



Crafty Bastards® Update

February 27, 2015

Crafty Bastards® Updates, a product of Kiernan Group Holdings (KGH), provide clients a periodic snapshot of emerging analytic lines during the Crafty Bastards® program. Analytic content will be folded into the final reports for each workshop.

An Inconvenient Truth: Ending Poverty a Misguided Solution to Curtailing Terrorism

Constructing a counter-narrative to the fragmented ideology used by Islamists would be more successful in reaching the roots of terrorism than would addressing poverty and lack of education. Violent Islamist extremists take fragments of the Quran and rework them to fit their violent narrative and recruit others to their cause. The narrative can be flipped using the intimate knowledge of Arab-Americans and foreign governments to craft a non-violent interpretation of the Quran, provide motivation for non-violent endeavors, and use partnerships with foreign governments to get the message out.

- Religious ideology specifically is the cause of Islamist terrorism, not poverty or unemployment. This is an Islamic project; it is not a jobs project.¹
- The nuances in the Islamists' message is lost in translation that can be avoided if a force of Arab-American Islamic historical scholars are put into place to correct the errors and to craft a counter-message, according to a military and intelligence official with a deep background in Middle East affairs and Islam².
- Flooding the Arab and European media space with a cacophony of alternative, non-violent narratives may undermine ISIS's ideology and beat them at their own game, according to the same military and intelligence official³.
- The realities of a beheading could be enforced - the sights, smells, regrets - rather than the glorified video game version, to deter young people from joining the jihadists and facing a different reality once they are there.

¹ Bergen, Peter. "Nonsense about terrorism's 'root causes,'" <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/opinion/bergen-terrorism-root-causes/index.html>.

² Interview with USN official, 24 February 2015.

³ Interview with USN official, 24 February 2015.



- Partnering with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Egypt, and members of the EU to get the message out could lessen the US “fingerprint,” possibly improving the appeal of the message.

Many analysts and government officials believe that one can get to the “root” of terrorism by providing opportunities to the young, poor, and uneducated. An alternative school of thought is that the majority, especially the leaders, planners, and vast number of terrorist members are the opposite - well educated, semi-affluent, and not educated in the madrassas, therefore indicating that addressing poverty is not the answer.

- Demographic analysis shows that the high percentage of young, unemployed, unmarried, uneducated men will continue to increase, contributing to the rise of violent non-state actors and reinforcing the US goal of addressing the underlying conditions that help foster violent extremism - poverty, inequality, and repression⁴.
- Numerous studies over the past 50 years have disproven this assumption. Only a small percentage of terrorists would be affected by improvements in economic or employment conditions. It is an easier fix and easier to blame and easier to see, but will not help in diminishing terrorism if the “true roots” are not fully examined and destroyed.
- Some of the followers are uneducated, poor, and mentally disabled, but they represent the few not the many.⁵ For example, the “underwear bomber” Umar Abdulmuttalab, who tried to set off a bomb on a U.S. passenger jet flying over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, is the son of one of the richest men in Africa and attended University College London. Anwar al-Awlaki, the late leader of al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula, was studying for his PhD at The George Washington University before he took up arms. His father was a cabinet minister in Yemen.⁶
- Another study by a terrorism expert examined 102 Islamist radicals involved in global jihad and found no correlation between poverty and terrorism; only about one quarter of the jihadis reviewed were from impoverished backgrounds. “[M]embers of the global Salafi jihad were generally middle-class, educated young men from caring and religious families, who grew up with strong positive values of religion, spirituality and concern for their communities.”⁷

⁴ National Security Strategy, February 2015, p. 9.

⁵ Bergen, Peter. “Nonsense about terrorism’s ‘root causes,’ ” <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/opinion/bergen-terrorism-root-causes/index.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/viewSubCategory.asp?id=550>.



Fully examining and countering Islamist Ideology is much more difficult than the quick fixes of military or poverty “strikes.” The Red Workshop and future Net Assessments can shine a light on the difficult realities. The true danger is the ideology that provides the logic of extremism, violence, and acts of inhumanity, according to Congressional testimony by a terrorism expert at the RAND Corporation.⁸

- US counterterrorism strategy will require a multi-pronged approach, and it won't be a quick win.
- An overwhelming message and commitment to force are essential to reclaiming territory, refuting ideology, and creating economic development.

⁸ Brennan, Jr, Rick. The RAND Corporation: “The Growing Strategic Threat of Radical Islamist Ideology,” Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives.