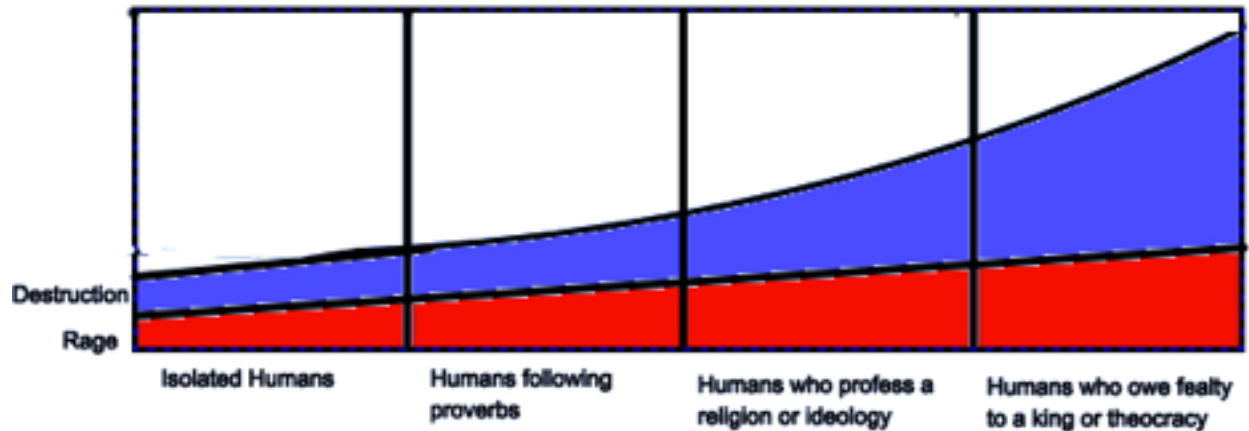


Ablation of ISIS on Four Levels

Aaron Zappaz



Levels 1 through 4

The summary schematic above indicates that on the bottom level, the level of least anger or rage, the phenomenon must be as constant as friction in human lives.

1. From the most primitively organized and educated human being that we might find, let's say that it might be a feral child of three who has never been in contact with other humans since shortly after it was weaned, to the most highly educated and financially secure individual of the present, a fly will always bite just after dawn or the toast will get burned or the environment will impinge on the human in some other negative way. There is no escape from things in the environment that do

not go our way. Humans react in anger against events that they do not know how to counteract rationally.

2. In early human societies, discoveries are preserved by using language. In this article they will all be called "proverbs" for short. It is not for idle entertainment that children are told the story of the little boy who cried wolf. Some such fables, parables, proverbs, and other shorthand ways of preserving insights are helpful, but they may also be dangerous over-generalizations. Too often, people seize upon them as immutable truths, and as a result they may make the same mistakes over and over again, wondering all the while why their activities are counterproductive.

3. Among human societies, each may have one or more systems of teaching that bring together founding insights with the words and insights of sages and holy men, systems that have the additional function of organizing people for action.

Proverbs, other teaching stories, and histories are collected, systematized, and written out as revered texts such as the Old Testament. If the authority of God is claimed to uphold the absolute truth of the collection of religious truths, that collection is protected from arbitrary changes by later people who would take the reins of religious leadership, but it also means, for all people who can understand logic, that if one sentence claimed to be divinely inspired is empirically disproven, then all of the text becomes subject to doubt. People who use these religious texts as instruments through which to control their subjects will be highly resistant to any attempts to challenge the factual accuracy of their texts. The causes of anger and rage forever present in life in the world can lead to aggressions directed against the religious group, and the reactions of the members of the community can

vary from immediate anger to ingrained rage when rational remedies cannot be found and carried out. Actions of individuals linked by their religious systems make them powerful, especially against unorganized outsiders.

4. Religions depend on belief to attract followers, and ostracism to retaliate against those who fall away, but nations depend on the punitive power of the king or other head of state to compel the fealty of all citizens, especially as taxpayers and soldiers.

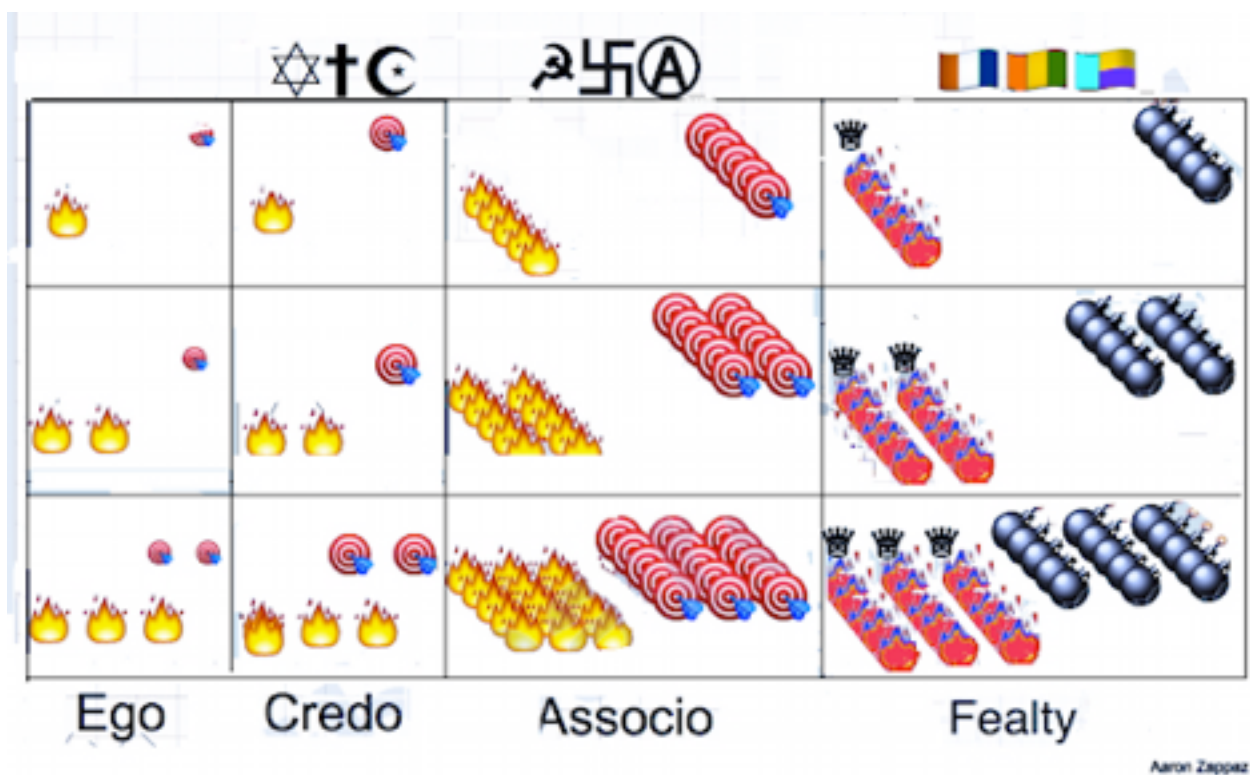
Kings and other potentates can use the anger and rage that besets subjects as individuals, use the lessons imbued in all members of the community through their culture to motivate the people ("Spare the rod and spare the child" can be used as a rationalization for capital punishment for disrespect shown to the king, for instance.) However, religions organize and integrate systems of belief that are powerful agents implying action in their cultures. They ordinarily lack the force of arms to compel obedience to their teachings. In fact, they may seek to borrow the power of the state to force their believers to do as their religious teachings would have them do.

Bringing in religion and "the word of God" to rationalize the power of life and death given to the king and the state can vastly magnify the power of a ruler who would otherwise depend only on the right of conquest and the subsequent force of arms to maintain his position. In some cases, religious leaders become temporal leaders, in some cases temporal leaders are declared to be gods or are declared to rule by the divine right of kings.

5. The above-mentioned factors are the levels of social, religious, and political development at which ISIS must be combated. Victory can only be achieved by a process of attrition,

but failure to see the ways in which higher levels are based in and dependent on the lower and more general layers leads to defeat. A leadership core or even just a manual of operations for ISIS might be preserved after the general destruction of it and its look-alikes. As long as the other three factors remain, it will not be difficult to make a new beginning on the fourth frontier.

A Closer Look at the Four Levels



There is one source of energy and it is the same for all four levels. In the schematic diagram above, the negative reactions of individuals against forces that impinge upon them from the environment are shown in symbolic form. Need to compress the intensity symbols into a range suitable for one diagram has led to the use of a fire symbol, a darker, redder, fire symbol, groups of five fire symbols indicating humans under a common source

of organization who pool their rage, and darker, redder symbols of the same type, but now dominated by a symbol for a sovereign. The external actors who attract the negative attention of the people of a country may become more intensely active as the country gains wealth and power because of its organization and industry.

The first column shows the individual against the world, with no cultural adaptations and with no allies or associates indicated. The second column shows the level of organization wherein certain individuals are united by common beliefs that they acquire during the process of childrearing and enculturation. The third column show how things stand when individuals become organized into one or more religious faiths, usually with a written core of beliefs and traditions. The fourth column shows individuals as organized into nations whether theocratic, monarchical, democratic, or of other forms. The state has functions through the use of its organized power, including the legal right to execute or otherwise penalize individuals, of compelling people to cooperate in achieving the goals of the state and of its leaders.

The above diagram helps explain why plans presently being advocated as sure-fire ways to defeat ISIS are severely deficient.

ISIS and similar organizations must be attacked on all four levels. Note that most of these levels and institutions are not the natural targets of the nation state.

- **The level of traumatized individuals.**
- The level of **unqualified or quasi-religious beliefs**, beliefs or values that one learns simply by becoming enculturated.
- The level of **systematized beliefs, traditional religions, ideologies** such as Communism, etc. For ISIS, this amounts to the salafist form of Islam that it has modified and now professes.
- The level of **the state**, i.e., of an organization that can **demand fealty** of its citizens using the monopoly on lethal power and judicial punishment that states arrogate for themselves.

I. There would be no ISIS problem if the individuals who form the core population of ISIS membership had not been systematically traumatized in the course of their enculturation and/or in the course of their growth and development toward adulthood, especially in fragile, failed, and failing states. However, conditions that have taken form over centuries cannot be remedied in time to prevent significant damage to others in the near future, so more than this fundamental problematical level must be treated. Note the the West now reaps what it has sown in the Middle East over the last two centuries.

II. The cultural practices and beliefs that are problematical would be ameliorated if community leaders could gain the courage to challenge those negative elements that are accepted primarily because of their antiquity. Only in the last century or so have humans gained the knowledge and techniques by which to evaluate child rearing practices, to determine what the likely outcomes of various kinds of child rearing practices are. It was formerly common, for instance, to try to force toilet training on

children before their neurophysiology was sufficiently developed to permit them to control their own urination and bowel movements. The resultant psychological and somatic dysfunctions have been difficult to treat, but the simple expedient of using more rational forms of toilet training have prevented those dysfunctions from ever developing. In the United States, we still have parents who insist on using corporal punishment as a central technique in child rearing. They rationalize the practice and thereby influence their own children to continue this pattern of abuse on into the next generation. These matters can be changed, but it requires the cooperation of community leaders with the real authority to challenge the rationalizers who will try to hang onto the bad choices made in antiquity. Cultural progress in the Islamic world has been moribund for centuries.

III. Attempts to ameliorate the factional struggles, the various forms of Islam that preach and fight over contradictory and often hateful messages to the faithful would appear to be almost impossible. Islam has not been able to solve its own problems peacefully in over a thousand years. Even today, peaceful followers of the Sufi tradition are killed for unacceptable poetic or musical expressions. (See account of the life of Amjad Sabri.) There is no overarching figure who can mediate between Sunni and Shia or among all the denominations or sects of Islam. It would be a welcome if ironic development if someone not a Muslim could perform this function. However, it would appear certain that any such solution must remain a fantasy.

IV. Present leaders of ISIS are, judging by their behavior and decisions, very much in the model of European kings who accepted Christianity only to use it as a tool to buttress their own political positions, confer the silver plate of divinity on their base-

metal policies, and work forward toward creation of a powerful state under their form of rule. People who actually believe some sort of religious extremist doctrine and rationalize their own evil behavior on that basis generally will resist arguments that challenge them on intellectual or theological grounds by turning to the use of torture and execution against doubters and dissidents.

As temporal leaders, these ISIS figures have command of armies. They can compel members of the populations they control to join the army, and to serve in it for some substantial period of time, to follow orders, and to go to war with other states on behalf of their sovereign.

All the more basic or fundamental levels of anger, rage, and reactions directed against the world and against the sources of these bad feelings have depended on the volition of individuals. Not so for the subjects of ISIS and similar quasi-states.

The single individuals who face an assault of one kind or another in their daily lives will chose whether to retaliate and how to retaliate all on the basis of their individual resources.

Those individuals who have learned the lore of their culture may depend on narratives they have learned from their own community or their own ethnic group. One person may have learned, "A gentle voice turneth away wrath," and react to an assault in one way. Another may have heard that "a stitch in time saves nine," and decide that a quick retaliation against something interpreted as an assault is better than encouraging the perpetrator to repeat the performance because of receiving no penalty the first time. As a community of individuals who all

have absorbed the same lore, however, their actions are likely to become unintentionally coordinated. If two individuals observe a large man bullying a teenage boy, they may both decide to teach the bully a lesson. They may simultaneously close on him without there being any proper discussion about what to do.

The single individuals who join a religious community, and perhaps learn from the same wise man or prophet, are still doing so as free acts of will. The state does not compel belief, or, if it did, they could feign compliance until they found an opportunity to slip away. These would be people like Taliban members. The level of organization is primary local and/or tribal. The same kind of membership characteristics would apply, e.g., to members of the Communist International. Nobody gets drafted into such organizations. The worst that can happen to someone who decided to quit would be an extra-judicial assassination.

ISIS, or the so-called Islamic State, follows most of the requirements for a state, but it is unusual in being a state without a stable territory of its own. It must conquer and hold territories that have long been regions of other, still-existing, nations. It has the potential, providing it can gain and hold territory for the long term, of directing its army against surrounding states, attacking more distant states by the use of ballistic missiles, etc.

The above analysis leads to the following policy recommendations:

The United States and its allies ought to prioritize research into the factors that, independent of political interference, motivate the immense rage that characterizes the typical ISIS recruit. (There are also individuals who have not suffered themselves suffered grave

damage but who empathize with those who have and take their part against what they regard as world-scale predators, i.e., the United States and its allies.)

Government officials and spokespeople for the United States ought to give due recognition to all the views and insights expressed by members of the communities from which ISIS draws its recruits. It would have been counterproductive to ignore the valid arguments of those who opposed Apartheid in South Africa, and make mention only of those who voiced the opinions and judgments of the state. The United States and its allies might find ways of supporting non-governmental efforts to sort out the conflicting opinions and even tortured arguments that surround theological disputes within Islam. Is it really possible to construct a logical bridge from the most fundamental values of Islam to the taking of sex slaves, the random killing of "non-believers," and/or any other of the extremist and brutal behaviors declared to be the rewards due to ISIS fighters?

The United States and its allies must elaborate and maintain a grand strategy for combating the development and spread of the so-called Islamic State. Not only must it countervail against the acts of war of this quasi-state, but it must do everything it can to smooth the paths toward the development of a growing pool of qualified and well-motivated leaders of the Middle East for the future.

The amount of real research done to determine the range and intensities of child rearing practices across the Arab world is not great. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that the general Arab culture is not in the forefront of enlightened child nurture and management.

The roots of the ISIS phenomenon go deep and would not die even if all members of the current al Qaida, ISIS, and other such peace-destroying groups were to be killed. The root conditions being still in existence and even thriving in the aftermath of this second Crusade, it is entirely possible that an even more barbaric religious cult and ideology would emerge to try to found a nation dedicated to expediting rule by the new cult.

Passages in the Koran and other religious texts that have so successfully been interpreted to encourage religiously motivated followers to take extreme measures would still be available to a new brand of extremism. There also exists a large corpus of beliefs and practices that are accepted, and even defended on grounds of their being long-accepted cultural characteristics. They constitute a corpus of items that everybody believes and everybody always practices. (Failing to observe these practices risks many kinds of punitive responses.) Their essentially abusive nature makes them potent sources of dysfunction and, projected forward, encourages new abuses of the following generation.

Several religions have been formed on the basis of ancient narratives that purport to record the activities and even the words of God, and these religions serve the interests of their own group by giving positive sanctions to defensive and even offensive behaviors on behalf of the group. Once communities are formed that are based on or are strengthened and supported by a common religious belief, it becomes possible to direct the activities of several community members at a single common foe, and the defensive and offensive behaviors become more effective or influential than the almost random reactions of single humans who happen to encounter some kind of assault.

Individual communities may be supported by different religious traditions, but if several communities share a religious tradition, then an official church structure can be constituted, and the religious leader of the several communities is then in a position to give positive sanction to the coordinated defensive or aggressive actions of the several communities against a common adversary. Groups of communities taking on a series of single adversaries in sequence have a clear military advantage.

The amalgamation of many communities into a nation led by a single leader (king) is often accompanied by an ideological justification for the ruling power bestowed upon the king. In the past, the ideologies used generally had a god at their center. Even the people of traditional China, generally regarded as having a humanist ideology, trace their justifications for nationhood and rule by a king (or, later, emperor) back to a belief in the beneficent interest in human welfare of Heaven. Later in history, ideologies such as Communism have taken on the general numinous glory of a religion while denying the possibility of the existence of any god. Buddhism is another form of belief that would seem to deprecate nationhood and yet has sometimes formed the primary system of belief supporting a secular regime.

On a local or regional basis, the religious life of many communities may be linked through a "mother church" and its informal connection with other churches in the region that group themselves under the older and/or larger community's leadership. In a sense, the various subsets of Islam fall into this category since there is no overall hierarchy, and dominance relations within grouped communities may be fluid. There is no overall equivalent of a Pope or of a papacy.

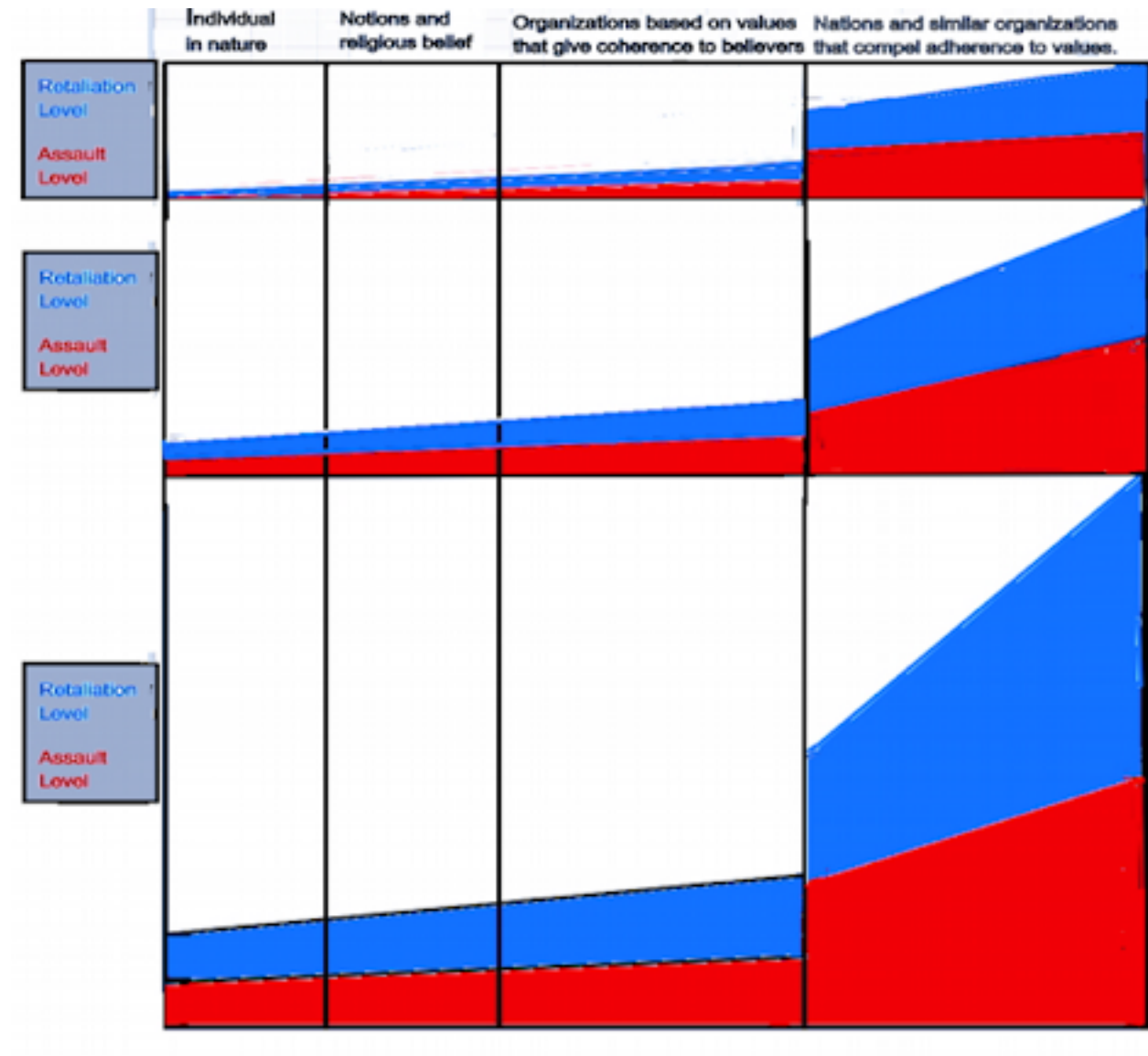
When communities become formally linked and rule over a set of communities, or of communities organized in a hierarchical way, then a king or analogous ruler stands at the apex of the organization. Furthermore, at this stage being the subject of a certain ruler is not optional. If one is born a citizen of France, then the French king can decide when and for how long you become a soldier, when you go to war, etc. When kings decide to wage war, the range of destructive results can become much greater than under simpler forms of community organization. If Germany decides to go to war with France, it will be extremely difficult for any healthy young man to avoid military service, and, as the twentieth century showed, the idea of non-combatant civilians observing the war safely from the sidelines turned out to be a bad joke.

In the history of Europe, monarchs were typically supported though religious affirmation of their right to rule, but the religions kept their autonomy, making a rather unstable relationship with much intrigue being involved from time to time.

It is also possible for a church organization to take over the functions of a civil state. The authority of the religion is used in place of the usual reasons given to support the authority of the ruler, e.g., rightful inheritance of the reign, direct investment by God, etc. In such cases, rejection of the authority of the state becomes tantamount to rejection of the commandments of God.

The following schematic diagram represents the same relationships indicated in the previous schematic, but in a slightly different format. Note that there is no scale of measures by which to quantize these relations, nor has any comprehensive attempt

been made to quantize these relationships by traditional measures.



Note that as organization of humans from level to level increase, the level at which individuals experience aversive inputs from their environment increases. Single individuals, free hunter-gatherers in nature, attract predators only because of their own efforts to secure food, lodging, etc., and because of their successes

in concentrating resources on themselves. When these form groups to live and hunt together, to farm together, etc., their group wealth attracts the attention of predators on a more regular basis. When they form farming communities or other settlements, they both present richer targets to others and also potentially impeach on the livelihoods of others living in the area. Citizens of the modern nation state have no alternative when it comes to serving in the military, either to attempt to conquer neighbors or to protect their countries from predatory attempts of others. The coercive influence of the community and the state has the potential to become more and more suffocating because of its multiple influences on the modes of livelihood permitted to individuals, the reproductive behavior of individuals, etc.