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Islamic State, Taliban Fanatics are Flourishing

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On 25 September a UN report warned that the terror group Islamic State has a presence in 25 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and two days later the BBC reported that «at least 300 Islamic State fighters have attacked checkpoints in eastern Afghanistan, in a rare co-ordinated assault on the security forces». It was claimed that sixty militants had been killed, but statements of that sort by Afghan or US-NATO officials in Kabul must be treated with caution.

The important thing is that the barbaric zealots of the Taliban and Islamic State are gaining ground and power in Afghanistan, the country invaded by US and British forces in 2001 in order, as NATO announced, to «ensure Afghanistan would never again become a safe haven for terrorists».



President George W. Bush declared in 2008 that he had ordered the invasion in order that «future generations of Americans don't have to worry about harm coming from a place like Afghanistan and future generations of Afghans can grow up in a hopeful society». His successor, Barack Obama, said in a speech at West Point Military Academy in December 2009 that «as Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan... I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan... we will pursue a military strategy that will break the Taliban's momentum... We're in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from once again spreading through that country».

He sent the 30,000 troops in what was called «the surge», but the momentum of the Taliban was not broken and the cancer of Islamic State is now spreading rapidly throughout Afghanistan. The «vital national interest» of the United States was quietly shelved, and Obama ordered withdrawal of all but about 9,000 US uniformed personnel from the country he has helped reduce to chaos. (For one thing, it is now the largest illegal heroin source in the world, which can hardly be in the national interest of the United States or anyone else, for that matter. The UN's 2015 Drug Report states that «opium poppy cultivation reached historically high levels in the main country in which [it] is cultivated: Afghanistan».)

The next in the series of insurgent onslaughts in Afghanistan was on September 28 when it was reported that Taliban barbarians had taken over the city of Kunduz, capital of the province of the same name, which has a population of 300,000, the fifth largest city in the country. On that same day President Obama delivered a 5,000 word diatribe at the UN General Assembly in which he criticised and insulted several countries and their leaders – but mentioned the word Afghanistan only once, when he had to admit in a throwaway line that «our troops have largely returned from Iraq and Afghanistan», where they had opened up both of them to formation and expansion of

the Islamic State which was described by the estimable US Congressional Research Service in June 2015 as being «a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group that has expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria since 2013, threatening the security of both countries and drawing increased attention from the international community».

Efforts to rid the world of this menace are complicated by the stance and wavering policies of President Obama. Certainly he announced in September 2014: «We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy» involving airstrikes and other «support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground». And then he boasted to the UN General Assembly that «I lead the strongest military that the world has ever known, and I will never hesitate to protect my country or our allies, unilaterally and by force where necessary». But as an afterthought he squeaked plaintively that «force alone cannot impose order internationally».

As Time magazine stated on 1 October, «the notion that the US military can bring order to chaos rooted in centuries of religious intolerance is absurd» but Obama wants to attack Islamic State in Syria while encouraging the overthrow of Syria's President Assad – no doubt looking forward to his murder by US-supported rebels, just as President Gaddafi of Libya was slaughtered when, as boasted laughingly <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/clinton-on-qaddafi-we-came-we-saw-he-died/> by Obama's then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, «we came; we saw; he died». On the other hand, while Moscow certainly wants to assist in eradicating the barbarians of Islamic State, it will not refrain from attacking terrorist groups who seek to overthrow the Syrian president, which would destabilise the region even further.

The US will not carry out air attacks on some of the terrorist groups intent on destroying Syria's government by force and on 1 October criticized Russia for conducting «indiscriminate military operations against the Syrian opposition», ignoring the fact that Islamic State is the most potent threat to the government of Syria – and to the government of Iraq and stability throughout the Middle East. As witnessed in many regions of the world, Obama's «vital national interest» does not necessarily represent the vital interests of the countries most affected by «the strongest military that the world has ever known».

The fact that many of the terrorist groups in Syria are funded and otherwise supported by the United States is regrettable, because they are far from being a unified force intent on supporting western style democracy. As noted by the BBC on 1 October «the Syrian civil war began with an uprising against the government but has since splintered into various rebel groups fighting President Assad's forces and also each other». Just where Islamic State fits into that picture is difficult to see, but one thing is certain: none of these extremist groups can be considered a supporter of vital US interests.

Islamic fanatics are proliferating in a long line of countries, from Algeria in the west to Indonesia in the east, and various lunatic off-shoots are flourishing. The well-established Afghan Taliban will probably fail in their attempts to take over the country completely – mainly because they couldn't run a coffee stall, administratively – but they will continue to exercise power as a

brutally disruptive and viciously bigoted band of thugs.

If Washington continues to devote military resources and massive amounts of money to supporting disparate groups of Syrian insurgents («moderate rebels») it will benefit Islamic State, which will continue to extend its influence in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan and probably elsewhere. The future seems bleak, and Obama's indecision and empty threats do not give cause for optimism.