

Striking a different path to fighting terrorism



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
On June 21, 2017, Islamic State militants destroyed Mosul's 12th-century al-Nuri mosque and its iconic minaret al-Hadba as Iraq's counter-terrorism units advanced within 164 feet of the structure.

This is hugely symbolic of the IS beating retreat from Mosul. That may effectively have been the curtains for its vestigial territorial hold on Iraq.

"Blowing up of the mosque," said the Iraqi prime minister, "amounted to an official acknowledgement of defeat by Daesh." For, it was from this mosque three years ago the militants' leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had declared a self-styled "caliphate" spanning parts of Syria and Iraq. In fact, he proclaimed himself "caliph" on July 4, 2014 after his followers had overrun vast swathes of Iraq and Syria.

Thus, the IS' territorial existence, though not its ambition, is put in dire straits. Its leadership hierarchy, even if the Russian claim of al-Baghdadi's death in an air strike on Raqqa is confirmed, remains more or less intact, according to reports.

It appears that the more their space shrunk in Syria and Iraq, the more aggressive and brutal became the terror attacks of converted lone wolves and the cells of the terror network in European capitals.

It is being increasingly felt that you cannot be battling an idea or suicidal bomber motivationally and physically wired with a neo-Jihadi killing mission completely out of character with the essence of Islam. Islam literally means peace; moreover, if one refers to the Prophet's (pbuh) Bidai Hajj speech, the totality of benign relations between communities and nations glows in superb radiance.

When such is the humanistic-spiritualist content of Islam, where is the place for enticing the youth to the "blissful embrace of heaven" if they were to die perpetrating a carnage on innocent people?

At this point, you regret the laidback indifference of the top-level Sunni and Shia ulema/clerics across the world (their lack of organisation needing badly to be overcome) to assert and instill the true essence of the religion in its followers.

It is worthwhile to note that whilst the IS, al-Qaeda and Boko Haram have each a command-and-control structure there is no respectable and unified international order at the top. Maybe, there's a semblance of an alliance to fight terrorism through intelligence-sharing but a united international approach in a multilateral sense is sorely missing. This is a contradiction because while launching an intervention they might have forged a common platform but in dealing with its results they fall apart. Another point to note is that their defence budgets are increasing by leaps and bounds but the allocations to fight far-right extremism fail to keep pace with it.

As a matter of fact, given the complexity and ramifications of internal security, it has to be equated with national security.

Actually, each country has to fight its own war against ideological extremism. The West's fight against it is migrant-centric and has to do with deterring European citizens of foreign origins from carrying out terror acts.

Our fight against terrorism is different from that of other countries. Granted, there is need for international and, especially, regional cooperation centring on intelligence-sharing and technical cooperation relating to cyber crimes and financing of terrorist outfits by vested quarters. But the fighting on the ground is essentially contextual.

Let's examine up close how we are doing in our fight against terrorism including, in particular, our counter-terrorism.

Admittedly, the intelligence-driven unearthing of terror dens, caches of weapons, subversive materials, arrest of suspects and killing of assailants have had a deterrent effect on terror attacks that might have been brewing. Nevertheless, the quality of information and their analysis leave much to be desired.

Bangladesh authorities, last year, released the names of 261 men who had gone missing,



The ravaged Great Mosque of al-Nuri, as seen through rubble in the Old City of Mosul. Iraqi forces say they've recaptured the landmark, where IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the group's "caliphate" in 2014.

PHOTO: AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP

in an apparent attempt to track them down. At the end of the very list was Jilani alias Abu Zidal. His real name was Ashequr Rahman, an engineering student dropout who travelled to Syria. IS notified him dead in action.

This is cited as an example of a slack in pursuing international links of radical Islamists groups in the country. "A grave error," according to regional experts on militant groups. When, however, the matter was reportedly brought up to the police, they said they went by whatever information the relatives of the missing men gave them.

Banking officials, it is gathered, admit of being "lost when it came to interdicting foreign funding for the attacks."

July 1 (Holey Artisan) and July 7 (Sholakia) militant attacks last year were described as the work of homegrown militants. "There is no IS inside the country,"—although that did not preclude a link to it—was the stock answer. It is claimed, "Many lone wolves and sleeper cell jihadis have pledged support to IS around the world. But their actual link to their command-and-control structure is unclear."

According to critics, our shortcomings are two-fold. First, an unrelenting focus on domestic Islamic militants faced challenges in tracking movements of money and people from abroad. Second, a certain political overtone is discerned in the

conduct of anti-terrorism activities.

We seek a new pattern of emphases on checkmating ideological extremism. First, we should become fully objective and professional in our approach. Second, we have to further step up precaution to ward off surprises. And finally, we need to neutralise the vicious doses of motivation by a superior knowledge-based inculcation of values. Let's have de-radicalisation circles all over the country under state and private sector patronisation.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

The Macron Doctrine?



ZAKI LAÏDI

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to Paris as his first foreign guest, while US

President Donald Trump will attend this year's Bastille Day celebrations. By reaching out to two world leaders who made no secret of their hope that he would never make it to the Élysée Palace, Macron has set the stage for a new and ambitious French foreign policy.

The message Macron is sending is that he will remain open to new opportunities for compromise—talking to anyone who is willing, but without glossing over disagreements. His foreign policy seeks to restore France's central position on the world stage, while remaining firmly committed to Europe.

Macron's foreign-policy effectiveness will depend on his ability to bring about a domestic economic turnaround—a lesson learned from Macron's predecessor François Hollande. Beyond a military intervention against Islamist militants in Mali, Hollande achieved little on the international stage, precisely because he lacked credibility at home, owing to France's economic weakness.

It is too early to tell whether Macron will succeed where Hollande failed. But it is already clear that Macron possesses some valuable skills and attributes that his predecessor lacked: undeniable charisma, an ability to connect with foreign leaders (thanks partly to his fluent English), a solid grasp of

global issues, and a drive to implement economic reform. Macron will also benefit from external factors. For starters, the economic situation not only in France, but throughout Europe, has recently improved substantially. Moreover, France and Germany seem

France will have neither the means nor the ambition to supplant the US on the world stage. But Macron does want France to exercise more influence over the international system—an ambition that is underscored by the way he addresses Putin and Trump.

Macron's perspective, however, the disagreements that will shape the bilateral relationship had to be laid out, and a clear power dynamic established, before dialogue could occur.

The major test of the Russia-France relationship lies in Syria—an

chemical weapons again. It is not yet clear whether Macron's approach will succeed; but France has reestablished itself, at least for now, as a player in Syria.

As for Trump, Macron's disagreement with him mostly concerns multilateral issues. France and Europe place much stock in multilateralism, which supports burden sharing. The Trump administration's tendency toward trade protectionism—not to mention financial deregulation—is therefore a source of serious concern.

But it is Trump's commitment to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement that is most problematic to Macron, who plans to work with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to bring about a US reversal. If this effort succeeds, Macron will have established France as an effective advocate and practitioner of multilateralism.

Macron has another objective with regard to Trump: to prevent disagreements from undermining their ability to pursue shared interests, especially in the fight against terrorism. In Syria, for example, the French and US positions are rather closely aligned, and Trump has already shown more willingness than his predecessor, Barack Obama, to enforce a "red line" on the use of chemical weapons. But Trump's Syria policy remains confused, with few clear lines having really been drawn and significant discrepancies between the claims of Trump and his own cabinet.

Of course, Trump's threats of disengagement from NATO also worry France. But France has always sought to maintain a capacity for strategic autonomy, and Macron hopes that the weakening of the US

strategic guarantee will convince Europeans, who have long lagged on the establishment of a stronger common defence posture, to do the same.

Considerable economic, strategic, and cultural obstacles to the emergence of a European defence posture no doubt remain, including among those within some French industrial circles who oppose open tenders for defence contracts. But there are signs of progress. Most notably, the European Commission has for the first time decided to offer European funding for key military programmes, especially in research and development.

It will take time to marshal not just the money, but also (and more challenging) the political will. But rising uncertainty over America's reliability—together with the departure of the UK, which has long opposed European defence, from the European Union—has already spurred Germany to acknowledge the need for progress. And, of course, progress for Europe is progress for France, as Europe acts as a multiplier of its national power.

There is not yet a "Macron Doctrine." But Macron's foreign policy goals are coming into focus: increase France's credibility by reversing its economic decline; bolster the Franco-German axis in Europe; strengthen Europe's role in the world; and engage with everyone. It is a realist approach—but certainly not a cynical one.

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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)



PHOTO: STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN/AFP

Macron has set the stage for a new and ambitious French foreign policy by reaching out to Putin and Trump, who made no secret of their hope that Macron would never make it to the Élysée Palace.

to be converging on a large number of global issues. Add to that the United Kingdom's self-isolation and Trump's erratic "America first" policies, and Macron is in a strong position to establish himself as a key champion of multilateralism.

Of course, even if Macron does guide an economic turnaround,

Just a couple of weeks after his election, Macron slammed Russian state-owned media for employing "lying propaganda" to smear him during the campaign—while standing right next to Putin himself. No French leader since Charles de Gaulle would have dared to stand up to Russia in such a public way. From

issue that, so far, Macron has handled skillfully. He intentionally set aside the question of whether Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would remain in power (as Putin wants) or be deposed (as the US and others desire), but also made it clear that France would intervene militarily if Assad were to use

QUOTABLE Quote

DOLORES HUERTA
 American labour leader and civil rights activist

Every moment is an organising opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Real bargain
- 6 Gambler's concern
- 10 Maze wall, at times
- 11 Is patient
- 13 German steel city
- 14 Silver bar
- 15 Hoppy brew
- 16 Wallet bill
- 18 Writer Levin
- 19 Meteor
- 22 Antique
- 23 Book unit
- 24 Draws close to
- 27 Strong winds
- 28 Wheel bar
- 29 Fizz ingredient
- 30 1974 Earth, Wind

& Fire song

- 35 Truck part
- 36 Used a spade
- 37 In the style of
- 38 Texas landmark
- 40 Admit
- 42 Defy authority
- 43 Put up
- 44 Hangs low
- 45 Challenges

DOWN

- 1 Bundle of papers
- 2 Physicist Nikola
- 3 Bygone car
- 4 Maturity
- 5 Soup veggies
- 6 Having debts
- 7 Football's Marino
- 8 Like some watches
- 9 Closet use
- 12 Rude looks
- 17 Finish
- 20 Film dom's Sophia
- 21 Stretches over
- 24 Sprint Cup awardee
- 25 Breathes out
- 26 "Open Sesame" sayer
- 27 Laughed coyly
- 29 African grazer
- 31 Pop stars
- 32 Spud
- 33 Tea party guest
- 34 Tirades
- 39 Ryan of "Top Gun"
- 41 Important time

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

P	A	I	D	B	E	E	R	
C	O	T	T	A	A	L	L	E
A	L	L	O	T	L	O	E	W
B	E	A	N	E	R	S	V	O
L	A	S	B	E	A	T	E	R
E	X	T	R	A	S	I	N	K
A	R	T	U	R				
A	L	E	C	O	N	E	A	C
B	E	A	K	E	R	S	M	A
A	M	T	B	E	A	V	E	R
C	A	S	E	S	V	A	L	E
K	N	U	T	E	R	I	E	S
S	P	A	N	D	Y	E	R	

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

CINEMA TEN

1. THE FRODO BAGGINS
2. WWW.COM
3. A WALKER
4. MORT'S DASH
5. BEETLE
6. WALKER
7. COME
8. COME
9. BEETLE

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

EM DOING A LOAD OF JEANS. DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY DARK STUFF?

DOES THAT INCLUDE THE FOURTH-GRADER'S MOOD?

UH-OH.