

A Three Front War

Heaven is the battleground (why Algeria is important)

by Mr. John W. Kiser

The observations of then-LtCol Stanton Coerr, USMC, eight years ago were certainly prescient. Updating his list of scattered entities, we can now add self-radicalizing individuals—the disturbed, lone vigilante who sacrifices himself for the caliphate, assuring himself a spot in paradise. Coerr does not reveal the idea because there is no *one* idea, rather a confusing and continuously changing blend. The most animating is ultimately a spiritual one, misguided and distorted by anger, hatred, and alienation. The goal: to bring about the sovereignty of God to a materialistic, vulgar, hyper-individualistic westernizing world. The critique echoes the preachers on Christian radio stations bemoaning the slow death of Christianity in a culture obsessed with sex, money, and six-pack abs. It was implicit in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s (hero of the anti-communists) upsetting condemnation of our narcissistic, consumer-bloated culture in his 1978 Harvard commencement address.

>Mr. Kiser is author of *Commander of the Faithful: Life and Times of Emir Abdelkader* and *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith Love and Terror in Algeria*. He is the sponsor of the MCG’s annual *Kiser Family Irregular Warfare Essay Contest*.



Cultural awareness and training will be required, not only for U.S. forces, but also for the average American. (Photo by LCpl Devan Gowans.)

While American forces focus on winning battles, our opponents will be focused on winning wars through the marriage of instability and initiative and projecting the smallest force at the quickest speed at the farthest place ... such a place will not be a battlefield of our choosing. The weapon will not be a club, but a stiletto. The mission is instilling fear ... The enemy will have no center of gravity and will not draw strength from a source of military power. Radical Islam is not a Communist line in the sand but scattered entities: boys, gangs, militias, soldiers, clerics floating around an idea.¹

Following the ISIS attacks in Paris, echoing LtCol Coerr, Pope Francis noted that WWII has already begun, “even though piecemeal.”² The struggle with “heretical” Islam (I prefer this to “radical” Islam) is showing the potential to become what extremists in both camps want—a global civilizational war. A fight to the death. It sounds crazy? Victory through a thousand bites. Chinese literature speaks of the lion versus the flies. Mao Tse Tung started as a fly. Yes, the muscle-bound American lion is bigger, stronger, and has technology, but the flies, more like wasps, are dispersed, agile, creative, hard to identify, and fighting for a place in paradise. Their power is the power of faith, however misguided. It is an enemy the secular-minded world

is unprepared to fight. And the wasps can win if, out of frustration, the lion lets non-life-threatening stings produce overreactions that generate still more angry wasps. There is a pool of 1.5 billion to draw from.

The enemy battle plan is simple and openly stated. The red meat eating American cowboys finally go berserk over increasing number of painful and humiliating attacks either by self-starter lone wolves or by organized sleeper cells. As a result, civil liberties are curtailed, and a terrorist-hunting McCarthyism sets in. American Muslims become targets of hatred, they are kicked out of government jobs, and calls are made to put them into detention camps. We destroy our own open culture and become a police state out of security paranoia, frustration, impatience, and ignorance of what we are fighting and how to counter it. A quasi war footing puts the United States still deeper into debt; the military industrial complex is delighted to peddle ever more expensive and ineffective technology to quell the never ending clouds of wasps. Decapitation of militant Islamist leaders provides

a short-lived sense of accomplishment but only produces new and more dangerous replacements. This futile strategy the military aptly calls “mowing grass” ... which is no strategy. Caliphates can be declared anywhere—it is a state of mind in a global war of small bites.

suming a succession of unwise foreign policy decisions and domestic hysteria fanned by our brilliant leaders, a combination of Viet Nam redux plus a Red Scare mentality.

The United States is facing a war on three interconnected fronts. Success

The United States is facing a war on three interconnected fronts. Success will occur only through building deep intelligence cooperation and partnering with Muslims and other nations, notably Russia.

Here at home, disenchanted and culturally alienated Americans, especially young American Muslims, tire of being harassed, demonized, and told they don't belong here. They find common ground with young, angry black Americans and morph into an enemy within while interbreeding with Iranian-backed Latin drug cartels³ to finance internal urban warfare. This scenario may be 3 to 10 years out, as-

will occur only through building deep intelligence cooperation and partnering with Muslims and other nations, notably Russia. America is being used by the militants to stoke the fire in what is a religious-political war within the Muslim world, one in which Muslims suffer far more than Americans, Europeans, or Christians. Such a struggle can only be won through patient, long-term, low-profile support of Muslim allies. It is their fight, first and foremost, for it is their religion that is being deformed, abused, and despised.

Do the United States and its secular allies know how to fight a global, irregular war without borders in which the enemy has no center of gravity? His aim is to create chaos, confusion, and fear leading to the breakdown of civil society. The soon-to-disintegrate caliphate will inevitably morph into minicaliphates scattered around the world, again offering no center of gravity, while al-Qaeda quietly pursues a long-term strategy of burrowing into the social fabric of vulnerable countries.

Does the knee-jerk political requirement for retribution serve as a useful policy guide in fighting an enemy that is neither understood nor visible until too late—an enemy that wins the minds of disconnected, discontented, and unfulfilled youth that includes atheists, agnostics, and middle class Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists? This extraordinary spectrum of recruits was revealed by research conducted in France in 2014 for Center for



We will need to reduce the presence of U.S. forces and rely on host-nation governments and forces. (Photo by Sgt Justin Updegraff.)

the Prevention of Islamic Sectarianism that profiled radicalized French youth.⁴ Has ISIS recognized the spiritual sickness within Western culture that Solzhenitsyn recognized 40 years ago while offering a higher purpose than being a good, debt-ridden consumer as President George W. Bush exhorted Americans in the wake of 9/11?

Front One: Islamophobia in the United States of America and Europe

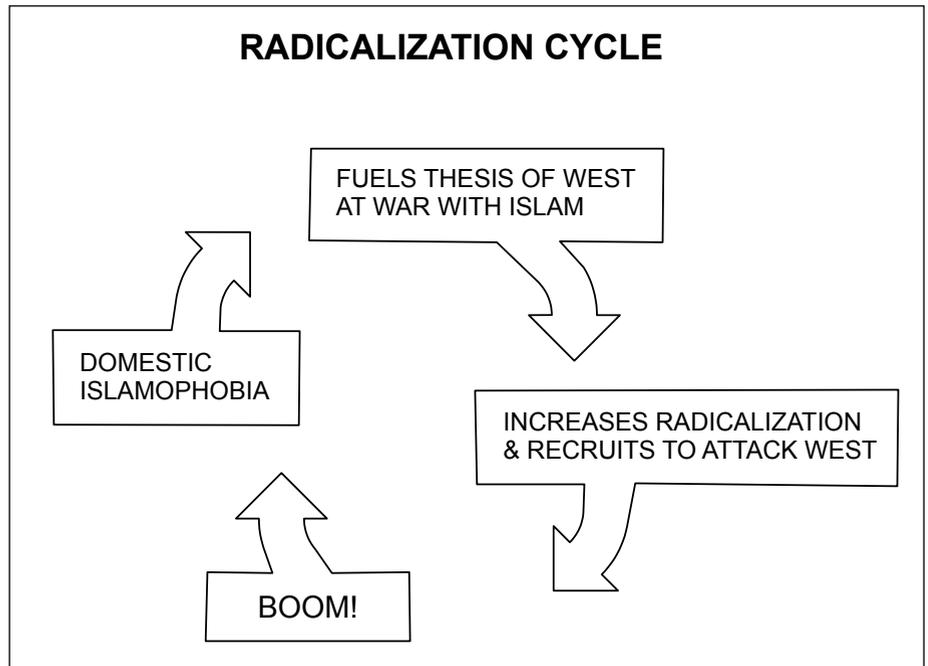
The strategy of ideologically-dedicated Islamophobes is to demonize the religion of Islam in its entirety and reduce it to a cult of violence. Their allies are the mosque and Koran burners, the angry and confused who shoot Sikhs, confuse catholic nuns with Muslims, and set women's hijabs on fire. The hard core Islam haters want Americans to believe that Islam is one thing—the new communism out to take over the world. For militant Islamists (or salafi jihadis), this is the end game. The question is: Do U.S. military and other security related actions help make this alienated, apocalyptic strand of the Muslim world population get bigger or smaller? Islam demonizers in the West serve only to recruit more martyrs, becoming a mirror of their counterparts in Muslim countries. Are we going to repeat the German-American experience of WWI or the Japanese experience of WWII?

This front must focus long term on cultural literacy education for the moveable middle of concerned but reasonable Americans who care about civil rights, religious freedom, and plain decency toward their fellow citizens. Americans who know Islam only through the media are most influenced by the steady drip of bloodshed in the name of Islam. The Western press, obsessed with violence of all kinds, has become the unwitting tool of the terrorists by feeding ignorant non-Muslims a one-sided diet.

Front Two: Protecting the Home Front

Retired Marine BGen Douglas Stone states the case simply:

In today's political climate, I strongly believe Islamophobia jeopardizes the security of our country. My tenure overseeing the Iraqi detention program taught me



The radicalization cycle of heretical Islamic extremists. (Figure by author.)

the valuable lessons that an ignorance of Islam and Muslims can impair our ability to achieve peace and stability.⁵

Anti-Muslim prejudices cannot be allowed to interfere with local law enforcement agencies developing strong, trusting relations with their respective Muslim communities. In the past, FBI statistics show that the most important source of leads for either preventing

Success in preventing attacks at home is directly related to Islamophobia.

plots, or finding the perpetrators, have come from local Muslims and through intelligence coordination.

Every successful attack strengthens the hands of those who want the civilizational war that former Commandant James Conway warned against in 2008: "Western nations must ensure that this Long War does not evolve into a cultural war between Christians and Muslims. Extremists would like nothing better."⁶ Yet, we are hastening in that direction.

Front Three: The Extra-Territorial Front

A heavy-handed, highly-visible U.S. and European presence in Muslim countries invites more retaliation at home. Radical Islamists use age-old reasoning: the friend of my enemy is also my enemy. When the United States supports Muslim governments that are themselves the reason for the radicalization, those governments become our Uncle Toms and our liabilities.

The war within Islam affects Muslims in ways much worse than anything America has experienced. We enter ignorantly into complex realities that are constantly fractionating and morphing into something else which the natives themselves are hard-pressed to understand. Gen Anthony C. Zinni said years ago that operating in the Muslim world is like Americans trying to discuss snow with the Eskimos.⁷ Without being culturally literate, we don't have a vocabulary to even talk about the Islamic world. Making decisions based on preconceived ideas and bumper stickers labeling democrat versus dictator, theocrat versus secular, and moderate versus extremist alongside outdated Cold War political alliances will likely cast us with the losing side of a struggle that has to be won by Muslims themselves. Nor



Successful operations against jihadists will require intelligence sharing between the U.S. and partner nations. (Photo by Sgt Jessica Braden.)

should we have preconceived ideas as to what is the right outcome in this world that is not ours; indeed many are fighting precisely because they don't want their world to be like ours.

In the generations-long struggle that is ahead, the most important weapons must be provided by Muslims themselves. Too many Muslims are ignorant of their own faith, misled by ignorant preachers, and confuse cultural traditions (such as clitoral circumcision) with Koranic teaching—a book many have never read. Needed are new educational tools, knowledge, and role models that can influence the young. While researching *The Monks of Tibhirine, Faith Love and Terror in Algeria*, I learned that British intelligence sources routinely monitored arguments between Koran-educated Algerian military officers and ignorant moudjahideen over interpretations of scripture during the brutal Islamist insurgency of the 1990s. Knowledge of the Koran and the Sunna are the most powerful of all the weapons in this war that deploys competing versions of the faith and their scholars of the law.

The Algeria Experience

Algeria in the 1990s offers a microcosm of what is happening in the world today. At that time, many observers in

France feared that its former colony might become an Islamist State. Like the Arab Springs of yesteryear, there were many legitimate grievances fueling the Algerian insurgency that started simmering in the 1980s and exploded in the 90s. Yet the Algerian government prevailed over the GIA (Group Islamique Armé) whose reign of terror committed all the crimes of ISIS today. Why were the Islamo-fascists defeated,

Algeria in the 1990s offers a microcosm of what is happening in the world today.

as they were called by Oran's Bishop Pierre Claverie, who was assassinated for his outspokenness?

I suggest five reasons that are relevant today as the United States and other countries face this contagion now taking hold in Africa and around the world:

No foreign boots. The so-called "apostate" military rulers were not contaminated by any visible presence of France or the U.S. government that could have fanned the call for jihad. The minimal role of Western helping hands was not in the open.

Revulsion of the citizenry. The original urban base of support for the terrorists disappeared over time. Hospitality and protection of foreign guests and minorities, especially priests and monks, are obligations of the faith. Ultimately, ordinary Algerians rejected the murderous violence exercised in the name of their faith. For many, the killing of the French Trappist monks in 1996 was the last straw, dividing even the terrorists. During the "Black Years," over 50 imams were assassinated for denouncing the terrorists.

Demoralization and killing terrorists. Algerian counterterrorism elements and infiltration of GIA emirates caused divisions and doubts about the righteousness of their cause. Theological knowledge became the ultimate weapon. Would heaven or hell be the ultimate destination of the terrorists? This matters for the committed jihadist warrior.

Authoritative knowledge. The role of knowledge and interpretation of the Koran and Hadiths became the ultimate battleground. Prominent religious authorities in the Middle East finally spoke out after seeing Islam being befouled by the massacres. Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti Abdul Aziz bin Baz openly condemned in 1999 (via cell phone conversations with insurgents) the GIA's vigilante jihad (jihad

must be declared by the ulema) and issued fatwas that reached the maqis. Conservative salafi Sheik Nacer-Eddine Albani's deathbed fatwa condemning GIA behavior as un-Islamic was particularly demoralizing. He was considered by Islamists to be a conservative interpreter of the law, but he believed that the only jihad worthy of the name is the jihad for knowledge.⁸

Reintegration. The Algerian government took a generally-forgiving attitude toward terrorists who laid down their arms voluntarily, calling them "lost sheep" (*les égarées*), making it easier

to reintegrate them into society. This may be one reason why Algeria has the lowest number of recruits of all the Arab nations joining ISIS, a mere 200 compared to 6,000 from neighboring Tunisia.⁹

The piecemeal war in which the United States and European nations are embroiled is a politico-religious war for the soul of Islam. However, more important in determining the outcome of this struggle will be wise leadership in the West and close cooperation with Muslim and non-Muslim allies. Without restraint and finesse in dealing with this multifaceted, constantly morphing virus, the Long War has all the potential for becoming a Chinese finger trap.

To Col Coerr, I give the last word:

America reacted to 9/11 exactly as Bin Laden knew and hoped we would—with a huge, public, angry, unilateral lashing out at Muslim lands ... in doing so we allowed him to become the voice

of the Muslim world in the face of First World mechanized overkill ... It is as if Bin Laden had read Boyd: *Enmesh your enemy in world of uncertainty, doubt, confusion, disorder, fear, panic and chaos.* [Emphasis by author.]¹⁰

We have barely begun to know our enemy.

Notes

1. LtCol Stanton Coerr, "Fifth Generation Warfare," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Online: 2009), available at <https://www.mca-marines.org>.
2. Pope Francis made this widely-quoted statement following the terrorist attack in Paris on November 2015 at a commemoration ceremony of WWII Italian war dead.
3. For more information on Iran's influence on Latin American drug operations, see LtCol Adolfo U. Gorbea, UAS, "By Way of Proxy," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Online: March 2017), available at <https://mca-marines.org>.

4. Dounia Bouzar, Christophe Caupenne, Sulayvam Valsan, *Recherche-Action sur la Mutation du Processus d'Endoctrinement et Embrigadement dans l'Islam Radicale*, (Paris: The Institute of Sectarian Studies, 2014).

5. Douglas Johnston, *Religion Terror, and Error: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Challenge of Spiritual Engagement*, (Westport, CT: Praeger 2011).

6. LtCol Glen Butler, "Know the Enemy?," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Online; August 2008), available at <https://www.mca-marines.org>.

7. Gen Anthony C. Zinni, (talk, Committee to Save the Republic, Washington, DC, 2008).

8. *Religion, Terror, and Error*.

9. Jenny Gustafsson, "Has Algeria taken an anti-IS vaccine?," (Online: 28 September 2016), available at <http://www.irinnews.org>.

10. "Fifth Generation War."



**1/2 horizontal
ad space size**