Another century, another long war

Peter Leahy

Introduction

Australia is involved in the early stages of a conflict that may last for the rest of the century and potentially beyond. Terrorism is but a symptom of a broader conflict in which the fundamental threat is from radical Islamists who are intent on establishing Islam as the foundation of a new world order. It's a conflict between radical Islamists and modern secular, mostly Western, states. The likely duration of the conflict is due to the intrinsic and widespread appeal of the underlying ideology, the youth of those currently involved, their fervour and the inability of those under attack to either realise or accept the true nature of the threat.

While the violence, so far, is mostly confined to Islamic lands, some of the radicals are engaged in a direct war against Western secular nations. Terror attacks in the US and Europe have already occurred, and there are, no doubt, plans afoot to attack again. Australians have been killed and injured in these attacks. The home-grown threat from terror remains

This undated image posted by the Raqqa Media Center, a Syrian opposition group, on 30 June 2014, which has been verified and is consistent with other AP reporting, shows fighters from the al-Qaida linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) during a parade in Raqqa, Syria. Militants from an al-Qaeda splinter group held a military parade in their stronghold in northeastern Syria. AP Photo/Raqqa Media Center File via AAP.

and is likely to worsen as radicals return from fighting overseas and the internet dumps unconstrained radical propaganda across the globe. If the caliphate in Iraq and Syria established by the Islamic State survives, it will be a worrying portent of worse to come.

Australia needs to consider its position in this ongoing conflict and the very real potential for terror attacks at home. As a matter of priority, efforts must be taken to deter those planning attacks and to protect vital infrastructure through defensive measures. This will in part depend on timely, accurate and distributed intelligence. More broadly important tasks include identifying, understanding and articulating the threat as the ideology of radical Islamists rather than just the isolated actions of terrorists. Once this is done, a well-resourced and extensive international and domestic effort at counter-radicalisation and deradicalisation must begin. Internationally, nations under the most substantial threat from radical Islamists must be supported while care is taken not to inflame local tensions.

The wars of the 20th century

In his book, *The shield of Achilles*, Philip Bobbitt aggregated the wars of the 20th century into a single 'Long War' that lasted from 1914 to 1990. He combined the separate events into a war to determine which system of government would prevail: fascism, communism or parliamentarianism.[1] In *The end of the Vasco da Gama era,* Coral Bell covered the decline of Western power in the Asia–Pacific and the rise of the three great civilisations of the non-West. She speculated that the West will be able to cope with the rise of China and India, but that finding a place for Islam may be an intractable problem.[2]

In combination, these two powerful writers invite a consideration of whether the current conflicts at the dawn of the 21st century are the opening battles of another long war—this time between secular states and radical Islamists to determine which system of government will prevail in the 21st century: secular or sharia. There are many fronts and flanks to the conflict, but the basic premise is set and the initial battles are being fought now.[3] For those living in secular societies, it's hard to imagine the theocratic view and the fervour shown by those advocating sharia law. Neither side shows any inclination towards compromise.

A new long war

The security environment of the 21st century already looks to be complex. It includes the growth and increasing confidence of China, a resurgent Russia, the largely unconsidered prospect of an emerging and powerful India, resource and territorial disputes, critical environmental pressures and the potential for humanitarian emergencies and disasters. Maintaining international peace and stability in this complex environment will require deft diplomacy. Reassuringly, the global system is more or less prepared to cope with events like these.

Alongside these threats, a new and seemingly intractable dispute over the form of government to be adopted in the new century has emerged. The rise of radical Islamists intent on establishing sharia law will do much to shape the security environment of the 21st century. Radical Islamists see no difference between religion and politics and advocate sharia law as the only acceptable system of government. As stated by Ali A Allawi, 'genuine political order has to rest on the subordination of human decisions to divine patterns.'[4]

The radicals are clear in their intent, and their rhetoric stresses that they're engaged in a long struggle between good and evil. Opposed to this view are pluralistic nations with a preference for secular governments. The challenge will be to support those states that don't wish to bow before the demands of the radical Islamists. Apart from adopting defensive and protective measures, there are few good options to counter the threat.

At the start of the 21st century, it's reasonable to judge that another long war over the system of government has commenced.

Radicals

Recently, Tony Blair stated that 'radical Islam', which combines politics with religion, is a growing threat. He views it as a radicalised and political view of Islam that opposes pluralistic societies.[5] Radical Islamist views exist, often uneasily but sometimes

supported, within the broader Islamic community. Those views are manifested by radicals who are united by a core philosophy of traditionalism, religious fervour and hatred. In the name of their religion, they kill and maim innocent men, women and children, including their fellow Muslims.

It's difficult to define the extremists, fundamentalists, radicals, Islamists and jihadists without offering offence. But a definition is needed, because the majority of Muslims are peaceful people who live moral and productive lives. They pose no threat. Those who pervert the teachings of Islam are the threat, and they're a threat to all. They've ignited local, regional and state-on-state conflicts or planned or carried out attacks in Russia, China, most of the Middle East, increasing areas of Africa, Europe, India, Pakistan, the US and Australia.[6]

The more extreme radicals advocate the removal of existing 'apostate' governments, the death of unbelievers, the creation of emirates and the re-establishment of a caliphate. These fundamentalist views, which matured during the second half of the 20th century, are generally found within three separate strands of Islam: Salafi-Takfiris, the Muslim Brotherhood and Revolutionary Shi'ism.[7] The most active and extreme are the Salafi-Takfiris, a subset of Wahhabism. They insist on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and take an intolerant view of other interpretations of Islam.[8] They proclaim those who alter the religion to be apostates, or no longer Muslims.

One unifying factor among these three radical Islamist views is the desire for religion to be the dominant factor in daily life. Another is the justification of violent jihad to bring about Islamism or to fight back against those they see as threatening Islam.[9] In their view, jihad is justified when Islam, as a religion, is under attack and in need of defence. This message has global appeal among Muslims, as it rises above local politics and geography. Stephen W Davis observes that 'The Western perspective that this movement is an attempt to gain power for purely political reasons discounts the reality that, for the Islamist, there is no difference between religion and politics.'[10]

The inability to find a way for secular ideas and radical Islamist thought to coexist is the fundamental cause of the conflict raging in much of the Middle East right now. In a globalised world, there's no avoiding the influence of radical Islamists and the intersection of political and religious ideas. Radical Islamists already live uncomfortably within the broader Muslim community. Finding a place for them to coexist with secular nations, free of conflict, will be extremely difficult.

Three fronts

Just as in the wars of the 20th century, the current conflicts are global, are diverse, have an underlying theme and are made up of multiple fronts. The oldest and largest front, within Islam, is where Sunni Muslims are fighting Shia Muslims, essentially about the question of succession after the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632 CE. This centuries-old antagonism is manifested today in conflicts such as those in Iraq, Syria and Bahrain and in international tension arising from the geopolitical struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, supported by their respective client states and groups. As Reza Aslan states, 'the West is merely a bystander—an unwary yet complicit casualty.'[11]

The second front, again within Islam, is a modern political battle in which radical Islamists are intent on overthrowing existing governments and replacing them with new ones based on sharia law. These conflicts also increase the potential for spillover violence into neighbouring states and among refugee and diaspora populations across the globe, including those in Australia.

The third front is the more recent conflict between (usually) Western states and smaller groups of radical Islamists who are motivated by a hatred of the West and a long list of real and perceived injustices against the Muslim world. These extremists are mostly non-state actors who have adopted asymmetric tactics, using terror as their weapon of choice. While they don't constitute an existential threat to the modern state, they affect citizens' freedom of movement and way of life. Their actions have killed and maimed many and forced the imposition of physical and legal defensive measures, which restrict civil liberties and human rights. Their presence in failed and failing states generates widespread turmoil and suffering, with subsequent cascading violence and instability. Because of this, large parts of the Muslim world are off limits for travel, commerce and aid.[12]

Beyond the Sunni–Shia clash, the complexity of the interrelated conflicts and their impacts on secular states is reinforced by the terminology used by the extremists: the 'near enemy' and the 'far enemy'. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the majority of the *mujahidin*, radicalised and emboldened by their success in defeating the Soviets, decided to return to their homelands and attack what they saw as 'apostate' pro-Western governments. Their mission was to topple what they called the 'near enemy'—governments under Western influence—and replace them with sharia-based laws.

Some of the returning *mujahidin*, such as Osama bin Laden and his supporters, didn't have the patience for a war against local governments. They were thinking on a global scale, saw the West as the source of evil and decided to take the war straight to the 'far enemy'—to the so-called 'Zionist–Crusader' alliance.[13] This is clearly stated in al-Qaeda's 1998 'declaration of war against Americans':

> The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual obligation incumbent upon every Muslim who can do it and in any country—this until the Aqsa Mosque [Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [Mecca] are liberated from their grip, and until their armies withdraw from all the lands of Islam, defeated, shattered, and unable to threaten any Muslim.'[14]

Many extremists have remained true to this sentiment, reinforced by the more recent September 2013 *Guidelines for jihad* issued by the current leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri:

> In the military sector, focus should be maintained on constantly weakening the head of international disbelief (America) until it bleeds to death both militarily and financially, its human resources are drained and it withdraws to its own shell after reaching a stage of retreat and seclusion (sooner rather than later, with the permission of Allah).[15]

While those focused on the far enemy may have a mission to attack the West, they haven't forgotten their overall strategic intent. Their attacks on America are genuine but also serve as morale boosters for their adherents. However, as outlined in *The Economist*, those attacks aren't al-Qaeda's main purpose: 'Its overriding aim remains, as it has been since bin Laden saw the retreat of the Soviet Union, the creation of a new caliphate across the Islamic world based on unswerving adherence to Sharia law.'[16]

Ideologues

While there are clear differences between the three strands of radical Islam, there are also strong links. One of the strongest is the influence of Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb, a major proponent of violent Islamism.[17] Natana DeLong-Bas sees Qutb's influence as 'visible in militant Islamic movements around the globe'.[18] Like many of his contemporaries in colonial Egypt, Qutb saw Islamism as a tool that would facilitate the liberation of Arab countries from Western colonialism and secular nationalism. In the mid-20th century, after spending time in America, he concluded that the West was evil and polluting the Islamic world.

Qutb argued that jihad should be waged against all unbelievers in order to bring the world's people into the embrace of Allah. In Egypt, he was jailed as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and after a period of incarceration was executed by the Nasser regime in 1966. Qutb's most influential book was *Milestones*, which DeLong-Bas describes as a 'manifesto for action'. In the book, Qutb declared that Islam is the way of life ordained by God for all mankind and that 'Jihad in Islam is simply a name for striving to make this system of life dominant in the world.'[19] He denounced Jewish and Christian societies because of their customs and manners and because their institutions and laws aren't based on submission to God alone.[20] Bassam Tibi describes the central idea behind Qutb's thinking as the idea of 'jihad as a permanent Islamic world revolution'.[21]

Both the current and previous leaders of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, were strongly influenced by Qutb's writings. As a young man, al-Zawahiri formed a strong association with the Muslim Brotherhood and held the view that Egypt was un-Islamic and should be replaced by a sharia state within a caliphate, which would help restore the Islamic world under one banner. The link between Iran and Sayyid Qutb is also direct. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as a seminary student, 'became acquainted with the theoreticians of the Muslim Brotherhood and was influenced by the works of Sayyid Qutb, some of which Khamenei himself translated into Persian.'[22]

Of course, Sayyid Qutb wasn't the only Islamist ideologue, but he was a prolific writer and had a direct impact on the three main extremist groups. His body of writing, along with that of other writers and thinkers such as the Indian Abul Ala Maududi and the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood, is compelling and attractive for Islamists. These tracts support a puritanical and intolerant approach to the modern secular world and to Muslims who don't follow Islam in its traditional and literal form.

World order

There are more than 1.6 billion Muslims, so it's impossible to generalise about what they want.[23] Many are content to practise their faith in peace, while others are dedicated to achieving supremacy for their sect (Shia or Sunni) and some seek political power through religion at home. As outsiders, there isn't much that the West can or should do about the centuries-old battle between Shia and Sunni. Similarly, it's difficult to intervene in political disputes over the form of government within the Muslim world. Nevertheless, it's important to understand the nature of 'political Islam' because its adherents are the most violent of the radical Islamists and are those most often in direct and deadly contact with the West.

According to Bassam Tibi, 'Political Islam is today the mainstream opposition in the world of Islam.'[24] He sees it not as a 'fringe phenomenon of delinquency, but rather an ideology and related practice of political movements that represent the major opposition in most countries in the world of Islam, particularly in the Middle East.'[25] Islamists are seeking a new Islamic order for the world and pursue that vision through an absolute faith in their religion. John Kelsay emphasises this point: 'In encounters between the West and Islam, the struggle is over who will provide the primary definition of the world order.'[26] There's no room for compromise. Their claims to a new world order are non-negotiable, and they've adopted terror as part of their campaign. While al-Qaeda and other similar groups are attacking the West, it's important to note that their primary battle is not with the West but is:

> against the rest of the Muslim world, which does not share its beliefs or agenda. Attacks on US interests are simply a means to achieve the group's main objective of establishing itself as a worldwide Islamic extremist society.[27]

This broader picture is reinforced by Bruce Riedel, who describes how al-Qaeda has an ambitious agenda for the new century and a goal of creating the Islamic caliphate from Spain to Indonesia.[28] The restoration of the caliphate is most unlikely, as there's no mass following for al-Qaeda and newer groups, such as the Islamic State, and their actions are alienating many in the Muslim world. However, they still see themselves as a vanguard movement, showing the way for Muslims worldwide. Attacking the US was only the first step in al-Qaeda's strategic plan.

While the US is unlikely to collapse, Washington and its allies, including Australia, have withdrawn from Iraq, which remains desperately unstable, and are withdrawing from Afghanistan without a clear result. From the radical Islamist point of view, things aren't going so badly: coalition forces are largely withdrawn from Arab lands, affiliate Islamist groups are active across large areas of the Middle East and Africa, they have global reach, they have an active and effective internet-based information campaign, and they're dispersed and unlikely to be defeated in detail. They are a significant threat to secular ideas and are attracting 'home-grown' or 'lone wolf' operators to their cause. The extremists' religious fervour, overall objectives and world view mean that they're not in a mood to compromise. Indeed, their outlook is stark, as described by DeLong-Bas:

> Bin Laden, like Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb before him, envisaged the world as divided into two absolute and mutually exclusive spheres—the land of Islam (dar al-Islam) and the land of the unbelief (dar al-kufr)—a division that results in a necessarily hostile relationship.[29]

This view is reinforced in 'Moderate Islam is a prostration to the West', an essay by Osama bin Laden denouncing dialogue between Saudi Arabia and America. The title is a clear indication of the message, as is much of the text, such as this example:

> Muslims and especially the learned among them should spread sharia law to the world—that and nothing else. Not laws under the 'umbrella of justice, morality and rights' as understood by the masses.[30]

What can be done?

The schism within Islam has lasted for centuries and is currently being fought with an unprecedented intensity and savagery. Access to new technology has meant that attacks have become more lethal and widespread. There's little the West can do, as intervention only seems to exacerbate the situation. This is an issue that the Muslim world has to resolve. So far, there's little leadership or inclination to seek a solution and certainly no historical precedent. Some argue that some kind of reformation of Islam is required. Given the historical record, that's unlikely. The West should expect continued sectarian violence and instability with the potential for regional conflict.

Nor is there much the West can do in the political battle being fought in many Muslim countries to determine the form of government. In many cases, the West is closely associated with incumbent or emerging governments and any intervention must be considered carefully. Doing nothing is a real option. Syria is an example: at the moment, Western forces are sensibly staying largely disengaged on the basis that it's impossible to identify who to support. As Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott correctly identified, this is a choice between baddies and baddies.[31]

The 9/11 attack (or the 'Manhattan Raid', as al-Qaeda called it) was only a symptom of the problem of radical Islamists. Yet the sustained coalition response has been focused on that one attack, seeking vengeance against the perpetrators and their supporters. What was missed was the larger problem, which is evident in the political and religious battles within most Muslim lands. There, the dispute is over the form of government: secular democracy (faring badly) or authoritarianism in monarchical, military or religious absolutist forms (doing rather better). In some cases, despite the efforts of those pursuing the Arab Spring, either anarchy or continued despotic rule seems to be the most likely result.

With no clear indication of how to achieve victory or what peace in the Middle East looks like, a strong option is to abstain. For those in the West, these conflicts could be seen as wars of choice. The rhetoric of al-Qaeda ('Be gone from the land of the two holy places') should ring loud, but on a humanitarian basis it will be extremely difficult to stay away. However, any engagement runs the risk of aggravating the already inflamed situation. Any intervention should have clearly articulated objectives and be restrained and tightly controlled.

Solutions

Carl von Clausewitz wrote that in every encounter there is a source of strength, a unity and cohesion, which, if attacked, causes a loss of overall balance.[32] He called this the centre of gravity. The problem with the current approach to problems in the Muslim world and emanating from Muslim nations is that Western efforts to counter them are focused on the symptoms rather than the root cause. Our efforts contribute little to a cohesive strategic outcome. It may be satisfying to lash out against terrorists in Afghanistan, but it does little to resolve the war raging within Islam, the desire to recreate the caliphate, the authoritarian nature of religious rule, the enmity towards Israel, the hatred of the presence of Western troops in Arab lands and the indignity felt by many Muslims, or to prevent direct terrorist attacks against the West.

Perhaps those who refrain from directly stating the true nature of the problem do so because they don't want to offend. They think it better to say 'a war on terror' than 'a war on radical Islamists'. Of course, many in the Muslim world are only too ready to take offence at any approach that links Islam with the violence emanating from Muslim lands. They're not being realistic; nor do they seem prepared to stand up and condemn the actions of the radicals. Any assessment of the level of violence in the world today almost invariably involves Muslim lands. The evidence is strong, and attempts not to offend invariably obscure the problem. An honest, direct and strategic approach is required. The problem is radical Islamists who enforce a perverted interpretation of Islam.

A new approach

A clear-cut and decisive victory in this new conflict is unlikely. It took most of the 20th century for parliamentarianism to be preferred over fascism and communism, and even now not everyone's convinced. A new concept of victory is required in this conflict against radical Islamists.

But where is there room for compromise in what has been defined by extremist ideologues as a cosmic battle of good versus evil? Philip Bobbitt suggests that victory in the 21st century will be 'preclusive'.[33] By this he means that the goal 'is to preclude a certain state of affairs from coming into being'.[34] He states that the aim should be to 'prevent attacks on civilians'.[35] British General David Richards also agrees that a clear-cut victory is unlikely. In 2010, he took the view that in Afghanistan it will be impossible to defeat al-Qaeda and the Taliban with military force and that NATO needs to plan for a 30–40-year role to help the Afghan armed forces hold their country against the militants. He argued against the idea of a clear-cut victory over Islamist militancy, stating that such a victory is unnecessary and would never be achieved. His view is that Islamist militancy can be contained to the point that 'our lives and our children's lives are led securely'.[36]

To be effective, any attempt to achieve a long-term resolution of the problem posed by radical Islamists must focus on countering their ideology. This won't be easy and will take a long time. Dale C Eikmeier argues that there are five approaches to solving the problem, and that the lead on four of them is the responsibility of the Muslim world: the message, the messenger(s), the ideology's supporting institutions, and the institutions of the counter-ideology. The fifth approach is a shared task between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds: the defence of the almost universally accepted values, norms and principles of modern civilisation.[37]

Egyptian President Abdel al-Sisi has made a promising start in countering the ideology. In a recent speech, he rebuked Islamic extremists for their 'destruction around the world, due to the crimes falsely committed in the name of Islam'. He took the argument further by saying that 'Religious discourse is the greatest battle and challenge facing the Egyptian people, pointing to the need for a new vision and a modern, comprehensive understanding of the religion of Islam—rather than relying on a discourse that has not changed for 800 years.'[38]

Strategic approaches of this kind will take a long time, and even then change is uncertain, but they must be encouraged and supported. So far, Western efforts to counter the threat of Islamic extremism have been too narrowly focused. Rather than concentrating on the centre of gravity—the ideology—the focus has been on retribution and the destruction of groups such as al-Qaeda and now the Islamic State group. These actions are necessary, but they stop short of countering the ideological intent of radical Islamists following the persuasive and appealing writings of Sayyid Qutb and like-minded ideologues.

Overall, we're not listening to the radical Islamists and we're not acting strategically. As a result, there's no focused and coherent strategy for the coming conflict. Even if such a strategy is developed, there must be doubts about our ability to sustain it, given constrained budgets, shifting coalitions, short election cycles and fickle populations.

The task for Australia

The threat from radical Islamists is real: it's foreign and domestic, and it's likely to be sustained. While it threatens Australia's way of life, it isn't an existential threat. Australia's first responsibility is to protect itself and, where it's in our national interests, to support those who are under attack.

At the national strategic level, Australian politicians must first develop an honest and frank dialogue with the Australian public. They should advance a narrative that explains that radical Islamism and the terrorism it breeds at home and abroad will remain a significant threat for the long term, that overcoming it will require considerable effort, blood and treasure, and that the fight will, of necessity, restrict our rights and liberties.

To effectively counter the ideology, a concerted effort at deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation is required. The ideology can be attacked through its ideologues, their message and the means of distribution of the message. Some efforts have begun,

but a much greater and more sustained effort is necessary. This must include the engagement of Muslim clerics and Islamic thought leaders throughout the Australian community to actively and routinely debunk the radical ideologies being offered to young Australians.

At home, Australia will require elaborate defensive measures to ensure that terrorists and their ideology do not easily gain access to Australia. This will require tight border controls for individuals and contraband, including chemical, biological and nuclear materials. The matter of dual nationality must be reviewed and, where appropriate, terrorists and their sympathisers should be either expelled from Australia or denied re-entry. The intelligence and police agencies must be well resourced and allowed to gather and use information to detect foreign or home-grown terrorists, inform action against them and allow for their prosecution and detention. Physical protective measures will be needed around critical physical and cyber infrastructure and iconic targets, which terrorists seek to attack.

Internationally, while Australia shouldn't sit idly by, there are limits to what we can do. At the moment, after an initial offensive phase (in Afghanistan and Iraq), the strategy is primarily defensive: gather intelligence, deter, protect, defend and respond. This defensive approach accords with the preclusion and containment prescriptions put forward by Bobbitt and Richards. Australia's international focus should be on cooperating with allies and friends to support moderate nations with radical Islamist problems in the immediate region: Indonesia, the Philippines and Pakistan, a pivotal state very much on the brink and suffering from persistent radical pressure. Leadership can be provided by focusing on a constructive soft-power approach using diplomatic, economic, intelligence and police support, rather than direct military intervention. However, military support must be available as a last resort.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott (right) addressing the United Nations Security Council as part of a special session convened and chaired by US President Barack Obama during the UN General Assembly 24 September 2014. The meeting began with all 15 permanent and temporary UNSC members unanimously backing a US-drafted resolution aimed at a stopping the travel and funding of IS fighters. AAP Image/ Office of the Prime Minister.

The recent declaration of a caliphate in Syria and Iraq meets a long-term radical aim and accentuates the problem of terror bases. In cases like this, an offensive capability will be necessary to deter and degrade the immediate threat so that local forces can deal with the problem. The US is likely to maintain air power, including drones, as a very effective means of countering terrorism in extreme cases. Australia's already considering drones for surveillance and in due course should consider the acquisition of an offensive unmanned aerial capability.

As a matter of course, we should try to avoid any involvement in direct combat, which is the responsibility of regional countries. Any military support should be restricted to indirect fire, primarily from aircraft, and training, mentoring and specialist advice on capabilities, intelligence and logistics to bolster local forces. Tasks of this nature require specialist forces with a broad range of skills and cultural adaptability. A specialist force approach is required, similar to the US military's approach to 'foreign internal defence'. [39] If Australia is to make a contribution, that contribution will require the further development of the whole-of-government concept trialled somewhat unsuccessfully in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the case of the Australian Defence Force, a focus on training, mentoring and enabling support to nations under threat from radical Islamists will be a new task for the 21st century.

Conclusion

The new conflict between secular societies and radical Islamists won't be the only conflict in the 21st century, but it will provide the dominant theme for global conflict. Our secular communities don't yet fully understand the nature of the war they have entered. Nor do they have a strategic view of what to do. As recent events in Iraq, Egypt, Afghanistan and Syria indicate, there's little that can be done about the two main conflicts in the Muslim world: Shia versus Sunni, and attempts to install sharia law as the dominant system of government.

To be truly effective, the solution to these two problems must come from within the Muslim world, which so far seems disinclined or unable to imagine a path to peace. The best course of action is to be careful about becoming involved and to offer carefully tailored, largely non-combat, support where appropriate.

As for the third threat—terrorism, which has the most impact on the West—apart from adopting largely defensive measures and reacting to terrorist attacks there's as yet no comprehensive strategy to bring about a resolution. Defensive measures are important, but so too is an offensive capability to reach out and deter and if necessary destroy imminent threats.

In these three fronts of the conflict, we need to reconceive 'victory'. It might only be partial; we might only limit, but not eliminate, terror and radical Islamism and its damage to secular societies. The focus should be on defensive and protective measures and intervention only when there's a clear vision of what can be achieved, an agreed and long-term strategy, and the commitment of resources over an extended period.

Notes

1   Philip Bobbitt, *The shield of Achilles,* Anchor Books, New York, 2003, p. xxviii.

2   Coral Bell, 2007*, The end of the Vasco da Gama era,* Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2007, p. 2, www.lowyinstitute.org/files/pubfiles/LIP21_BellWEB.pdf.

3   The al-Qaeda narrative describes the 9/11 attack as the 'Manhattan Raid' and the conflict in Afghanistan as one of a range of 'Bleeding Wars' designed to exhaust and defeat the US, just as the Russians were defeated in Afghanistan during the 1980s.

4   Ali A Allawi, *The crisis of Islamic civilisation*, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 161.

5   Tony Blair, *Why the Middle East matters*, April 2014, www.tonyblairoffice.org/news/entry/why-the-middle-east-matters-keynote-speech-by-tony-blair/.

6   According to US authorities, in 2012 a total of 6,771 terrorist attacks occurred worldwide, resulting in more than 11,000 deaths and more than 21,600 injuries. In addition, more than 1,280 people were kidnapped or taken hostage. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Annex of statistical information: country reports on terrorism 2012*, May 2013, www.state.gov/documents/organization/210288.pdf.

7   Vincenzo Oliveti, *Terror's source*, Amadeus Books, Birmingham, 2001, p. 15.

8   Generally known as 'wahhabis' inside Saudi Arabia and 'salafis' outside Saudi Arabia.

9   Jihad = a holy war of legitimate self-defence. Oliveti, *Terror's source*, p. 46.

10   Stephen W Davis, *Center of gravity and the war on terrorism*, research paper, US Army War College, Strategy Research Project, 2003, p. 19, www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA415120.

11   Reza Aslan, *No god but God: the origins, evolution, and future of Islam*, Random House, 2006, http://thesunmagazine.org/issues/372/the_war_within_islam.

12   The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs of Trade has listed 12 countries that it advises Australians not to travel to: Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Niger, Libya and Chad; http://smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/.

13   Ayman al-Zawahiri, *General guidelines for jihad*, 2013, http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2224.

14   Al-Qaeda's 'Declaration of war against Americans', issued 23 February 1998, in Raymond Ibrahim, *The al Qaeda reader*, Broadway Books, New York, 2007, p. 13.

15   al-Zawahiri, *General guidelines for jihad*.

16   'The state of al Qaeda', *The Economist*, 28 September 2013, p. 23.

17   Born 1906, visited America from 1948 to 1951, executed by the Nasser regime in 1966.

18   Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam from revival and reform to global jihad*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 256.

19   Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, The Holy Qur'an Publishing House, 1978, p. 139.

20   Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 151.

21   Bassam Tibi, 2008, 'From religious extremism or religionization of politics?', in Hillel Frisch, Efraim Inbar (eds), *Radical Islam and international security challenges and response*, Routledge, 2008, p. 13.

22   Akbar Ganji, 'Who is Ali Khamenei? The worldview of Iran's Supreme Leader', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2013, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139643/akbar-ganji/who-is-ali-khamenei.

23   The Pew Research Centre estimates that in 2010 there were 1.6 billion Muslims, making Islam the world's second-largest religion. The overwhelming majority (87–90%) are Sunni; about 10–13% are Shia. The highest concentrations are in the Middle East and North Africa, where 93% of the approximately 341 million inhabitants are Muslim; www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/07/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/.

24   Bassam Tibi, 'From religious extremism or religionization of politics?', p. 11.

25   Bassam Tibi, 'From religious extremism or religionization of politics?', p.11.

26   John Kelsay, *Islam and war*, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993, p. 117.

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About the author

Peter Leahy is the Director of the National Security Institute at the University of Canberra where he teaches a unit on, 'The Challenge of Modern Terrorism'. He was Chief of the Australian Army from 2002 until 2008.

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