

The background of the entire page is a photograph of four men in silhouette, standing on a hill against a bright red, sunset-like sky. Each man is holding a rifle or assault weapon high in the air with both hands, in a gesture of triumph or defiance. The silhouettes are dark against the vibrant red background, which has some wispy clouds. The overall mood is one of conflict and ideological struggle.

THE ANNUAL JOHN BONYTHON LECTURE

**WHAT ARE WE
FIGHTING FOR?
ISLAMISM AND
THE THREAT TO
LIBERAL IDEAS**

Counter-insurgency expert and author
Dr David Kilcullen

THE CENTRE FOR
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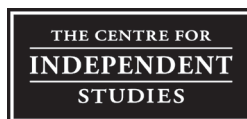
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INTRODUCTION

Greg Lindsay

Executive Director and Founder of
The Centre for Independent Studies

It gives me considerable pleasure to say a few words of introduction to this year's John Bonython Lecturer, Dr David Kilcullen. A quick flick through the various biographical notes about him attest to a man who already has more items on his list of achievements than most people could ever gain in a lifetime, or even two.

Educated at St Pius X College at Chatswood, he then headed for Canberra and the Australian Defence Force Academy, a campus of the University of New South Wales, where he achieved a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Military Art and Science and was awarded the Chief of Defence Force Army Prize. He completed his army officer training at the Royal Military College Duntroon and continued his studies attaining a PhD focused on guerrilla movements and conflict in Indonesia, while picking up an applied linguistics diploma along the way.

As an army officer he saw service in peace-keeping and counter-insurgency operations in Timor, Bougainville and the Middle East. He attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was based for a while at Defence headquarters in Canberra.

A little over a decade ago while based in Canberra, we at CIS were privileged to have David briefly attached to us as a Visiting Fellow and it has been an enriching experience for us as he was able to participate in the occasional event then and over the years since.

Following a brief stint as a Senior Analyst at the Office of National Assessments where he helped write the government's 2004 Terrorism White Paper, he was seconded to the United States Department of Defense in 2004, where he wrote the counter-terrorism strategy for the Quadrennial Defense Review that appeared in 2006.

While remaining an officer in the Australian Army Reserve he worked for the United States Department of State in 2005 and 2006, serving as the Chief Strategist in the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. He worked in the field in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Horn of Africa and Southeast Asia. He helped design and implement the Regional Strategic Initiative. He was now becoming acknowledged as one of the world's foremost thinkers on counterinsurgency and military strategy.

In 2007 he joined the staff of General David Petraeus and served as the Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor until 2008 and was responsible for planning and executing counterinsurgency strategy and operations. He was a principal architect of the Joint Campaign Plan which guided the Iraq War 2007 Troop Surge.

He also served as the Special Advisor for Counterinsurgency to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2007 and 2008. And there is much more. As I said, a very long list of achievements.

In his spare time, he also became a best-selling author with three major books, *The Accidental Guerilla* in 2009, *Counterinsurgency* in 2010 and *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla* last year, plus a very long list of shorter papers, reports and journal articles. He's a scholar of considerable significance.

He then moved into the think tank, academic and private sectors and founded Caerus Associates in 2010. Caerus is a Washington-based strategic and design consultancy firm that specialises in working in complex conflict and disaster-affected environments, and undertakes work in some amazing places. Earlier this year he stepped back from day-to-day operations and is its non-executive Chairman. But that does not mean he is any less busy. We were delighted that he accepted my invitation for him to deliver this year's

lecture and just a cursory look at the media over the last few months, as affairs in the Middle East have taken regrettable turns, show that he is one of the key figures able to explain the situation and what needs to be done.

The week of the 2014 John Bonython Lecture saw a couple of anniversaries that will resonate with the theme of the lecture. These included Remembrance Day, the day that marks what was hoped to be the end of the war to end all wars. And we also marked the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Communism in Europe. But as subsequent events have shown, the optimism about that event as one signalling the end of history has been misplaced. We are still in the middle of an ideological battle, though now of a different kind of ism.

Finally, 2015 is the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta. As a foundational document for much of the freedom we enjoy, I hope it will remind us of the need always to strengthen the message and the institutions that have built this free and prosperous nation.

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR? ISLAMISM AND THE THREAT TO LIBERAL VALUES

David Kilcullen

Addresses the 2014 John Bonython Lecture

I want first to thank the Centre for Independent Studies for the opportunity to be part of this event, with its rich tradition of provocative debate. I want to thank the team for organising this, and for your wonderful welcome. Most importantly, I want to thank all of *you* for coming out to be part of this discussion.

My topic is ‘What are we fighting for? Islamism and the threat to liberal values’. I’m going to approach it through three questions that are simple to ask, but extraordinarily complex to answer:

- What’s the ideology that drives groups like al Qaeda or the Islamic State?
- Where did ISIS come from?
- What should we be doing about it?

First, though, let me define my terms. By Islamic State, I mean the organisation whose Arabic name is *ad-Dawla al-Islamiyah fi ‘Iraq wal Sham* (now becoming widely referred to in the West as *da’ish*, or *Daesh*), led by Abubakr al Baghdadi, now calling itself *ad-Dawla al-Islamiyah* or *al-Khilafa*, the Caliphate. I’ll use the

acronym ISIS for this group, which fields more than 30,000 fighters. It controls a network of a dozen cities, populations and territory across about a third each of Iraq and Syria, owns economic assets that make it the richest terrorist group on the planet, and is expanding into the wider region, reinvigorating Islamist terrorism worldwide and radicalising fringe members of our own societies, of whom thousands are fighting alongside the group.

When I use the word Islam, I mean the second largest religion in the world, with 1.6 billion followers, founded by the prophet Muhammad. ‘Islamic’ refers to characteristics of that religion, and a ‘Muslim’ is someone who follows it. Islamism, on the other hand, is a political ideology that seeks to propagate a particular form of the religion, shape society around it, and (often) use violence to force it on others.

Two other terms I’ll use are *salafi-jihadist* and *takfir*. A *salafi* is someone who emulates early Muslims, *as-salaf as-salih*, the righteous ancestors, hence ‘salafi’. The *salafi* movement arose in the 19th century as an effort to reassert a strict interpretation of Islam in the face of colonialism, and experienced a revival—which some call *neo-salafism*—in the 1960 after the failure of Arab nationalism and socialism in the post-colonial Middle East. There are millions of Salafis, most of whom don’t personally use violence, but some *do* use violence to spread their beliefs within the framework of a global religious war—a jihad—and we call that subgroup *salafi-jihadist*.

When I talk about liberal values, I’m *not* speaking of what people in the United States call ‘Progressive’ politics, but about something older, more basic, namely the tenets of 19th and 20th century classical liberalism that shaped the societies we live in—individual freedom and accountability, civil liberties, limited government, the rule of law, free-market economics tempered by regulation, equality of opportunity, religious toleration, the removal of violence from politics. We differ about how to apply these ideas—how limited should government be, how much regulation is appropriate, what safety net should the state provide, how should we balance economic opportunity with social justice—but these surface differences obscure a fundamental consensus in our societies around these values.

As I'll point out later, this set of unexamined assumptions about what society is, how it should be organised, and the bounds of acceptable conduct within it—assumptions shared across almost the entire political spectrum in our countries—are utterly foreign to Islamism, even in its non-violent form. It's precisely these values that salafi-jihadists seek to destroy by killing or terrorising all who hold them, and it's these values that we ourselves can place at risk, depending on how we choose to react to the terrorist threat.

What's the ideology that drives groups like al Qaeda and ISIS?

With that as context, what *is* ISIS? Is it just al Qaeda under another name? You could be forgiven for thinking that, if you listen to politicians talk about it. For diplomatic and legal reasons—because the U.S. *Authorization for the Use of Military Force* and UN Security Council Resolutions since 2001 were framed around al Qaeda—political leaders paint ISIS as an al Qaeda ally, but in fact the two are quite different. Let me explain, starting with al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda's ideology has three components, only one of which is religious: the notion of defensive jihad. This idea is that when infidels attack an Islamic state, a defensive war becomes legitimate, and in *defensive* jihad (as distinct from offensive jihad, which can only be ordered by a Caliph, and fought by professional armies in accordance with Islamic norms of war) every Muslim has an individual obligation to participate.

Al Qaeda tacks onto this religious concept a second element—a political interpretation of current events—namely that the encroachment of western culture, values, and foreign policy into the Muslim world (by which Islamists mean *all* Muslim-majority countries, *all* countries with significant Muslim minorities, *all* countries with Islamic governments and *all* territories ever, at any time, controlled by the historical Caliphate) is so hostile to Islam that it represents an attack on an Islamic world community (which they call the *ummah*), that this is tantamount to infidel invasion of an Islamic state, and therefore a worldwide defensive *jihad*—

endless war, everywhere, against all non-Muslims—is in effect, and is obligatory on all Muslims. Osama bin Laden declared the global jihad in two speeches during the 1990s.

Al Qaeda regards *democracy*—which organises society around human rather than divine will, because individuals in democratic societies elect their governments, who set policies in line with public opinion—as idolatry, and holds every citizen of a democracy responsible for that country’s actions, those of its leaders (who every citizen elects) and of its allies. In other words, salafi jihadists hold every person here individually responsible for Australia’s actions and, by extension, those of the United States because we elected these governments. In their view, that justifies violence against people we consider non-combatants or innocents—to them, in a democracy, there *are* no innocents because by voting in elections we are all responsible for our country’s policies.

To state the obvious, this stretches to breaking point the idea of defensive jihad in Islam—it broadens beyond all recognition the meaning of ‘invasion’; it holds every democratic citizen (as well as any Muslim who adopts democratic ideas) responsible for this supposed invasion, and posits the global *ummah* as a **virtual state** (with al Qaeda at its head) in defence of which this jihad takes place.

I sometimes hear people ask: “If this idea’s so foreign to Islam, why don’t Muslims publicly reject it?” Actually, they have. Salafi-jihadist ideology has been repeatedly, publicly condemned by Islamic scholars and Muslim leaders worldwide. In 2005, for example, 200 Islamic scholars from 50 countries issued a religious ruling, the Amman Message, which condemned *takfir* and rejected jihadism. This message was reaffirmed in 2012.

The final element of al Qaeda ideology is military. Remember the first element is that defensive jihad is legitimate (the religious component), and the second is that this *is* a defensive jihad (the political). The final component argues that because the West supports Israel and ‘apostate’ governments in the Muslim world, and because Western militaries are so strong, conventional warfare—formed armies fighting openly, force-on-force, following international laws of war—is hopeless. But it also sees Westerners

as weak, easily exhausted and intimidated, reliant on technology, unwilling to die for their beliefs. Hence terrorism, the killing of civilians, the torture and enslavement of non-combatants, intimidation through violence, become not only acceptable, but the military method of choice. It is a strategic choice to go with this approach.

This concept of a global guerrilla jihad led al Qaeda to a provocation strategy. Via the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda sought to provoke a global religious war, dragging the West into protracted conflicts, exhausting our financial and military resources, sapping our political will, and ultimately forcing us to withdraw from the so-called ‘Muslim world’, leaving the field clear for a salafi jihadist takeover. Bin Laden outlined his strategy in 2004. He said:

“All we have to do is to send two mujahideen to the furthest point East to raise a cloth on which is written al-Qaeda, in order to make the generals race there, to cause America to suffer human, economic and political losses without achieving for it anything of note ... so we are continuing this policy of bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy. Allah willing and nothing is too great for Allah.”

The idea was that intervention would bog us down in occupation warfare, which in turn would create a backlash that would allow al Qaeda to rally local groups (originally motivated by localised grievances) under the single unifying narrative of a global Islamic jihad, and aggregate their efforts into a worldwide uprising that would transform the planet, allowing a Caliphate to rise from the ashes.

Notice that the Caliphate for al Qaeda was a distant future goal, deferred until after military victory—at different times, *salafi*-jihadist leaders spoke of it as being in Egypt, in Mecca, or in Baghdad—and its very vagueness allowed it to serve a unifying function as a kind of millenarian jihadist utopia. Notice also a certain amount of what we might call ‘magical thinking’ here: the idea that however

powerful the enemy, truly Islamic fighters would demonstrate commitment to Allah by their effort, and *Allah* in turn would provide the victory.

Thus while social movement theory, mass psychology and revolutionary warfare theory do indeed have something useful to say here, we can't ignore the fact that Islam—a distorted version of Islam, to be sure, one most Muslims would scarcely recognise, a perversion perhaps, but Islam nonetheless—is fundamental to both the ideology and the strategy of a group like al Qaeda. There are plenty of murderous ideologies worldwide, but they're *not* all the same. They reflect the ground from which they spring, and *this* one springs from Islam. To deny that just makes it harder to think clearly about the problem.

On the other hand, holding some *thing* called 'Islam' responsible for terrorism is as much an over-reach as holding Japanese culture responsible for the atrocities of World War II, or blaming all Communists for Pol Pot. It not only accepts the al Qaeda line that there's just one undifferentiated 'true' Islam, whereas in fact Islam is massively diverse. It also treats non-violent Muslims the same as those who use violence in contravention of the Prophet Muhammad's words that "there is no compulsion in religion" (*al-Baqara*, 256). And of course, it's a logical fallacy to expect a constant cause to explain a variable effect: if Islam alone caused terrorism, we would have seen the same level of terrorism since the tenets of the religion were settled a thousand years ago, but we haven't seen that—so other factors must also be at play.

There's a paradox here: on the one hand, only a tiny percentage of the world's Muslims are involved in terrorist jihad. On the other, that jihad is a real threat, it only *takes* a small number to sustain it, and of course everyone in it is a Muslim. This creates a fundamental tension—most Muslims aren't jihadists, but all jihadists are Muslims—that can separate Muslim minorities from society, create opportunities for authoritarian repression in the name of counterterrorism, and make every Muslim a target. It also creates a moral hazard: leaders of Muslim minorities in Western societies can demand special consideration, using the implied threat of violence

by others as a way to get what they want, and that in turn can separate Muslims further from the rest of society. That's what's so insidious about this: not only terrorism, but also our reaction to it, can be equally destructive. I'd go further—our reaction has the potential to be vastly *more destructive* than the terrorism that gives rise to it. This paradox lies at the heart of al Qaeda's strategy, in fact.

Now, this is an obvious point, but the global uprising that bin Laden sought did *not* occur. After 9/11, the international community came down on al Qaeda like a ton of bricks. They were expelled from Afghanistan, damaged in Pakistan, defeated in Saudi Arabia, allied groups in Somalia, Yemen and North Africa were (temporarily) set back, affiliates in Southeast Asia lost support, and al Qaeda in Iraq was almost destroyed—by 2010, we'd reduced them to 5 per cent of their strength and banished the remnant from all major Iraqi cities. U.S.-led coalitions stabilised Iraq and Afghanistan, only to see Iraq unravel after leaving, and Afghanistan looking quite shaky as we exit.

So, if al Qaeda's strategy didn't succeed, at least not in the way bin Laden intended, does that mean our strategy, the Global War on Terror, 'overseas contingency operations', worked? Well, unless you've been living under a rock, you would have to know that the answer to that question is a resounding *NO*. And that, of course, is because as al Qaeda has waned, we've seen the rise of ISIS.

Let's talk now about that group. ISIS comes from the same basic salafi-jihadist worldview as al Qaeda, and shares much of al Qaeda's ideology, including the notion of defensive jihad and the focus on terrorism. It's in the second component—the political interpretation—that it parts ways with al Qaeda, and that results in a starkly different strategy, and a different set of threats to our societies.

ISIS is the successor to al Qaeda in Iraq. That might lead you to suppose that it was originally a branch of the wider al Qaeda movement, but actually its origin is independent. It came out of extremist circles in Jordan in the late 1990's, propelled by anti-Shia sectarianism, and peaked in the ferocious violence of the Iraq war between 2004 and 2010.

Its first leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, emerged after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when he formed terrorist cells to oppose the occupation, allied himself with Sunni nationalist and former regime fighters, took up the al Qaeda name as a branding exercise, and carried out attacks like the killing of UN Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello in 2003, the beheading of aid workers, the kidnapping, rape and murder of Shi'a children, and the 2006 Samarra bombing.

Before he was killed in June 2006, Zarqawi unified several factions under the Islamic State of Iraq, part of the Mujahidin Shura Council, responsible for some of the most horrendous atrocities of the war. Zarqawi was succeeded by Omar al Baghdadi, himself killed in April 2010, to be followed by Abubakr al Baghdadi, the current leader of ISIS, who expanded into Syria after the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, and now calls itself Islamic State.

It was soon clear that there were solid ideological and strategic differences between al Qaeda and Zarqawi's group. These emerged through a series of letters between Zarqawi and Ayman al-Zawahiri, then bin Laden's deputy, which fell into the hands of western intelligence in 2005.

Zarqawi viewed Shi'a Muslims and by extension their regional protector, Iran, as the greater threat. He saw Shi'a as apostates who should be slaughtered without mercy. He sought to provoke a sectarian civil war that would split Iraq, generate massive violence that would make the country ungovernable, drive out the occupation forces, collapse the state, and allow Zarqawi to inherit the wreckage. This translated into violence against Iraqi civilians, which for all its horror, was anything but random. Rather, it was designed to turn Shia and Sunni against each other, and both groups against the occupiers.

Zawahiri and al Qaeda differed, not in terms of rejecting violence against Shi'a, but as a matter of timing. Zawahiri wanted Zarqawi to first rally all Iraqis against the occupation, and defer action against the Shi'a until after the invaders were expelled. He said, in effect, "form a popular front against the occupiers, you can always deal with the Shia later". This was the classic al Qaeda aggregation

strategy we've discussed, with a view to a global rather than a local agenda.

Zarqawi and his successors reject that—not because they're less opposed to the West, far from it, but because of a difference in strategic sequencing. They want to provoke an immediate sectarian war with the Shi'a, use that to unify Sunnis behind them, establish the Caliphate, build a powerful Islamic state, and then expand its territory by military conquest. What, for al Qaeda, is a distant millenarian utopia, is for ISIS an immediate, 2014, real-world, practical goal.

That means a real state—with a territory, an army, a government, an economy, a population—and that makes ISIS a much more conventional nation-building enterprise. Unlike al Qaeda with its post-modern notion of a virtual, non-territorial Islamic state, of guerrilla cells acting locally while thinking globally, and its call for an uprising by Muslims everywhere, ISIS wants the Caliphate *now*, in Syria and Iraq as a real-world entity, in one territory, and then plans to expand it by military conquest.

That's why, whereas bin Laden said, "if you support al Qaeda, attack Westerners wherever they may be", and sought to *provoke* our intervention in local conflicts so as to generate a global insurgency, al Baghdadi said "if you support ISIS, come to Syria and help us build the state." He put out a call for doctors, engineers—and, of course, fighters—to join him. Far from wanting to provoke Western intervention, ISIS wants breathing space. It's ultimately no less hostile to the West, but its sequencing is different: first build the Caliphate, then expand it, *then* take on the West. It is all about territorial expansion.

If al Qaeda's agenda is twenty-first century, ISIS looks, to many of my friends in Iraq and Syria, a lot like the seventh century. After Muhammad's death in 632AD, his successors—the Caliphs—engaged in a campaign of military expansion that took them within a few decades to control vast territories in the Middle East, North Africa, South and Central Asia, and eventually into Spain and Southern Italy. These wars of Muslim Conquest,

as they're known, created the largest pre-Modern empire in history. The restoration of this Caliphate—as contrasted with the al Qaeda 'virtual' Caliphate—lies at the heart of the ISIS agenda.

ISIS has had a massively reinvigorating effect on the global jihad. We've seen groups in Indonesia, the Philippines, North Africa, and across the Middle East revive. Fighters have travelled to join ISIS from these areas, and from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand and Latin America—indeed, foreign fighter flows into Syria and Iraq are ten times what we saw at the height of the Iraq war.

Where did ISIS come from?

How did ISIS come to join al Qaeda at the peak of the global jihad? It resulted from two key events: the killing of Osama bin Laden, and the failure of the Arab Spring. Bin Laden's death on May 2, 2011 threw al Qaeda into disarray. The organisation went through a succession struggle, and turned inward for several months before Ayman al-Zawahiri emerged as undisputed leader. Those months were critical, because mid-2011 was when the Arab Spring seemed to be succeeding—secular, democratic, largely peaceful protest movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen had successfully thrown off dictatorships. For a time, this seemed to contradict al Qaeda's argument that only terrorism against the West (the 'far enemy') could overthrow these regimes (the 'near enemy').

But by late 2011, it was clear the Arab Spring was *not* going to deliver stable democracies. Egypt slipped back into authoritarianism, Yemen remained hugely violent, Libyans threw off Gaddafi but were left with an increasingly violent power vacuum, and a crackdown in Bahrain crushed protests there. Most importantly, in Syria, the early promise of a peaceful end to the Iranian-backed Damascus regime failed, the regime consolidated, and protests escalated into a horrific sectarian civil war.

So peaceful methods failed (except in Tunisia, site of the original outbreak and, seemingly at present, the exception that proves the

rule) and insurgencies emerged in Syria, Libya, Egypt's Sinai desert, and Mali (as a direct result of the fall of Gaddafi). Al Qaeda, as I've mentioned, was in disarray: the Arab Spring seems to have caught them flat-footed. So as people turned back to violence, they didn't look to al Qaeda: the group had lost credibility. That gap was increasingly filled by ISIS.

ISIS, for its part, used Syria to reinvent itself after its defeat in Iraq. You recall the organisation was down to only 5% of its strength by late 2011, it was scattered, on the run from U.S. and Iraqi forces. As the Syrian revolution unfolded, Abubakr al-Baghdadi sent a small cadre to Syria. They found sanctuary from pressure in Iraq, they could regroup and re-equip, and because of their battle experience, their financial backing from salafi donors, their tight organisation, and their concrete, specific political program, they began to dominate. Three factors helped: the Assad regime, the West's failure to support the secular democratic uprising, and the Iraqi government in Baghdad.

In Syria, Assad claimed his opposition consisted entirely of jihadists. At first this was a lie: the same broad-based, secular, pro-democracy movement arose in Syria as elsewhere in the Arab Spring. But the violence of Assad's crackdown turned protest into insurgency. Civil leaders were sidelined, armed groups began to grow, the movement became more extreme, and Assad's lie became increasingly true. He maintained a *de facto* truce with ISIS until late 2013—the rise of ISIS helped prove his case about a jihadist enemy, ISIS spent most of its time attacking other rebel groups anyway, and avoided confronting the regime directly, so Assad in turn let ISIS gain control of Raqqa. Raqqa today is the ISIS capital, its major base, home to hundreds out of the thousands of foreign fighters who have flocked to join it.

The second factor was our failure to support Syria's secular democracy movement. It's a self-serving myth that there was never a chance for the democracy movement to succeed. The democratic opposition to Assad was long-standing, it had significant popular support, and it was far stronger and better organised than Gaddafi's

opposition in Libya. Firm diplomatic pressure by the West in 2011, military support to democracy groups in 2012, and deterrent strikes against Assad when he began using chemical weapons against his own people in late 2012 and early 2013 could have made a real difference.

Instead, we were tied up in Libya in 2011, gave virtually no support to the secular democracy movement, and offered too little help, too late, to the secular rebels. I'm not suggesting we should have invaded Syria—but I *am* suggesting that Western diplomatic efforts to ensure a political transition, backed by force if necessary to stop Assad's violence against his people, in accordance with the established international principle of Responsibility to Protect, would have done a lot to prevent the emergence of ISIS. Even now, because Western countries have refused to come out strongly against Assad, and have yet to target any regime positions, many Syrians see our efforts as helping the regime. Few Syrians will back us against ISIS until we commit to overthrowing Assad, which for them is the whole point of the uprising.

The final factor was the Iraqi government's lurch into sectarianism at the end of 2011. It's easy to blame Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki here. I've heard people ask "What happened to Maliki? How did he go from being inclusive in 2007-8 to being sectarian in 2012"? That question bespeaks a lack of understanding of conditions in Iraq. Yes, Maliki was relatively inclusive in 2007-8: but that was when we had 165,000 U.S. troops in Baghdad and the districts around Baghdad, advisors embedded throughout his government and security forces, and were spending billions in assistance—we had huge leverage, and could ensure a fair outcome for Sunnis, Shi'a and Kurds. We acted like a playground umpire ensuring fairness which meant Maliki could afford to be inclusive, afford to make deals because someone was going to enforce the outcome. After the coalition withdrew, leaving zero troops behind, pulling out civilian advisers and cutting off assistance, we lost leverage. For his part, Maliki no longer had us to act as mediator or ensure fair outcomes. He was in a zero-sum game, where he could no longer

afford to be inclusive—he had to consolidate his Shi'a support base, and seek Iranian support. He reneged on his deals with Sunnis and Kurds, and started sidelining US-trained professional military, police and administrative officials, and replacing them with sectarian (often corrupt) loyalists.

As a result, by 2013, Iraq was in disarray, Kurds and Sunnis felt betrayed by Baghdad, tribal elders had been hung out to dry, the Iraqi security forces were engaged in what Sunnis saw as a sectarian version of ethnic cleansing, and there was space for a return of ISIS. And that created the environment that allowed the ISIS expansion in 2013, its jailbreaks, seizure of cities, expansion in Iraq and Syria, and its *blitzkrieg*-like breakout to Mosul and other cities in June 2014.

What should we do about it?

If that's the threat, what should we do about it? We need to consider both the threat from Islamist terrorism, and the risk arising from our own reaction to that threat.

We can break the terrorist threat into four components: domestic radicalisation, foreign fighters, the effect on regional terror groups, and destabilisation in the Middle East. Our strategic approach needs to address all four and, I would argue, in that order of priority.

So, domestic radicalisation first. What we see in Western societies is the seductive pull of ISIS on marginalised people, who feel themselves disenfranchised, losers in our society, with no opportunity to advance themselves, and want to be part of something huge, successful, historical and important—ISIS offers them all that, a chance to validate themselves through action. A lot of the European and UK and other foreign fighters who go to join ISIS in Syria are not particularly ideological. They are mainly young men and significantly, a large number of young women in search of adventure and for something big that's outside themselves, like leftists going to fight in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, or indeed, not unlike Aussies going to fight for the Empire in 1914. So I

don't want to create any kind of moral equivalents here but I want to point out that these individuals are not necessarily 'dyed in the wool' salafi-jihadists. They are people who want to seek adventure, significance and opportunity that they are not getting out of their society.

Western governments since 9/11 have had a bad habit of orientalisng Muslims, treating them as a special case, as an exotic, potentially violent minority, who need to be handled with kid gloves. Often governments have sought to deal with Muslims through traditional elders, appointed (sometimes self-appointed) conservative leaders who the government treats as intermediaries, hoping they will keep their young men and women in line.

This has three really bad effects. First, these so-called elders are often, by definition, more conservative, authoritarian and traditionalist, and by deferring to them we're deepening the marginalisation of young Muslims who tend to be a lot more integrated into our societies. Secondly, as I said earlier, there's a moral hazard—people are encouraged to seek special treatment, to set themselves apart from the rest of society, leveraging the existence of extremist crazies as a way to advance their own agenda, and that tends to move entire communities in a more sectarian, segregated direction, and creates divisions in society that extremists can exploit. Finally, it creates the impression that a whole community is responsible for the actions of a lunatic, criminal fringe.

I think we need to do away with this approach. Repression, surveillance, and special intermediaries simply make the problem worse. We need to treat Australian Muslims like Australian Catholics, Australian Hindus or any other Australian—with all the rights, freedoms, expectations and responsibilities that come from free membership in a free society. If people engage in criminal acts, they need to be treated like any other criminal. We need to open up opportunities for self-expression and free agency within our own societies, so people can see that the answer to their problems lies here, not elsewhere. The answer to domestic radicalisation, then, turns out to be more freedom, not less.

Likewise, though, with freedom comes responsibility. We need to be clear that we don't plan to turn our societies inside out in order to make a disaffected minority more comfortable. The liberal values that lie at the heart of our society, on which our country is built, are not up for discussion. We can't afford to be tolerant of intolerance, or to allow the implied threat of terrorism to let a minority (any minority) hold the rest of us to ransom.

The second threat is that of foreign fighters, and here the risk is that members of our own societies will join ISIS or al Qaeda, reinfiltate back into our communities, and carry out attacks here. This threat is real, but we need to calibrate our response carefully lest we do more harm than good. I often hear people say "why do we need to intervene overseas? Let's just pull up the drawbridge, take defensive measures to protect ourselves against domestic terrorism, and leave it at that."

I'm afraid that approach doesn't really work. In the first place, there *is* no drawbridge. Australia is an open society, connected with the rest of the world, and our freedom and prosperity depends on maintaining that openness. Secondly, we need to be clear about what truly effective 'defensive measures' would look like. These might include mass surveillance, collection of personal data, suppression of dissent, limits on free discussion, tracking of individuals on suspicion, detention without trial, travel and financial restrictions, and a pervasive police and security presence including fortified checkpoints in public places, heavily armed police and gun-carrying intelligence services with the power of arrest or to use lethal force. Since 9/11, many western countries have moved well on the way to some of these things in the name of protecting ourselves against terrorism. We may destroy our free and open society in order to save it: a fully protected society looks a lot like a police state.

There's a stark trade-off here. To put it one way, how many terrorist attacks, bombings or assassinations are we prepared to accept in Australia as the price of preserving our freedom? Conversely, how much privacy, freedom and civil liberty are we prepared to surrender in order to prevent those attacks? You can't

have your cake and eat it too. In a democracy, this is a decision that only the people can make. Technocrats—especially security professionals whose budget and advancement depend on the outcome, or politicians who know they will shoulder the blame for any attack—can't be allowed to decide this for us. At the same time, if society decides a certain level of risk is acceptable, we can't go back and retrospectively change our minds after the event, retroactively punishing security officials or political leaders for risk-management decisions we made as a society. What we need is a public, informed debate on this set of trade-offs, along with safeguards to protect ourselves and against unintended consequences.

The third threat—the effect on regional terrorist groups—is something that Australia has done well since 9/11, and where current policy seems pretty well calibrated. Assistance to regional partners, information sharing, cooperation on regional security preparedness, and joint investigation when incidents occur, are all things that have been in place since 2003, after the first Bali bombing, and they have largely been effective in our region. We need to think about widening that regional network, and about how to react to increased threats, but in general terms I think we have those settings about right.

The final threat—the destabilising effect of ISIS in the Middle East and North Africa—is the one against which our troops are currently engaged in Iraq. To me, the logic of this is extremely clear. We've already talked about how attractive ISIS is to disaffected elements within our own society. It has an appeal precisely because of what seems to be an unbroken string of military victories, because it seems successful, and it offers people the chance to share in that success and significance. We can turn our society upside down in order to make every disaffected young Muslim male in Sydney or Melbourne feel good about themselves or we can go to where ISIS is—currently, the Middle East and parts of North Africa—and inflict damage on the group that takes the shine off it, shows people it can be defeated, and emphasises to a lot of young Australians and others that joining ISIS is a fool's errand, it's pretty dangerous over there, and you might not make it back. If we want to limit

the restrictions to our freedom in this country, and relax those restrictions before they become permanent, we **MUST** deal with ISIS where it currently is.

I am emphatically **NOT** talking about reinvading or reoccupying Iraq—that was a disaster the first time around, and doing it again wouldn't make it any better. I'm also not talking about a campaign to destroy the Assad regime in Syria militarily. I'm talking about a targeted effort using a combination of air power, special operations, military assistance and a limited number of combat troops to destroy the ability of ISIS to carry out its strategy of territorial control, and put enough pressure on Assad to force a negotiated settlement to the Syrian civil war, one in which secular democracy, with international support, plays a key role.

I want to conclude with two observations. The first is to re-emphasise something that I, and others, like Kate McGregor who introduced me to CIS a dozen years ago, have been saying ever since 9/11: namely that this is a long war, a multi-generational struggle between two fundamentally opposed sets of values. It has already gone on for half a century, since the Day war in 1967 and it has just as long to run.

One mistake we made after 9/11 was to focus too narrowly on al Qaeda, as if killing senior al Qaeda leaders equated to defeating the organisation, and as if defeating al Qaeda equated to ending the terrorist threat. Let's not make the same mistake again with ISIS. We *will* defeat ISIS, I have absolutely no doubt about that. But if we don't also think more broadly, across all four of those threat categories, we'll find ourselves back here again in another ten years, talking about the successor organisation to ISIS, and in twenty years, the successor to that. We will keep seeing new organisations re-emerge.

If we want to succeed in that conflict, we **MUST** find ways to deal with the threat that are cheap enough, non-intrusive enough, protective of our own values and sustainable enough, that we can maintain them essentially indefinitely, without destroying the free society we seek to protect. I would also argue that invading, occupying

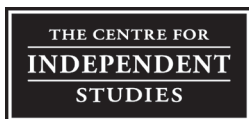
and trying to re-construct other people's countries is not the answer; but sitting at home and turning Australia into a police state is also not the answer. The truth is somewhere in between.

And that's my final point. I've spent a lot of time tonight speaking about what we're fighting against, the enemy's ideology and strategy. But let's remember what we're fighting *for*, those values on which our society is founded, and on which—whatever else we might disagree on—we have wide consensus.

We believe in individual freedom, and the personal responsibility that comes with that. We believe in the pursuit of happiness, the sanctity of human life, in a secular state whose authority derives from consent of the governed, and whose purpose is to serve the needs of its citizens. We believe in a free market economy, as tempered by appropriate regulation, and in the rule of law as established by human society. We believe in respect for the rights of others, in gender equality including women's autonomy, reproductive freedom, and freedom of sexual relations between consenting adults. We believe in social justice based on equality of opportunity and access, and in human progress through innovation and creativity.

Yes, we disagree among ourselves on how to balance these values, and on what form they should take, and on their relative priority. But let's recognise how utterly, and unalterably alien these beliefs are to salafi-jihadists like al Qaeda, ISIS, or any of their fellow travellers, including even those who don't actively use violence. Intolerance of difference, religion as a total explanation for all aspects of life, communal over individual purpose, the imposition of beliefs on others by force, the subjugation and oppression of women, a cult of death perpetrated by a hyperviolent nihilistic band of exterminators, a theocratic state whose authority derives from the Divine rather than from its people, a non-rational cult of authority, intolerance of sexual or gender freedom, hostility to innovation and progress, and a return to the supposedly righteous behaviour of the seventh century. That is the ideology of our opponent.

ISIS and groups like it are horrendous, but they're not unique: in some ways, they're just the latest in a long line of ideological enemies of liberal democracy, foes of the enlightenment that go back to eighteenth century Absolutist monarchism, Clericalism, and Authoritarianism, to nineteenth century ideas like Slavophilism and Communism, and to 20th century movements like the Nazi racial community of blood and soil, Fascism, Japanese militarism, or Stalinism. Today's threat will go the way of those historical threats, I have no doubt about that—but it won't happen without effort from all of us, a conscious effort to preserve our freedoms here at home, and to extend those freedoms to ALL members of our society, even as we defend them abroad.



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WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR? ISLAMISM AND THE THREAT TO LIBERAL IDEAS

Counterinsurgency expert and military strategist Dr David Kilcullen delivered The Centre for Independent Studies' 2014 John Bonython Lecture with a crucial and fascinating exploration of recurring Occidentalism, why Western values are anathema to Islamists, and why we must take decisive action *now* to counter the Jihadist ideology that is spreading around the world.

The lecture explored the key questions about the Jihadist movement: How did we get to this state in the conflict? How long is it likely to last? Is this the start of a new conflict, or the continuation of an old one? And what are the likely geopolitical ramifications and impact on Australia?



Dr David Kilcullen is Founder and Chairman of Caerus Associates LLC. He is also a Senior Fellow in the Future of War program at the New America Foundation. A former Australian Army officer, David has worked with the Australian and US Governments including roles as senior counter-insurgency advisor to General David Petraeus, Chief Strategist in the Counterterrorism Bureau at the U.S State Department and special advisor for counter-insurgency to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

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