

# 5 Lines of Effort to Degrade and Defeat ISIS (Research Guide Infographic)

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# 5 LINES OF EFFORT TO DEGRADE & DEFEAT ISIS

WASHINGTON INSTITUTE ANALYSIS AND IDEAS



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## #1 Providing military support to our partners

### OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

**5,000+** airstrike sorties

**1,700+** intel-related sorties

As of Jan. 13, 2015

#### IRAQ

**WHAT TO EXPECT**  
Strategic stalemate characterized by a chain of ISIS-controlled cities surrounded by contested desert and river-valley lines of communication. [MORE >](#)

**BEYOND AIRSTRIKES**  
The United States needs to combine emergency efforts to defeat ISIS with long-term security cooperation with Iraqis that will "outperform" Iranian efforts and influence as a military partner. [MORE >](#)

#### AND BEYOND

**HEM IN ISIS**  
Sealing Syria's borders Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq will enable better management of ISIS in both Iraq and Syria. [MORE >](#)

**NEW FRONTS?**  
ISIS's "wilayat" (provinces) expansion model poses new challenges that differ from al-Qaeda's affiliate approach. [MORE >](#)

#### SYRIA

**WHAT TO EXPECT**  
ISIS shift toward Aleppo and southern Syria resulting in more "Kobanes"—isolated pockets of resistance facing heavy attacks—and more moderate rebel groups joining ISIS's side. [MORE >](#)

**BEYOND AIRSTRIKES**  
Clarity about the nature and purpose of America's train-and-equip program for Syrian rebels would improve the prospects for the effort's success. [MORE >](#)

Coordinated Israeli, Jordanian, and allied assistance in the south could boost the moderate Syrian rebels there, stave off an extremist takeover, and facilitate the ongoing international campaign against ISIS. [MORE >](#)

MICHAEL EISENSTADT

“ This argues for an ‘anaconda strategy’ that slowly, methodically squeezes ISIS from all directions, in both Iraq and Syria, and along multiple lines of operation. [MORE >](#) ”

## #2 Impeding the flow of foreign fighters

### MORE FOREIGN FIGHTERS THAN AFGHANISTAN

#### TACTICS

Measures taken to prevent foreign fighters by countries around the world include:

- Seizing passports and controlling borders
- U.S. effort to create a single database of attempted and active foreign fighters

**20,000+** foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, surpassing the Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s  
Peter R. Neumann, ICSR, Jan. 2015

**1 in 9** fighters in conflicts from 1990–2010 returned home to perpetrate attacks  
Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go?", American Political Science Review, Feb. 2013

- Targeting recruitment networks, Salafist groups, websites, and online material
- Early-report hotlines and community programs [MORE](#) ▶

### CHALLENGES

- Faster, more condensed radicalization process
- Cooperation between ISIS and al-Qaeda adherents and their radicalization and facilitation networks in Europe [MORE](#) ▶
- Need for a broader strategic approach to countering violent extremism to address the root problem [MORE](#) ▶

## #3 Stopping financing and funding

**TACKLING A MODEL LESS SUSCEPTIBLE TO EXISTING TOOLS**

### OIL

Target refineries, including mobile refineries, and smuggling routes through airstrikes as well as financial and intelligence measures. [MORE](#) ▶

### FOREIGN DONORS

- Continue to isolate ISIS from the international financial system. [MORE](#) ▶
- Help countries like Qatar and Kuwait build their capacity to target terrorist financing and enforce newly enacted laws and regulations. [MORE](#) ▶

**\$3 MILLION**

ISIS daily income (Sept. 2014)  
Ken Dilanian, Associated Press

### CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

- Pressure partners to end ransom payments.
- Prioritize military effort to push ISIS back from areas it controls in order to deny it extortion and criminal profits.
- Work toward Iraqi political reform and law enforcement ability to investigate and prosecute criminal activity.

**Congressional Testimony on Terrorist Financing and the Islamist State** [MORE](#) ▶

## #4 Addressing humanitarian crises in the region

**IF IT ENDED TOMORROW:**

**3.7 MILLION** Syrian crisis refugees

**7.6 MILLION** Displaced in Syria

**0.7 MILLION** Iraqi crisis refugees

**2.1 MILLION** Displaced in Iraq

Refugees, UNHCR; Displacement, USAID  
 Reported as of Dec. 2014 or Jan. 2015

- Humanitarian safe havens can protect vulnerable civilians only if backed up with sufficient power (and other lessons from the Bosnian experience). [MORE](#) ▶
- Syria's canonization by ISIS, moderate rebel groups, and the regime poses logistical and legal problems with providing aid inside the country. [MORE](#) ▶
- Jordan's economic woes and burgeoning refugee crisis make it increasingly fertile ground for local recruitment. [MORE](#) ▶
- Is Lebanon the next front line? ISIS actions, the refugee influx, political paralysis, and increasing civil strife keep the country on the knife's edge. [MORE](#) ▶

ANDREW J. TABLER

**"The longer [Assad] is in place, the longer Syria will be divided. Once Assad goes, it will be possible to put the pieces of Syria back together again. [MORE](#) ▶"**

## #5 Exposing its true nature

**SEEKING A STRATEGY TO COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE)**

Moderates can inoculate the Islamic middle against ISIS, and this is happening for the first time. Their messages need to be amplified. [MORE](#) ▶

CVE efforts require both community engagement and a response to the ideological underpinnings of radicalization, but currently the U.S. government has both a structural and programming deficit. [MORE](#) ▶

As new programs emerge, it is time to reassess our domestic CVE model, which is largely based on 1990s strategies to target gang violence, neo-Nazi groups, and other forms of organized crime. [MORE](#) ▶

**126** Muslim scholars signed an open letter refuting ISIS's religious arguments

**30-40** "Engagements" against terrorist propaganda conducted daily by the State Dept.'s Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications.

ALBERTO M. FERNANDEZ, CSCC

**"The work of counterterrorism communications is not a sprint but a marathon, a daily grind of numerous skirmishes, of opportunities to influence audiences seized and**

CVE efforts need to address personal, local grievances and foreign policy issues, such as the U.S. approach to the crises in Syria and Iraq, which has cemented the perception that America is not committed to protecting Sunni Muslims. [MORE ▶](#)

influence audiences seized and lost, of trying to find the right mix of words and images at the right moment. This is an alchemy that is more art than science. [MORE ▶](#)

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May 4, 2024

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May 4, 2024

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Michael Knights,  
Amir al-Kaabi,  
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