

Isis And The Promotion Of Genocidal War

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By Ahmed Rashid

President Barack Obama's decision to [bomb the forces of Isis](#) (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) - in order to blunt the danger of a genocidal mass killing of tens of thousands of Christians and Yazidis seeking shelter in the mountains of northern Iraq without food and water - reflects a much-needed change of policy, but could be too little too late.

However, even more tragic has been the reaction or lack of it from leading Arab states including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, who now all feel threatened by the Isis advances but refuse to do anything about it.

By [dropping supplies](#) and the use of "[targeted](#)" [air power in Iraq](#), Mr Obama said he would try to prevent "a potential act of genocide". At least 40,000 Yazidis are stranded on a mountain side surrounded by Isis forces, while tens of thousands of Christians are also fleeing after Isis captured [Iraq's largest Christian town](#) of Qaraqosh and immediately started executing Christian policemen and civilians.

Never before in modern Islamic history has a group so mercilessly set out to not only undo long-standing frontiers in [Iraq](#) and [Syria](#), but also to carry out mass killings of Muslims and non-Muslims (Isis do not consider Shia as Muslims and has been executing them at will).

Even in the heyday of the Islamic empire that stretched as far as Madrid and Vienna, no conqueror treated non-Muslims with the ultimatum of conversion to its version of Islam or be killed - as [Isis](#) is doing in every town it captures. The Christians, Jews, [Yazidis](#) (whose beliefs originate in Zoroastrianism) and many other minorities, who constitute the essence of the Arab world and a showcase for Islam's early tolerance, are being destroyed before our eyes. By allowing Isis to do so we are destroying our own shared history, our humanity and the historical and geographical reality of centuries.

Until now nobody seemed to be overly concerned - especially Arab rulers who are themselves being threatened by Isis, as it tries to spread its notion of a caliphate to the eastern and western shores of the Middle East. Isis is already on the borders of [Saudi Arabia](#), Jordan and Lebanon. The Gulf states, their precious oil wealth and world's dependence on it, now seem to be just a hop, skip and a jump away.

Moreover, the worst is yet to come. Isis's main front line is against the Shia of southern Iraq where the Iraqi regime has tried to draw a line in the sand to protect Baghdad and the Shia shrine cities of Karbela and Najaf. At every opportunity Isis has executed Shia soldiers and civilians it has captured. It wants nothing less than to eliminate all Shia from the world.

Isis also has a new target - the [Sunni Kurds of northern Iraq](#), who are a minority but have been able to defend themselves against all intruders over the past two decades. Yet this week they seemed unprepared for Isis forces, who are now just a half an hour's drive from Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish semi-autonomous region. The Kurds constitute a secular, nationalist minority in Iraq, Turkey and Iran. If the Iraqi Kurds are defeated or forced to flee and Isis carries out its plan to try to eliminate all Kurds, the entire region of west Asia could also explode with Iran, Turkey and Pakistan getting sucked into an ever-widening conflict.

Less than a decade ago it was fashionable for US policy makers to consider humanitarian relief, as a major incentive for intervention and a strategic part of its foreign policy. Nobody - least of all the American people - wants to see another major military intervention by the US in the [Middle East](#), yet with these multiple looming catastrophes caused by Isis, it has taken America far too long to outline a policy or undertake humanitarian relief.

And still to make an appearance are the enormous and powerful air forces of the Gulf states for which their rulers have paid trillions of dollars, but now refuse to undertake the simplest of humanitarian measures and save the Arab world from further humiliation.

To watch and stand by as these minorities die in a region that is precious to every religion and people is to witness the end of an important part of our joint recorded history as we know and understand it.

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