

“We must try never to forget the arguments of the adversary, or the uncertainty of the future, or the faults of one’s own side, or the underlying fraternity of ordinary men everywhere.”

– Raymond Aron

Response to a Request for Recommendations to the UN Security Council Committee on Counter Terrorism

(November – December, 2015)

Scott Atran

Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict
Harris Manchester College and Centre for International Studies
University of Oxford (satran@hmc.ox.ac.uk)

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique,
Institut Jean Nicod — Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York

ARTIS INTERNATIONAL

A. What ISIS Wants

The following are axioms drawn from *The Management of Chaos-Savagery* ([Idarat at-Tawahoush](#)), required reading for every ISIS political, religious and military leader, or *amir*, and from the February 2015 editorial in *Dabiq* (online ISIS publication), on “[The Extinction of the Gray Zone](#).” ISIS’s actions have been, and likely will continue to be, consistent with these axioms:

- Work to expose the weakness of the so-called Great Powers by pushing them to abandon the media psychological war and war by proxy until they fight directly.
- Draw these powers into military conflict. Seek the confrontations that will bring them to fight in our regions on our terms.
- Diversify the strikes and attack soft targets – tourist areas, eating places, places of entertainment, sports events, and so forth -- that cannot possibly be defended everywhere. Disperse the infidels’ resources and drain them to the greatest extent possible, and so undermine people’s faith in the ability of their governments to provide security, most basic of all state functions.
- Target the young, and especially the disaffected, who tend to rebel against authority, are eager for self-sacrifice and are filled with idealism; and let inert organizations and their leaders foolishly preach moderation.
- Motivate the masses to fly to regions that we manage, by eliminating the “Gray Zone” between the true believer and the infidel, which most people, including most Muslims, currently inhabit. Use so-called “terror attacks” to help Muslims realize that non-Muslims hate Islam and want to harm all who practice it, to show that peacefulness gains Muslims nothing but pain.
- Use social media to inspire sympathizers abroad to violence. Communicate the message: Do what you can, with whatever you have, wherever you are, whenever possible.
- Pay attention to what works to hold the interest of people, especially youth, in the lands of the Infidel [e.g., television ratings, box office receipts, music and video charts], and use what works as templates to carry our righteous messages and calls to action under the black banner.

B. How Research Could Help Counter ISIS 's Attraction and Success

- Understand and use the ISIS playbook against ISIS (as it now uses our own media against us). Know the messages that resonate and why. Include: cognitive and social scientists, historians, geo-political experts, spiritual leaders, scholars, security and intelligence professionals, content and marketing experts, bloggers, media and gaming creators and story tellers. We already know the people ISIS targets. We need to research and test messages of hope for those who are disillusioned and disaffected — those seeking meaning, glory, esteem, adventure, respect, remembrance, camaraderie, justice, rebellion, self-sacrifice and structure around personal chaos.
- Fortunately, there is no shortage of credible voices ready to engage globally. There are thousands of individuals and organizations around the globe that know the social platforms and have the alternative narratives to the claims of victimhood and triumphal war that ISIS puts out. At the community level and from popular culture, these include athletes, musicians, graffiti artists, hip-hop activists, actors, comedians, imams, business icons and others. But systematic study is needed to show which narratives work, for whom, and in what contexts.
- Use research to find the counter-narratives that work and curate an independent influencer network of credible global voices, local content creators, bloggers, etc., who grasp the generational, cultural, theological and geographical nuances of their communities.
- Build a network of social media “early responders” to monitor, obfuscate, overwhelm, disrupt and block the distribution of ISIS content. Study what methods worked in the past.
- ISIS implements marketing and data services to map and profile “susceptible” audiences. Integrating data on consumption (what people watch and click), natural language (what they say) and relationships (whom they connect with) culled from social media, search, web programmatic, dark social and web. We should do the much same with these same “at- risk” audiences.
- Governments are useful, even essential, in seeding these efforts, financially and with organizational support. But societies have always needed commitment and leadership from their citizens and the private sector. Across the world, people want to help. Research into how to crowd-source funding and volunteers could show them how.
- Involve media in recognizing the need for responsible restraint. Media exposure, which is the oxygen of terror in our age, not only greatly amplifies the perception of danger, but in generating fear, makes the threat to our own societies greater. Because our own media are mainly designed to titillate rather than as a public service to inform, it is has become child's play for ISIS to turn our own propaganda machine, and the world's mightiest media, into theirs – a novel, highly potent jujitsu style of asymmetric warfare that could be countered with responsible restraint. Research could help indicate when and where restrain has most effect and least limits free expression and provision of information to the public.
- Inquire into the successes and failures of past revolutionary, insurgent and terrorist movements. For example, there are striking historical parallels with the rise of ISIS. The French Revolution suffered through internal factionalism and fighting, “the Terror” was introduced as a political tactic, the realms of the revolution were invaded by a fractious coalition of outside powers, yet the revolution survived, transformed, and emerged as the Empire.

- The failure and aftermath of the 1848 revolutions that swept Europe is somewhat suggestive of what happened with the Arab Spring, when participatory democracy had not yet sufficiently developed the underlying values and institutions—free press, independent judiciary, tolerance of minorities, etc.—needed to make popular choice and elections more than a tyranny of the majority.
- The rise of al-Qaeda in the late 20th century is reminiscent of the rise of anarchism in the late 19th century. The present dwindling of AQ relative to Daesh is similar to the co-opting and near annihilation of the anarchists by the Bolsheviks, who knew much better how to manage a shared political ambition through military and territorial administration. And there are lessons to be learned from the experience of the Nazis as well: The National Socialist movement had genuine appeal as it asked for self-sacrifice in a glorious mission of radical, world historical change that rejects all prior international norms governing the relations between peoples and nations.
- Study how reaction to terrorism is affecting the resilience and ability to respond in our own societies. Many governments are sacrificing liberties for security, which plays into ISIS's hands. Research could help indicate which security measures are most effective in thwarting terrorism with minimum effect on human rights.
- More generally, study and understand the noxious effects of reaction to terrorism on our own societies. For example, the US Justice Department and Congress now consider the common kitchen pressure cooker to be a “weapon of mass destruction” if used for terrorism however defined. This novel legal concept of “weapon of mass destruction” places a cooking pot on par with a thermonuclear bomb that has many billions of times greater destructive power, which preliminary research suggests is trivializing true weapons of mass destruction in the public mind, and making their acceptance more palatable and their use more conceivable.
- Study the general psychology of choice in the flight versus the fight response to violence.
 - Review what's known about fight versus flight from human and animal studies. For example, when do people stay home after a rise in neighborhood crime, versus when do they organize to secure the neighborhood?
 - Review surveys of opinion (especially panel studies) on people's response to terrorism. For example, after the Paris attacks which kinds of people support military action, and which support isolationism? What beliefs under lay this choice? For example, does belief in the efficacy of force mediate the choice? Or is it mainly cue taking from respected opinion leaders? Surveys in other enduring conflict zones can be most helpful since there are many events. Our most recent survey, taken in the days after the Paris attacks, indicates that heightened perceive threat heightens willingness to fight for “democratic values.” But can such willingness be sustained? For how long? Under what conditions?
 - Design new survey instruments to understand the determinants of the flight versus the fight response to terrorism. For example, study what evokes a desire for vengeance versus a desire to keep one's head down. (There has been a lot of inconclusive speculation on this in the interpretation of the surprising Spanish election outcome after the Madrid bombing - but surveys should be better able to study it.)
- Research will to resist and fight, and make other costly sacrifices, whether for or against ISIS. In remarks last year, President Obama [endorsed](#) the [judgment](#) of his U.S. National Intelligence Director: “We underestimated the Viet Cong... we underestimated ISIL [the Islamic State] and overestimated the fighting capability of the Iraqi army.... It boils down to predicting the will to fight, which is an imponderable.” But research suggests that predicting who is willing to fight and who isn't, and why, is quite ponderable and

amenable to scientific study. Thus, from our recent interviews and psychological experiments on the frontlines with Kurdish fighters of the Peshmerga and PKK, with captured ISIS fighters, and with Nusra fighters from Syria we have a good initial indication of willingness to fight. Two principal factors interact to predict readiness to make costly sacrifices (go to prison, lose one's life, have one's family suffer, etc.). The first factor is perception of relative commitment of one's own group versus those of the enemy to a cause that defends and promotes sacred values, as when land or law become hallowed or holy. This can be [measured](#) through behavioral experiments and tracked via neural imaging to show:

- Disregard for material incentives or disincentives; attempts to buy people off ("carrots") from their cause or punish them for embracing it through sanctions ("sticks") don't work, and even tend to backfire (e.g., as would happen for most people if asked to sell off their children or sell out their religion).
- Blindness to exit strategies: people cannot even conceive of the possibility of abandoning their sacred values or relaxing commitment, to the cause that defends them, no matter how reasonable or alluring the alternatives (i.e., they reject the "Devil's bargain").
- Immunity to social pressure: sacred values are not consensual norms; it matters not how many people oppose your sacred values, or how close to you they are in other matters, their opposition counts for naught (because "what's right is right").
- Insensitivity to discounting: in most everyday affairs, as in politics and economics generally, distant events and objects have less significance for people than things in the here and now ("a bird in hand is worth more than than two in the bush"); but in matters associated with sacred values, regardless of how far removed in time or space, are more important and motivating than mundane concerns however immediate.

The second factor in predicting willingness to fight is degree of identity fusion with one's comrades, Consider, by way of illustration, a pair of circles where one circle represents "me" and a larger circle represent "the group" (tagged with a flag or some other identifying icon). In one set of experiments, we ask people to consider five possible pairings: in the first pairing, the "me" circle and "the group" circle don't touch; in the second pairing, the circles touch; in the third they slightly overlap; in the fourth they half overlap; and in the fifth pairing, the "me" circle is entirely contained within "the group" circle. People who choose the last pairing think and behave in ways entirely different from those who choose any of the other pairings. They experience what social psychologists call "identity fusion," wedding their personal identity of "who I am" to a unique collective identity of "who we are." Such [total fusion](#) demonstrably leads to a sense of group invincibility and a willingness of each and every individual in the group to sacrifice for each and every other. Thus, only among the Kurds do [we find](#) commitment to the sacred cause of "Kurdeity" (their own term) and fusion with fellow Kurdish fighters comparable to perceived commitment to cause and comrade among ISIS fighters.

- Study how willingness to fight and make costly sacrifices is related to perceptions of physical formidability on the battlefield and with perceptions of spiritual strength, but for one's own group as well as allied an enemy groups. For example, we find that Nusra fighters consider Iran to be the most formidable foe in Syria, both in terms of physical and spiritual strength, but they consider the Islamic State "growing" to parity on both scores. These Al Qaeda combatants consider the USA to be of middling formidability, and the Syrian and Iraqi army to be relatively weak physically and spiritually worthless, and thus an inconsequential enemy in the long run. Understanding such perceptions could inform military and political strategy in important ways.

- To be sure, not all who fight with the Islamic state are committed zealots, and many people under ISIS control would prefer other forms of rule. Thus, we need to understand wedge issues between the regional host populations and ISIS, and also between diaspora populations in Europe and elsewhere who do not directly support ISIS or violence but through which ISIS volunteers may move freely because the surrounding populations themselves (especially immigrant populations) do not trust government actions to be just, fair or reasonable. Not all of these wedge issues can be used as levers to separate these populations from ISIS and its volunteer networks. Accordingly, social network analyses can be used to identify direct versus indirect support networks, and experimentally designed questionnaires may be used to elicit and prioritize the issues that can be used as wedges to help pry support away from ISIS.
- Study ways to help residents of ISIS controlled areas dodge their taxes. More generally study how to disrupt their finances.
- Study ways to discredit ISIS leadership: for example, by uncovering their hidden personal wealth, immoral behavior, or murders of their internal rivals.
- It is important to look at research across various extremist networks in order to find general factors about ideologies, group dynamics, financial structures, and so forth. But in addition to distinct projects on financing, or social networks, or development of ideas, or attacks as such, a holistic approach that simultaneously traces all of these aspects over time in key sets of related cases could be even more informative for security agencies and policymakers. It could also yield scientifically interesting and novel results.
 - For example, we know almost nothing of how such natural networks form in the abstract (there are many a priori models, few if any of which predict natural network developments over time). Graphic analyses embedded in dynamic (animated visual) timelines of developing networks could present complex datasets in readily understandable form.

Thus, one such study might involve: dissecting the financial, logistical and social networks of the Paris attacks and their relationship with other attacks. This would involve research into supporting networks in particular neighborhoods in Western Europe; their facilitating networks through the refugee pipelines in Turkey, Greece, the Balkans and Central Europe; and root networks in North Africa and the Sahel. Because law enforcement, especially in the European Union, has no legal mandate to have sustained interactions with persons having no criminal ties or record, and because social support networks consist largely of such people, researchers may be in a better position to gain a broader picture of the social, economic and ideational forces at work.

- Researchers can also focus on key issues that law enforcement generally ignores. For example, researchers might use an epidemiological approach to track how different individuals in a network express key ideas and act on them, and how the various ideational currents help to form social and action networks and vice versa.

This type of project is very labor intensive, even for a single set of cases (prior to the modeling, research would involve interviews with friends, family, neighbors, fellow travelers, as well as police and prisoners in the field and in various milieux). Here, the best confirming evidence is court records which, because of cross-examination, comes the closest to peer review in the real world. But court records and pretrial testimony are voluminous, often hard to obtain official access to, and their careful study requires a great deal of patient labor.

- Consider artificial intelligence analysis of texts (such as court documents) to lessen the great labor now required.
- *The UN Security Council Committee on Countering Terrorism might consider asking member governments to provide assistance to bona fide researchers in accessing field sites, prisons, and court records under appropriate arrangements for the protection of human subjects in ways compatible with national and international law.*
- *Involve significant university, NGO and government research initiatives in the UN's Global Research Network, and help coordinate their efforts by circulating research designs and results. Allow and endorse free and open criticism, however harsh (but respectful), so that truths may prevail no matter how unpleasant.*
- Continually monitor and measure the progress in research. Succeed. Fail. Learn. Innovate. Sustain the response — no matter its origin or sponsors.

C. Basic Research Facts Concerning Foreign Volunteers for ISIS

- More than 3 of every 4 foreign volunteers to Al Qaeda and ISIS join through [peer-to-peer relationships](#).
- In some countries (e.g., [France](#)), about 1 in 4 who join are converts.
- The overwhelming majority has no formal religious education or training but are “born again” into radical Islam in late adolescence or early adulthood. Few are recruited in mosques.
- Most who join are youth in transitional stages in their lives – immigrants, students, between jobs and before finding their mates, having left their homes and looking for new families of friends and fellow travelers to find purpose and significance.
- Unlike America, Europe was not built to absorb immigrants. In the USA, Muslim immigrants attain parity or surpass the average American in wealth and education in the first generation. In Europe, they are much more likely to be [poorer](#) than the average citizen, and poorer [still](#) after the second generation. In France, 7 to 8 percent of the total population is Muslim, the largest Muslim population as percentage of the total population in Europe; however, up to [70 percent](#) of the prison population is Muslim, contributing significantly to an underclass ripe for radicalization. As one 24-year-old who joined Jabhat an-Nusra, Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, described his experience:

“They teach us to work hard to buy a nice car and nice clothes but that isn't happiness. I was a third-class human because I wasn't integrated into a corrupted system. But I didn't want to be a street gangster. So, I and my friends decided to go around and invite people to join Islam. The other Muslim groups in the city just talk. They think a true Muslim state will just rain down from heaven on them without fighting.”

- But other volunteers for the Islamic State are far from marginal in their home countries. As one family practitioner wrote us earlier this year:

“During the past few months, 2 groups of medical students from the University [of Medical Sciences and Technology in Khartoum, Sudan] have fled to the Levant in order to join ISIS. The families of those students have had difficulties coping with their loss. It was almost grievousness of death. The students who left from our university... are well funded by their parents (Higher middle class with multi-background). I find difficulty identifying the factors that led those smart, straight A

students, to [ISIS]. Could it be lack of identity? could it be the universities fault? could it be... the family's lack of influence?"

A banker from Mosul recounted:

"Daesh fighters came into the bank and our staff was terrified. They offered to help in any way. An Algerian, about 25, polite, asked only to be led to our computers. In a short time he downloaded all of our bank's transactions. He said that he came to the Islamic State to put his education in computer engineering to good use."

- The Caliphate is an attractor to all of these young people, providing purpose and *freedom from* what they have come to see as the vice of a material world based on a specious *freedom to* make only false and meaningless choices. Some speaking for Western governments at the East Asia summit in Singapore last April argued that the Caliphate is mythology, covering traditional power politics. But research in Europe and North Africa, involving structured interviews and behavioral experiments with participants randomly selected from neighborhoods previously associated with jihadi support or violence (e.g., Paris suburbs of Clichy-sous Bois and Epinay-sur-Seine; the Moroccan neighborhoods of Tetuan's Jemaa Mezuak and Casablanca's Sidi Moumen) indicate that this is a dangerous misconception. The Caliphate has re-emerged as a mobilizing cause in the minds of many. Ignorance of such developments even threatens to alienate Muslims who favor interfaith cooperation. As one Imam in Barcelona who helps run an interfaith dialogue initiative with Christians and Jews told us:

"I am against the violence of Al Qaeda and ISIS, but they have put our predicament in Europe and elsewhere on the map. Before, we were just ignored. And the Caliphate.... We dream of it like the Jews long dreamed of Zion. Maybe it can be a federation, like the European Union, of Muslim peoples. The Caliphate is here, in our hearts, even if we don't know what real form it will finally take."

- Like all global marketers trying to influence millennials, ISIS uses the most popular social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, as well as peer-to-peer and gaming platforms. Their strategy is targeted and scripted. They use sophisticated marketing technology to sift hundreds of millions of social media messages in **search** of a few thousand users who are likely to support their causes. (Many of the conversations are encrypted to avoid law enforcement's detection. ISIS even offers an online encryption "help desk."). Some **estimates** have ISIS managing upwards of 70,000 accounts, sending approximately 90,000 texts daily. A recent study found that ISIS **issued** more than 1,146 official communiqués in a single month. These messages come from a determined army of online digital operatives that have won over tens of thousands of recruits worldwide.
- The "counter narrative" strategies developed in think tanks and used by governments are largely ineffective. They try to dissuade youth with mass negative messaging. "So DAESH wants to build a future, well is beheading a future you want, or someone controlling details of your diet and dress?" As I noted at the UN meeting last April: Can anyone not know that already? Does it really matter to those drawn to the cause despite, or even because of, such things?"

In contrast, the Islamic State may **spend** hundreds of hours enlisting single individuals and their friends, empathizing instead of lecturing, turning personal frustrations and grievances into moral outrage. ISIS understands that young people empathize with each other; they generally don't lecture. From Syria, a young woman messages another:

"I know how hard it is to leave behind the mother and father you love, and not tell them until you are here, that you will always love them but that you were put on

this earth to do more than be with or honor your parents. I know this will probably be the hardest thing you may ever have to do, but let me help you explain it to yourself and to them.”

- We already know the people ISIS targets. We also know that in social media, the messenger matters. Government voices lack for authenticity, agility and are suspect due to their policies and practices. As one Imam who was a former recruiter for ISIS explained:

“The young who came to us were not to be lectured at like witless children; they are for the most part understanding and compassionate, but misguided. We have to give them a better message, but a positive one to compete. One in our religious frame. Otherwise, they will be lost to Daesh.”

In brief, seek to understand the passions that motivate the move to what has become the world’s most dynamic countercultural movement, with the largest extraterritorial volunteer fighting force since WWII. For if we ignore these passions, we risk fanning them, to our likely detriment and that of others across the world.

D. Key Gaps in Understanding ISIS’s Success and What to Do About It

- *For those who voluntarily join from abroad, ISIS is a joyful movement bonded in blood.*

Despite a relentless propaganda campaign against the Islamic State as vicious, predatory and cruel – most of which may be right – there is little recognition of its genuine appeal, and even less of the joy it engenders. This joy is evident among those mainly young people who volunteer to fight for it unto death. It is a joy that comes from joining with comrades in a glorious cause, as well as a joy that comes from satiation of anger and the gratification of revenge (whose sweetness, as neuroimaging studies suggest, can be [experienced by brain and body](#) much like other forms of happiness).

As the work of our research team suggests—in interviews and experimental studies with youth in Paris, London, and Barcelona, as well as with captured ISIS fighters in Iraq and Jabhat an-Nusra (al-Qaeda) fighters from Syria—simply dismissing the group as “nihilistic” amounts to a dangerous avoidance of trying to comprehend, and deal with, the Islamic State’s profoundly alluring mission to change and save the world. There is absolutely no evidence for, and massive evidence against, the role of “brainwashing” (a leftover canard about allied soldiers during the Korean War being broken like Pavlov’s dogs by Red China’s psychological manipulation wizards). Appeals to brainwashing are invoked by those who wish to remain ignorant of the sincere motives of those who join such radical movements, or of those who wish deny that apparently normal members of society generally seek out these movements out on their own (parents surprised that their children have joined are those most ready to invoke “brainwashing”).

For those who adhere to the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, extreme forms of mass blood shedding are generally considered pathological or evil expressions of human nature gone awry, or collateral damage as the unintended consequence of righteous intentions. But across most human history and cultures violence against other groups is universally claimed by the perpetrators to be a sublime matter of moral virtue. For without a claim to virtue it is difficult, if not inconceivable, to kill large numbers of people innocent of direct harm to others. And brutal terror scares the hell out of enemies and fence sitters.

- *An Enormous Cost-Benefit Advantage Comes with Sincere Commitment to Beliefs.*

The 9/11 attacks cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000, whereas the response by the US alone is on the order of *10 million times* that figure, including related security arrangements and military actions that make up the vast bulk of that spending. On a strictly cost-benefit basis, the violent movement of which Al Qaeda and now ISIS are the spearheads has been wildly successful, and increasingly so. Herein lies the full measure of asymmetric warfare. After all, who could claim that the international community is better off than before or that the overall danger is declining?

This alone should inspire a radical change in own counter strategies, instead of complacency punctuated by fitful reactions to particular attacks and possible plots. Yet, in keeping with the proverbial notion of insanity as repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results, counter strategies and tactics continue to focus almost exclusively on security and military responses, most of which repeatedly fail.

Because many foreign volunteers are marginal in their host countries, a pervasive belief in governments and NGOs is that offering would-be enlistees jobs or education or spouses could be the best way to reduce violence and counter the Caliphate's pull. But a still unpublished report by the World Bank shows no reliable relationship between job production and violence reduction. If people are ready to sacrifice their lives, then it is not likely that offers of greater material advantages will stop them. Although such incentives may provide viable alternative life pathways at initial stages of radicalization, research shows that fully radicalized individuals who are fused with their group and its values are not particularly susceptible to such material incentives or disincentives (punishments, sanctions), which often backfire by increasing support for violence.

Research also shows that most who originally joined Al Qaeda were [married](#), and prior marriage does not seem to be a deterrent to those now volunteering for ISIS. Among the senior ranks of such groups, there are many who have had access to considerable education—especially in scientific fields such as [engineering](#) and [medicine](#) that require great discipline and a willingness to delay gratification. Indeed, ever since the anarchist movement beginning in the late 19th century, this sort of specialized preparation holds for much of the leadership of insurgent and revolutionary groups. Just since World War II, revolutionary movements have [on average](#) emerged victorious with as little as ten times less firepower and manpower than the state forces against them. Behavioral research in conflict zones indicate that [sacred values](#) (e.g., national liberation, God and Caliphate) mobilized for collective action by devoted actors empowers outsize commitment in initially low-power groups (e.g., Viet Cong, Islamic State). They are able to resist and often prevail against materially more powerful foes who depend on standard incentives, as do those police and armies that rely primarily on pay, promotion or punishment to motivate.

- *There is a Crash of Traditional Cultures, Not a Clash of Civilizations.*

The popular notion of a “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West is woefully misleading, although an idea purposely promoted both by Al Qaeda and ISIS and many who oppose them. Violent extremism represents not the resurgence of traditional cultures, but their collapse, as young people unmoored from millennial traditions flail about in search of a social identity that gives personal significance and glory. This is the dark side of globalization. Individuals radicalize to find a firm identity in a flattened world. In this new reality, vertical lines of communication between the generations are replaced by horizontal peer-to-peer attachments that can cut across the globe.

Without serious intellectual investment, wider appeal, and quality individual time, little progress can be made against ISIS and its ilk beyond force of arms although that may well be what many will opt for, with all of the unforeseen and unintended consequences, agony and suffering that are likely to result from open-ended war. Even if ISIS is destroyed, its message could still captivate many in the coming generations unless our

governments, businesses, information and entertainment media, faith-based groups, and civic organizations work with others to actively engage and mobilize youth, earnestly consider their perceived grievances, listen and learn from their aspirations and dreams, and provide concrete pathways rather than mere promises for the realization of their hopes and a fair chance for a better world.

Even if good ideas find ways to emerge from youth and obtain institutional support for their development to application, they still need intellectual help to persuade the public to adopt them. But where are the intellectuals to do this? Among Muslim leadership I've interviewed around the world, I listen to power point presentations intoning about "dimensions of ideology, grievance, and group dynamics," notions that originate exclusively with Western "terrorism experts" and think tanks. When I ask "what ideas come from your own people?" I'm told in moments of candor, as I was most recently by a Muslim leadership council in Singapore, and in similar terms by groups from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Mali: "we don't have many new ideas and we can't agree on those we have."

And where among America's or Europe's current or coming generation are the intellectuals who might influence the moral principles, motivations and actions of society towards a just and reasonable way through the morass? In academia, you'll find very many who criticize power – a necessary but far from sufficient condition for change – but very few willing to engage with power. They thus render themselves irrelevant and morally irresponsible by leaving the field of power entirely to those they censure. As a result, politicians pay them little heed and the public could care less.

- *Grass Roots Approaches are Not Sufficient.*

Local initiatives can exhibit repeated local success in pulling people away from political and religious violence. ([UNOY Peacebuilders](#) has had remarkable results in this regard: for example in convincing young Taliban in Pakistan that enemies can be friends, and then encouraging those so convinced to convince others in a snow-balling program that now extends to more than a thousand young people). But this will not challenge the broad attraction of the Islamic State for young people from nearly 90 nations and every walk of life. What is needed is a platform where the lessons of local successes can be shared with governments, and ideas allowed to bubble up from youth (before they boil over) to those in governments that can help refine and realize them. To date, no such platform exists.

Young people with good ideas have no really good institutional channels to develop them: their often naive demands such as "governments must do this or that" – so apparent at the recent UN-sponsored Global Youth Forum In Amman – are dismissed out of hand by people in government who have to deal with real world constraints on power and its exercise and youth are left in the lurch with their ideas unrealized and unrealizable for want of practical guidance and refinement (as Alan Brooke, Britain's WWII military Chief of Staff mused about Churchill: "Winston had 10 ideas every day, only one of which was good, and he did not know which it was"; but it was the job of Brooke and his staff to figure out which one and try to see what could be done).

Currently there is no global, institutional platform to coordinate among grass roots movements: to find out which ideas may work across different countries and cultures, which may work only in a particular context or environment, and which may be prone to fail or to be counter productive in the long run.

The United Nations should, and is possibly the only globe-spanning organization that could, provide such a platform.