

ISIS: A Four-Letter Household Word

Unfortunately ISIS has become a four-letter household word with which most westerners and Arabs are quite familiar.

The past several months, ISIS has been in the news for a variety of brutal acts including burning, beheading, crucifixion, and shooting to death of captives, and rape, slavery, and many other acts of cruelty. Despite ISIS' well-known and dubious deeds, not many are familiar with its history and specific ideology.

Recently, I read two books that shed light on this and complement one another spectacularly. Erick Stakelbeck's *ISIS Exposed* is the product of several months of research by an authority on global Islamic terrorism. *The Third Target* was written by *New York Times* best-selling novelist Joel Rosenberg. "ISIS Exposed" is a factual book based on numerous sources, and "Third Target" a novel based on current events. I will write about them separately as a two-part series.

I've known Erick Stakelbeck for a few years and, as much as I respect him, I'd like to see him out of work. In a perfect world, it'd be nice not having the need to have an authority on such things. However, as long as there's a need, I'm glad that he is a watchman on the wall, and exposing ISIS and their ideological brethren for what they are.

I think of myself as someone well versed in Middle Eastern affairs, including the rise of ISIS and other Islamic extremists. Studying Mideast politics in college and living in Israel, it's literally very close to home. But, *ISIS Exposed* taught me numerous things I didn't know that I really need to know.

I found Stakelbeck's narrative raising questions as I was

absorbed in his book, and the organization of the book wisely answered many of the questions in the pages that followed, as if projecting the questions and providing the answers accordingly.

There are many elements of the rise of ISIS in specific, and Islamic terror in general, but one underlying pillar of ISIS is the conquering of all areas that were ever part of previous Islamic caliphates, stretching across the Middle East and Europe. Imposing of an intransigent Islam globally is the ultimate goal, but *"in the short term, ISIS will settle for expanding the current borders of the Islamic State into the countries in its immediate backyard: Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia ..."*

While ISIS is a Sunni Muslim brand of terrorism, they not only fight and kill other Sunni Muslims and have their targets on other Sunni states, but they also hate and are at odds with Shia Muslims and Shia states, the most influential being Iran. These sects may have the same end game, the global dominance of Islam, but they fight one another and each differs about under whose domination that caliphate will be. This all gives veracity to the notion that the enemy of my enemy is still my enemy. Indeed, whether it is Sunni ISIS or Shia Iran and Hamas, both are enemies of the western and non-Islamic world.

Stakelbeck discusses ISIS activities, recruitment, and threats in numerous countries with a specific emphasis on western countries and the United States. Writing about the U.S., he says its borders are *"a disaster waiting to happen."* But the problem is that we only know of those who have been stopped at, or after crossing, the borders. We don't know who came through and slipped through. It may be a disaster that's already happened. The concern is beyond sleeper cells, but the use of terrorists or mules to transport WMD across the US' *"beyond porous"* borders.

Among the important myths that Stakelbeck debunks is the

notion that poverty or lack of meaningful career opportunities are the direct cause of sowing terrorism among young people. He introduces one section with a quote from Secretary of State John Kerry, *"And so we have a common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty, which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism...."*

He then documents that, *"The alleged brain behind ISIS's cutting edge social media and video operation was not raised in a dilapidated Afghan hut or a squalid Baghdad slum. Instead, (Ahmad) Abousamra, a dual Syrian-American citizen, was reared in leafy Stoughton, MA, a highly desirable Boston suburb that boasts no shortage of affluent professionals – including Abousamra's own father, a leading endocrinologist at Massachusetts General Hospital. Opportunities abounded for the younger Abousamra, who made the honor roll at a prestigious catholic high school and later the Dean's List at Northeastern University."*

Not all threats come from a terrorist mastermind. Stakelbeck refers to "chip away" attacks. This is not a new kind of Ben and Jerry's ice cream or Pillsbury cookie, but Stakelbeck's insightful awareness of one of the ISIS strategies to encourage *"smaller-scale, low-tech acts of terrorism that chip away at America's psyche and security."*

Stakelbeck references his book, *The Terrorist Next Door*, where Islamic terrorists like ISIS prey on wayward, lost, social outcasts as recruits. Americans tend to think of the threat to America. But with long borders, threats in Texas, New York, Minnesota, and California are unique.

America and all countries need to be aware, and prepared. Like a 12-step recovery program, the first step is to acknowledge that there is a problem and to call it by its name and certainly not to dismiss the threat as "jayvee" or fail to note it is 100 percent Islamic.

Threats in other countries and other parts of the world are no less relevant because by not counteracting these, ISIS is emboldened. The more ISIS gains strength in other countries, the more it can fan out and threaten the rest of the world, including America.

ISIS Exposed ends with a call to action. It's not just a recounting of the threats and wringing one's hands. He lists strategies to combat ISIS and other Islamic terror groups that make sense. This makes it required reading. I am working on a way to provide a copy of *ISIS Exposed* to every U.S. presidential candidate, every member of Congress, all 50 governors, the entire U.S. Cabinet and other world leaders so they can be informed and asked what's their plan is to counteract ISIS. (If you'd like to join me in sponsoring a copy as a gift, please be in touch directly.)

This is not reading for the faint of heart. *ISIS Exposed* reads as the making of a plot of a horror movie that could be our lives, or a novel, as we will see in the *Third Target*.

Tune in next week for part two of this two-part series.

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