

The Fight Against ISIS and al-Qaeda: Another Hundred Years' War

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The Problem We Face

The last 15 years of American foreign policy have had one, singular focus: defeating Islamic Terrorism abroad to protect interests at home. This obsession has plunged the country into two wars and has racked up a tab numbering in the trillions with no, real effect. First springing up in the late 1970's along with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, extremism has plagued the Middle East, creating wars and conflicts that have touched every country in the region. Despite trillions of dollars in aid and having the most modern military, Iraq is a failed state; religious discrimination from a bitter, formerly oppressed majority, the Shia, disenfranchised the Sunni, worsening that country's already existing civil strife.

In the past year, the group calling itself the Islamic State has annexed vast swathes of Iraq and Syria. Afghanistan seems equally worse off. After the longest war in American history, Afghanistan, though markedly safer than before intervention, houses a large population of radical ideologues that sympathize, or fight with the Taliban. With a neighbor to its east, Pakistan, that harbors the same terrorists it has worked so hard to exterminate, Afghanistan's own future looks bleak at best. Attacks on the West have been increasing at a terrifying rate.

Only a few months ago, over a hundred civilians were killed in Paris by Islamic State militants and a plane carrying hundreds of Russian tourists bombed mid-flight. This necessitates the conclusion that our strategy in destroying Islamic Terrorism has fatal flaws. The question then arises; if all other strategies have failed in eradicating Islamic terrorism, how can we fix our missteps in the past and what policies can be instituted to finally destroy the pernicious evil that aims to destroy our way of life?

Background on the Islamic State and al-Qaeda

Background on al-Qaeda

- The Afghan Jihad of the 1980's against the Soviet Union saw the US funneling billions into the region to halt the invasion
- The funds were allocated to the more extreme, Islamist elements; chief among them was the legendary Sheikh Abdullah Hazzam and Osama Bin Laden, a young Saudi heir who was prominent because of his philanthropy
- Bin Laden became the group's leader after Hazzam's death and spread his ideology throughout the Middle East before being exiled to Afghanistan
- In 1996, Bin Laden declared the war on the US, launching numerous attacks in the following years, which culminated in the deadly attack of September 11th 2001
- The fateful events of that day catapulted the US into two wars: one to catch Bin Laden and stomp out an Islamist government, and the other to eliminate the possibility of another such attack
- Bin Laden was killed in 2011 by US Marines
- The group is now led by Egyptian cleric Ayman al-Zawahiri and has gained influence in a number of countries especially in Syria



Background on ISIS

- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian jihadi, began an extremist group Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad to fight the US occupation of Iraq
- After considerable success in a number of suicide bombings, Bin Laden reached out to Zarqawi and the group's name was changed to al-Qaeda in Iraq
- Zarqawi was killed in a US airstrike in 2006 and AQI was weakened
- ISI was created, led by al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi until they were killed in 2010
- Abu Bakr-al Baghdadi was there successor, sending insurgents into Syria in 2011 following the country's slip into civil war
- After gaining a substantial amount of land in Syria, Baghdadi launched a major offensive in the early summer of 2014 into Iraq and conquered 30% of Iraq in only a few months
- Now a self-proclaimed Islamic State, the group is supported by many disenfranchised Sunnis and governs with its interpretation of Islamic law: the Sharia
- They hold additional land in West, East and North Africa, as well as sparse control of land in Asia



Fighting ISIS

- Support the moderate opposition groups, or democratically elected governments with logistical support
- Constant airstrikes paired with Kurdish allies on the ground to coordinate deadly, precision bombings
- Destroying financial assets and resources that create revenue (oil)
- Repudiation of Radical Islam
- Special forces presence

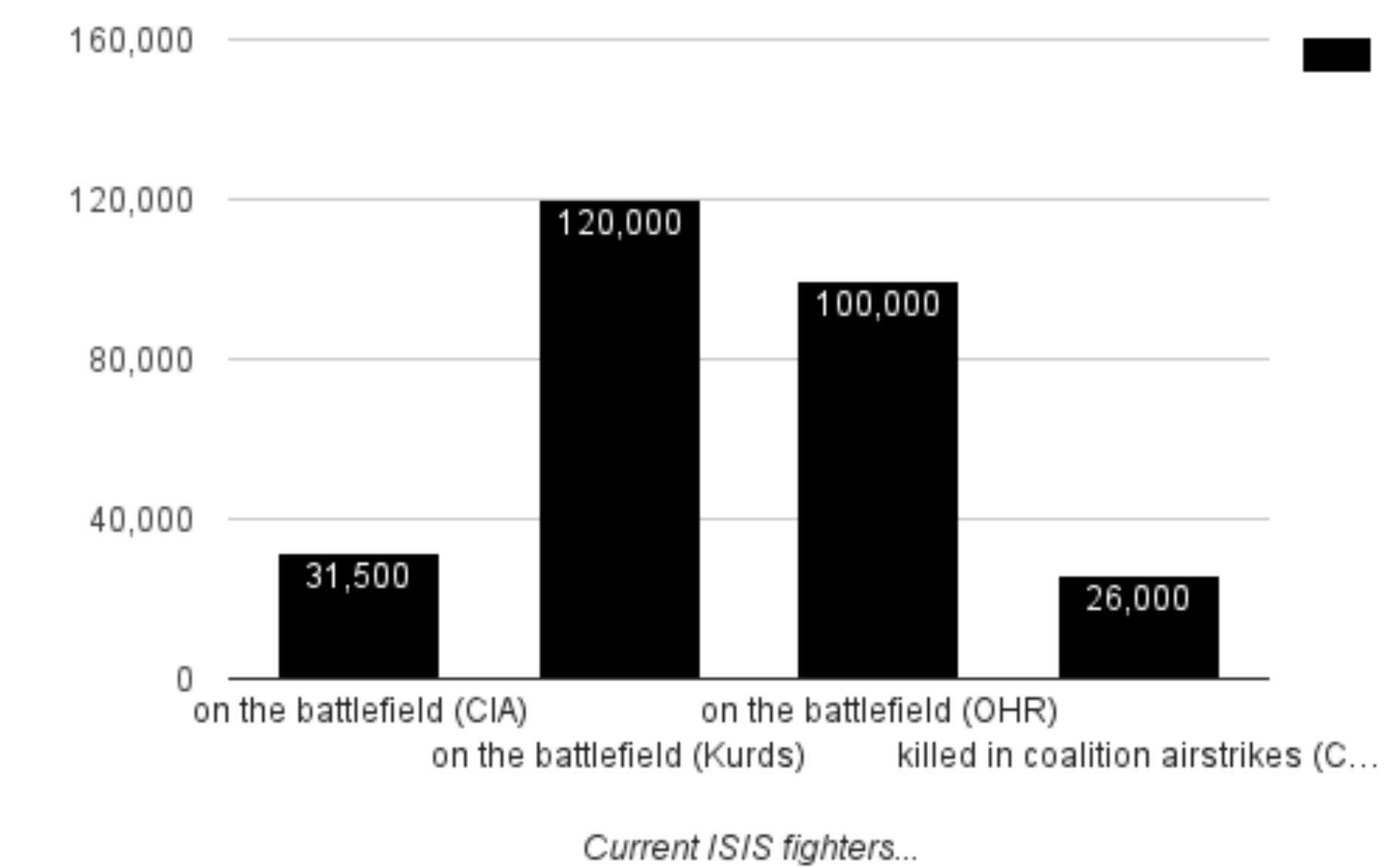


Fighting al-Qaeda

- Provide economic opportunities to those in afflicted areas
- Ideological repudiation
- Not paying ransoms for hostages
- Grants to governments and secular militias fighting the group



ISIS' Fighting Force



Extension

- President Obama has claimed that "ISIS has nothing to do with Islam", presumably because he believes that connecting Islam and ISIS only worsens the problem
- But if we misdiagnose the problem as something other than Radical Islam, will the war against ISIS play out in our favor?



Acknowledgements / References

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