

# The New War, the Forever War, and a World Beyond War

A statement on the current and enduring crisis, by the coordinating committee of WorldBeyondWar.org  
October 3, 2014

## SUMMARY

The following is an assessment of the current ISIS crisis. The statement examines: (1) the social context of the destructive violence in Syria and Iraq -- **where we are**; (2) viable nonviolent alternatives -- **what should be done**; and (3) opportunities for civil society to advocate and push for those alternatives -- **how we can make it happen**. The alternatives and pathways toward achieving those are not only preferable from a perspective of humanity, but proven to be more effective.

Graphic beheadings and other quite real stories of horrors committed by a new enemy -- ISIS -- have led to increased support for U.S. involvement. But a war on ISIS will make things worse for all concerned, following, as it does, a pattern of counterproductive action. Through the course of the so-called global war on terrorism, terrorism has been on the rise.

Nonviolent alternatives to war are abundant, morally superior, and strategically more effective. Some but not all are: apologies for past actions; arms embargoes; a Marshall Plan of restitution for the Middle East; meaningful diplomacy; appropriate conflict resolution responses to terrorism; addressing the immediate crisis with humanitarian intervention; redirecting our energies at home; supporting peace journalism; working through the United Nations; and de-authorizing the war on terror.

No solution by itself will bring peace to the region. Many solutions together can create a strong web of peacebuilding fabric superior to continued war. We cannot expect to make all of the above happen immediately. But by working toward those ends we can achieve the best results as quickly and as lastingly as possible.

We need teach-ins, communications, and education of all sorts. People should know enough facts to give their positions context. We need demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, town forums, disruptions, and media productions. And if we make this a part of ending the whole institution of war, rather than just a particular war, we may move closer to not having to keep opposing new wars all the time.

## WHERE WE ARE

Public opinion on wars in the United States follows a tragic [pattern](#), soaring -- sometimes to over a majority -- in support of a war when it's new, and then predictably sinking. During most of the 2003-2011 U.S. war on Iraq, a majority in the U.S. said the war should never have been begun. In 2013, [public opinion](#) and pressure played a prominent role in preventing the launching of a new U.S. war on Syria. In February 2014, the U.S. Senate rejected legislation that would have moved the United States closer to war with Iran. On July 25, 2014, with the U.S. public [against](#) a new U.S. war in Iraq, the House of Representatives [passed](#) a resolution that would have required the President to obtain authorization before launching a war (just as the Constitution already requires) had the Senate passed the resolution too. At that distant date of a few months back, it was still possible to talk about an "antiwar mood," to applaud the Catholic peace group Pax Christi for its historic decision to [reject](#) "just war" theory, to celebrate the state of Connecticut's creation of a commission to transition to peaceful industries, to point to public [support](#) for taxing the rich and cutting the military as the top two solutions whenever the U.S. government and media discussed a debt crisis, and to envision a less-militarized future approaching.

But support for U.S. drone strikes remained relatively high, opposition to Israel's war on Gaza with U.S. weapons remained weak (and in Congress and the White House virtually nonexistent), the CIA was [arming](#) Syrian rebels against the overwhelming preference of the U.S. public, and the proposed missile strikes into Syria had not been replaced with any significant effort to create an arms embargo, negotiate a ceasefire, provide major humanitarian aid, or otherwise reject a war-focused foreign policy and economic agenda that had merely been put on hold. Moreover, public opposition to war was weak and ill-informed. Most Americans lacked even a roughly accurate idea of the [destruction](#) their government had caused in Iraq, could not name the nations their government was striking with drones, didn't study the evidence that their government had lied about chemical weapons [attacks](#) in Syria and [threats](#) to civilians in Libya, didn't pay much attention to the human rights abuses or support for terrorism by U.S.-backed kings and dictators, and had been long trained to believe that violence arises out of the irrationality of foreigners and can be cured with greater violence.



Support for a new war was driven by graphic beheadings and other quite real stories of horrors committed by a new enemy: ISIS.<sup>1</sup> This support is as likely to be short-lived as support for other wars has been, barring some dramatic new motivation. And this support has been exaggerated. Pollsters ask whether something should be done and then simply [assume](#) that the something is violence. Or they ask whether *this* type of violence should be employed or *that* type of violence, never offering any nonviolent

alternatives. So, [other questions](#) could produce other answers right now; time is likely to change the answers for the better; and education would accelerate that changing.

Opposition to the horrors of ISIS makes perfect sense, but opposition to ISIS as a motivation for war lacks context in every way. U.S. allies in that region, including the Iraqi government and the so-called Syrian rebels, behead people, as do U.S. missiles. And ISIS isn't such a new enemy after all, including as it does Iraqis thrown out of work by the U.S. disbanding of the Iraqi military, and Iraqis brutalized for years in U.S. prison camps. The United States and its junior partners destroyed Iraq, leaving behind [sectarian division](#), poverty, desperation, and an illegitimate government in Baghdad that did not represent Sunnis or other groups. Then the U.S. [armed](#) and trained ISIS and allied groups in Syria, while continuing to prop up the Baghdad government, providing Hellfire missiles with which to attack Iraqis in Fallujah and elsewhere. Even opponents of the Saddam Hussein government (which was also put into power by the United States) say there could have been no ISIS had the United States not attacked and destroyed Iraq.

Additional context is provided by the manner in which the U.S. occupation of Iraq temporarily ended in 2011. President Obama withdrew U.S. troops from Iraq when he couldn't get the Iraqi government to give them immunity for any crimes they might commit. He has now obtained that immunity and sent troops back in.

ISIS has religious adherents but also opportunistic supporters who see it as the force resisting an unwanted rule from Baghdad and who increasingly see it as resisting the United States. That's how ISIS wants to be seen. U.S. wars have made the United States so hated in that part of the world, that ISIS openly encouraged U.S. attacks in an hour-long film, provoked them with the beheading videos, and has seen [huge recruitment gains](#) since the U.S. began attacking it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The atrocities committed by ISIS are rightfully condemned. [The threat ISIS poses is considered exaggerated.](#)

<sup>2</sup> According to the [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#)

ISIS is in possession of [U.S. weaponry](#) provided directly to it in Syria and seized from, and even [provided by](#) the Iraqi government. At last count by the U.S. government, 79% of weapons transferred to Middle Eastern governments come from the United States, not counting transfers to groups like ISIS, and not counting weapons in the possession of the United States.

So, the first thing to do differently going forward: stop bombing nations into ruins, and stop shipping weapons into the area you've left in chaos. Libya is of course another example of the disasters that U.S. wars leave behind them -- a war in which U.S. weapons were used on both sides, and a war launched on the pretext of a claim well documented to have been false that Gaddafi was threatening to massacre civilians.

So, here's the next thing to do: be very skeptical of humanitarian claims. The U.S. bombing around Erbil to protect Kurdish and U.S. oil interests was initially justified as bombing to protect people on a mountain. But most of those people on the mountain were in no need of rescue, and that justification has now been set aside, just as Benghazi was.



A war on ISIS isn't a bad idea because the suffering of ISIS's victims is not our problem. Of course it's our problem. We are human beings who care about each other. A war on ISIS is a bad idea because it is not only [counterproductive](#), but will make things worse. Through the course of the so-called global war on terrorism, [terrorism has been on the rise](#).<sup>3</sup> This was predictable and predicted. The wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, and the abuses of prisoners during them, became major recruiting tools for anti-U.S. terrorism. In 2006, U.S. intelligence agencies produced a National Intelligence Estimate that reached just that

conclusion. Drone strikes have increased terrorism and anti-Americanism in places like Yemen. The new U.S. attacks on ISIS have already killed many civilians. "For every innocent person you kill, you create 10 new enemies," according to General Stanley McChrystal. The White House has [announced](#) that strict standards for avoiding large numbers of civilian deaths do not apply to its latest war.

ISIS is fighting against the government of Syria, the same government that President Obama wanted to bomb last year. The United States is arming close allies of ISIS in Syria, while bombing ISIS and other groups (and civilians) in Syria. But the U.S. State Department has not changed its position on the Syrian government. It is entirely possible that the United States will attack both sides of the Syrian war. Even the fact of already attacking the opposite side from a year ago, and the same side you're arming ought to be enough to make anyone ask whether the point is largely to bomb somebody for the sake of bombing somebody. Bombing people is one of the best known methods by which the U.S. government convinces the U.S. media that it is "doing something."

It is tearing down the rule of law, among other things. Without Congressional authorization, President Obama is violating the U.S. Constitution, and his earlier professed belief. "The President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation," said Senator Barack Obama quite accurately.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the [Global Terrorism Index](#) by the [Institute for Economics and Peace](#), the number of terrorist incidents has increased virtually every year since 9/11.

With a Congressional authorization, this war would still violate the U.N. Charter and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which are the supreme law of the land under Article VI of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>4</sup> The British Parliament voted to approve assistance in attacking Iraq, but not Syria -- the latter being too clearly illegal for their taste.

The White House has refused to estimate [the duration or the cost](#) of this war. There is every reason to assume that conditions on the ground will worsen. So only public pressure, not some sort of victory, will end the war. In fact, military victories are almost unheard of in this era. The RAND corporation studied [how terrorist groups come to an end](#), and found that 83% are ended through politics or policing, only 7% through war. This may be why President Obama keeps saying, quite accurately, "There is no military solution," while pursuing a military solution.

So what should be done and how can we make it happen?

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

Adopt a new approach toward the world: Apologize for brutalizing the leader of ISIS in a [prison camp](#) and to every other prisoner victimized under U.S. occupation. Apologize for destroying the nation of Iraq and to every family there. Apologize for arming the region and its kings and dictators, for past support for the Syrian government, and for the U.S. role in the Syrian war.<sup>5</sup> Cease to support abusive governments in Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, etc.

Pursue an arms embargo<sup>6</sup>: Announce a commitment not to provide weapons to Iraq or Syria or Israel or Jordan or Egypt or Bahrain or any other nation or ISIS or any other group, and to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from foreign territories and seas, including Afghanistan. (The U.S. Coast Guard in the Persian Gulf has clearly forgotten where the coast of the U.S. is!) Cut off the 79% of weapons that flow to the Middle East from the United States. Urge Russia, China, European nations, and others to cease shipping any weapons to the Middle East. Open negotiations for a nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons free region, to include the elimination of those weapons by Israel.

Create a Marshall Plan of restitution to the entire Middle East. Deliver aid (not "military aid" but actual aid, food, medicine) to the entire nations of Iraq and Syria and their neighbors. This can generate sympathy in the population supportive of terrorists. This can be done on a massive scale for less cost than continuing to shoot \$2 million missiles at the problem. Announce a commitment to invest heavily in solar, wind, and other green energy and to provide the same to democratic representative governments. Begin providing Iran with free wind and solar technologies -- at much lower cost, of course, than what it is costing the U.S. and Israel to threaten Iran over a [nonexistent](#) nuclear weapons program. End economic sanctions.



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<sup>4</sup> The Kellogg-Briand Pact is a 1928 international agreement in which signatory states promised not to use war to resolve "disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or of whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them." For an in-depth exploration see David Swanson's [When the World Outlawed War](#) (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Political apologies are considered part of a complex peacebuilding process in conjunction with other conflict transformation techniques. [See a summary of Apologia Politica: States and their apologies by proxy.](#)

<sup>6</sup> UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, for example, [urged the Security Council to impose an arms embargo into Syria.](#)



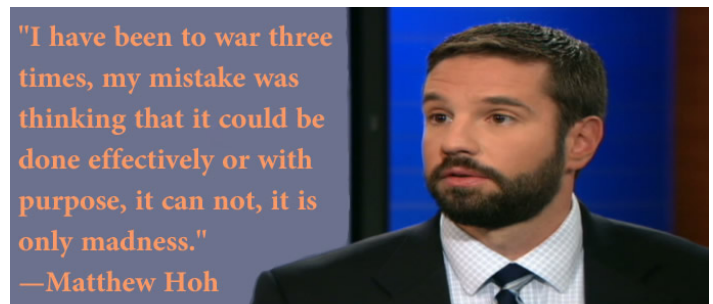
Give real diplomacy a chance: Send diplomats to Baghdad and Damascus to negotiate aid and to encourage serious reforms. Open negotiations that include Iran and Russia. Use the mechanisms provided by the United Nations constructively. The political problems in the region require political solutions. Employ peaceful means to pursue representative governments respectful of human rights, regardless of the consequences for U.S. oil corporations or any other influential profiteers. Propose the creation of truth and reconciliation commissions. Allow for citizen diplomacy efforts.

Apply an appropriate conflict resolution response to terrorism by creating a [multi-layered policy framework](#). (1) Prevention by reducing proneness to terrorism; (2) persuasion by reducing motivation and recruitment; (3) denial by reducing vulnerability and defeating hardliners; (4) coordination by maximizing international efforts.<sup>7</sup>

Dissolve terrorism at its roots. [It is proven](#) that civilian-based nonviolent forces can produce decisive change in societies, consequently reducing the demand for terrorism as a form of struggle, even driving a wedge between militants and their sympathizers.<sup>8</sup> We need [engagement](#) through strategic contact, consultation and dialog rather than military force. Sustainable peacebuilding processes require the engagement of multiple stakeholders from multiple sectors of societies affected by violent conflict. Strengthening the civil society in the conflict zone will diminish the support base for terrorist groups.<sup>9</sup> Responding with more violence is the victory which extremists seek. Deliberative dialogue inclusive of all views assists in understanding the sources of violence; addressing them through nonviolent strategies and creating conditions for sustainable peace will drive a wedge between militants and their sympathizers.<sup>10</sup>

Address the immediate crisis with a firm but caring humanitarian intervention: Send journalists, aid workers, [international nonviolent peaceworkers](#), human shields, and negotiators into crisis zones, understanding that this means risking lives, but fewer lives than further militarization risks.<sup>11</sup> Empower people with agricultural assistance, education, cameras, and internet access.

Redirect our energies at home: Launch a communications campaign in the United States to replace military recruitment campaigns, focused on building sympathy and desire to serve as critical aid workers, persuading doctors and engineers to volunteer their time to travel to and visit these areas of crisis. At the same time, make economic transition from war to peace industries in the United States a collective public project of top priority.



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Support [peace journalism](#): "Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices -- about what to report, and how to report it -- that create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict."

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<sup>7</sup> The framework is explained in detail by conflict transformation scholars Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall in [Contemporary Conflict Resolution](#) (2011)

<sup>8</sup> Outlined thoroughly by Hardy Merriman and Jack DuVall, experts from the [International Center on Nonviolent Conflict](#).

<sup>9</sup> See for example: [Syrian Civil Defense](#)

<sup>10</sup> As discussed by peace and conflict studies experts John Paul Lederach in [Addressing terrorism: a theory of change approach](#) (2011) and David Cortright in [Gandhi and Beyond. Nonviolence for a new political age](#) (2009)

<sup>11</sup> The [Nonviolent Peaceforce](#) has a proven [successful track record](#) of unarmed civilian peacekeeping to prevent, reduce and stop violence

Stop going rogue: Work through the United Nations on all of the above. Adhere to international law, more specifically the UN Charter and Kellogg-Briand Pact. Sign the United States on to the International Criminal Court and voluntarily propose the prosecution of top U.S. officials of this and the preceding regimes for their crimes.

De-authorize the war on terror ([Authorization For Use of Military Force](#)) as a "forever war authorization" -- The AUMF can be challenged by taking partial but important steps. Those include reining in the drone warfare program and increasing government accountability. These steps have broad support among human rights and legal rights groups.

## HOW WE CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

We cannot expect to make all of the above happen immediately. But we can move in that direction as quickly as possible. The government will come further toward meeting us the more persuasive and powerful our demand. So, determining Congress members' current position and asking them for just that or a little better is unlikely to produce better results and could produce worse ones -- both in the short and long term. A compromise is usually made between two sides of a debate, so it matters where the side of peace is established. And if we demand a limited war, we eliminate the opportunity to inform anyone about the advantages of avoiding war altogether. Thus, people will lack that information when the *next* war is proposed. We also cannot expect to organize large numbers of people to demonstrate, protest, or lobby for "a war of no more than 12 months." It lacks the poetry and the morality of "No War."

Once a war is well underway and a debate is framed around how many more months it should go on, and the reality on the ground is predictably worsening, and "support the troops" propaganda is insisting that the war go on for the supposed benefit of the troops killing, dying, and committing suicide in it, the problem of how to end it is likely to loom much larger than if the popular position of "No War, Nonviolence Instead" has been well-articulated and defended.

A demand is going to be heard for "no ground troops." This should not be the focus of a peace movement. For one thing there already are some 1,600 U.S. ground troops in Iraq. They're labeled "advisors" as are the 26 Canadians who just joined them. But nobody actually believes 1,626 people are giving advice. Another 2,300 troops will be deployed as a Middle East Marine Corps task force. By demanding "No Ground Troops" while accepting the pretense that they aren't there now, we can actually give our stamp of approval to any ground troop labeled something else. In addition, a war dominated by air strikes is likely to kill more people, not fewer people, than a ground war. This is an opportunity to inform our neighbors who may be unaware that these wars are one-sided slaughters killing mostly people who live where they're fought, and killing [mostly civilians](#). Once we've acknowledged that reality, how can we continue with cries of "No ground troops" rather than "No war"?

We need teach-ins, communications, and education of all sorts. People should know that beheading victim James Foley was opposed to war. People should know that ISIS gives George W. Bush credit in their film for being right about the need for war and pushes for greater warmaking against them by the United States. People should understand that ISIS promotes martyrdom as the highest goal, and that bombing ISIS strengthens it.

We need demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, town forums, disruptions, and media productions.



Our message to people is: get active and engaged in what we're doing; you'll be surprised how this can be turned around. And if we make this a part of ending the whole institution of war, rather than just a particular war, we may move closer to not having to keep opposing new wars all the time.

Our message to Congress members is: publicly pressure Speaker Boehner and Senator Reid to get back to work and vote to halt this war, or do not expect our votes to keep you in office for another term.

Our message to the President is: now would be a good time to end the mind-set that gets us into wars, as you said you wanted to do. Is this really what you want to be remembered for?

Our message to the United Nations is: the U.S. government is in blatant violation of the U.N. Charter. You must hold the United States accountable.

Our message to all parties is: war has no justification and no benefit, now or ever. It is [immoral](#), makes us [less safe](#), threatens our [environment](#), erodes [liberties](#), [impoverishes](#) us, and takes [\\$2 trillion](#) a year away from where it could do a world of good.

World Beyond War has a bureau of speakers who can address these topics. Find them here: <http://worldbeyondwar.org/speakers>