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November 19, 2015: How to Defeat ISIS

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

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Title: How to Defeat ISIS

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11/19/2015—I have watched in amazement as the media has failed in analysis in the week since the Paris attacks. Shortly after the attacks, in a meeting in Vienna, the major world powers reached a framework to end the Syrian Civil War. There was to be a cease fire and then UN intervention followed by free elections. The precise timing of President Bashar Hafez al-Assad's leaving office was to be worked out. It was not final, but it was promising. And then...nothing. Back to more or less irrelevant bombing and Republican Party hints at more invasion on the ground—see a column by Mitt Romney. Although it holds territory in both Iraq and Syria, ISIS's current power is the product of the Syrian Civil War. End that war, end ISIS. The terrorist group is a political, not a military issue. Iraq has the military power to eliminate ISIS, but cannot rally Sunni forces because of its Shiite predominance. Iraq's failure is also political, not military. I am not making an argument against military intervention on moral grounds or even on national grounds. Such intervention is simply not necessary, nor even the most efficient way, to eliminate ISIS. Now, how far apart are the US and Russia—Obama and Putin? From the outside, not particularly far. Putin does not look like he is insisting that Assad remain permanently. The US seems to have dropped its demand that he leave before negotiations take place. All that is missing is the political will to make the deal. That will seemed present when it was understood that this is the way to fight ISIS and end the refugee flood into Europe. Now, that will has been diverted. Still, the framework remains and eventually someone will figure out that the world is close to solving this problem for now. Incidentally, even coming this close to a deal shows that the Russian intervention in Syria was great for the US and for everyone else. For the first time, a power with the ability to deliver Assad had an incentive to end the Civil War in Syria. Prior to that, Russia and Iran could just sit back. With the bombing of the Russian plane and the chaos in Europe, everyone needs peace—or at least a cease fire and the reconstruction of order. I'm optimistic. But where is the media? Where are what Paul Krugman calls the deep thinkers to point all this out?