIS must be fought by the local and regional powers, militarily and ideologically, if the goal is There is an existential struggle between different strands of Islam in the Middle East, today. As Thomas Friedman of the New York Times has suggested "the US intervention against the Islamic state is to change the soul of Islam and leaves the states concerned time to do nothing and let the fight continue".

US military intervention against ISIS will anger many Sunnis, even moderates, in Iraq who feel that the excessive Shiite domination in the Iraqi parliament and society have paved the way for the 'Caliphate'. It would be as if the United States intervened in to fight the mafia in Italy by bombing Sicily, leaving out any responsibility for Italy itself. ISIS's menace is now largely directed toward Syria and Iraq. The neighboring states, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran, are the ones for which ISIS is most threatening. The more ISIS advances the more chaos it creates for the regional powers – most of which are too Western dependent. Meanwhile, the House of Saud has financed the war against ISIS as well as the Islamist ideology that has fed it. Meanwhile, the US Air Force has carried out 12 attacks against ISIS oil installations used to illegally extract and trade oil, generating funds of over a million dollars per day.

British Prime Minister Cameron has better understood the regional implications, meeting Iranian President Hassan Rohani for what are the first direct Anglo-Iranian talks at a high level since the Iranian revolution of 1979. "We disagree on many things," Cameron said in his speech at the UN. "Iran supports terrorist organizations...but Iran's leaders can help defeat ISIS and to ensure greater stability in Iraq and Syria." How long will it be before the United States will do the same? It is rather inevitable.