

The Passy Press[®]

Letters to the Editor

From: Tom Tucker <thtuck@undisclosed.com>
To: Nick Gardiner <enpg@thepassypress.com>
Sent: January 5, 2017 at 11:41 PM GMT+1
Subject: Robert Hardy's Essay, December 2016

Dear Sir,

I read Mr, Hardy's essay with interest. While I agree with, or accept most of his factual background statement, based on his undoubtedly greater knowledge of ISIS, I disagree with parts of his policy proposal.

The Islamic State is only the Western World's current problem du jour in the Middle East (we don't include the Syrian problem as we have largely opted out of dealing with that). It is not specifically a United States problem as it affects Europe and the Middle East countries even more, and, as further discussed below, it is not the only or even the most major Middle East problem. However, ISIS' terrorist attacks and radicalization of American and European citizens as well as its aggressive terrorist activities in the Middle East have brought it far more attention in this country than it probably deserves.

As Mr. Hardy's essay correctly projects, the Islamic State is likely to lose its geographic territory in the near future, but its ideology will continue in some form. However, this is where I begin to disagree with Mr. Hardy, as I think the Islamic State or ISIS is only a manifestation of larger, more difficult problems in the Middle East. There are at least 3 larger Middle East problems which have, to one degree or another, laid the groundwork for the creation of ISIS: 1) the authoritarian political structure and anemic social institutions, together with great disparities in wealth, poverty and employment in most of the Middle East countries; 2) the rise of the Islamic revival movement known as "Islamism", which is generating religious fervor and anti-Western attitudes across the whole region, and has given rise to the Iranian religious government, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and, of course, ISIS itself; and 3) the Israeli-Palestinian problem which has festered for over 60 years, resulted in numerous wars and military engagements, and generated boatloads of US hatred across the Arab world.

Mr. Hardy's essay and policy proposals do not address either the first or third of these larger Middle East problems, only the 2nd. As his essay recognizes, his first policy proposal (Replacing the IS Salafi jihad ideology with another) is not something we can do - it's up to the Muslim community. However, to the minor extent we can influence it, we should encourage them to move in the direction of a peaceful, religiously oriented Islam and not "Salafism" or its Saudi variant "Wahhabism" out of which ISIS grew.

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Which, of course, raises the issue of U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia which is the home of the Wahhabi movement and source of much of the funding of radical Islam. In contrast to Mr. Hardy's essay, which states that Iran's Islamic Revolution is a greater threat to the West than ISIS, I think radical Islam, emanating largely from Saudi Arabia is the greater threat. Saudi funded schools (madrasas) are spreading radical Islam throughout the Middle East and beyond. This is a far more insidious and widespread danger to Western interests than Iran's support of Shiites throughout the Middle East. Iran is not trying to spread its radical Islamic ideas throughout the world nor provoke a war between the West and Islam, unlike ISIS, nor is it slitting the throats of anyone who disagrees with its radical theology. Despite its authoritarian Islamic government, Iran is, compared to most of the Middle East, a more modern and Westernized country. We really should not care about the Sunni - Shiite clash; that's up to the Moslem world to resolve. However, we do have a strong interest in opposing the spread of radical Islam largely through the support of the Saudis and, in this regard, I agree with the essay's proposal about monitoring mosques and Moslem religious schools. As far as encouraging enmity between ISIS and Al Qaeda is concerned, this sounds like an idea from the intelligence community which may be marginally useful but not really a public policy issue.

However, if we really want to significantly impact the cluster of problems affecting the Middle East, we should reexamine our unconditional support for Israel. Unless and until the Israeli - Palestinian issue is laid to rest, the Middle East as a whole will continue to fester and affect the U.S. and Europe, and the issue will not be resolved without serious and sustained head-banging of Israel by the U.S. But that's an issue for another day.

Sincerely,

Tom Tucker

Tom Tucker practiced law for over 40 years. After graduating from Yale University in 1961, he spent three years as an officer in the U.S. After leaving the Navy, Mr. Tucker attended Harvard Law School, graduating in 1968. He served as legal counsel in various positions at the Federal level in Washington DC before returning to New England in private practice and has served as well in various local positions in Duxbury Massachusetts where he resides with his family.