INSIGHT

Limits of war

Nadim Nassar says ending the conflict in Syria is vital to defeat Islamic State and its extremist ideology

Aristotle believed that nature abhors a vacuum. As we have seen in the Middle East in recent years, it is not only nature: politics abhors a vacuum too.

The political conflict in Syria, between the regime that has ruled the country for the last 40 years and its varied opponents, directly resulted in the partial collapse of an ordered society, albeit a dictatorial one. In much of Syria, where once there was order and governmental institutions, we find petty principalities briefly ruled by one opposition movement or another.

Shifting alliances, internecine squabbles and a strong determination by every faction leader to seize power for himself meant that the opposition focused on soldiers, weapons and logistics rather than on rebuilding the civic infrastructure in their area. The result was, inevitably, chaos.

Into this chaos came a new order built around a twisted understanding of Islam and a fondness for sectarian violence. This new order is, of course, Islamic State.

Before the Arab spring destabilised an entire region, the idea of a theocratic, extremist state erupting out of nowhere in the Middle East would have been regarded as ludicrous. Now, it is a nightmare which we all share: modern Islamic religious extremism, born out of the fire of conflict in Iraq and Syria, showers the entire planet with the glowing embers of hatred and religious fanaticism. These embers can catch light anywhere, and they produce a warped misinterpretation of faith that excludes, denies and even hates all others.

The consequences of this can be dreadful. As the spark of extremism spreads, the very cohesion of our diverse communities is threatened. We have seen this most recently in Paris, but we should not forget the atrocities already committed all around the world in the name of religious extremism.

DAVID HUMPHRIES

> **A victim mentality is burning into the psyche of many Muslims – even those who reject fanaticism**
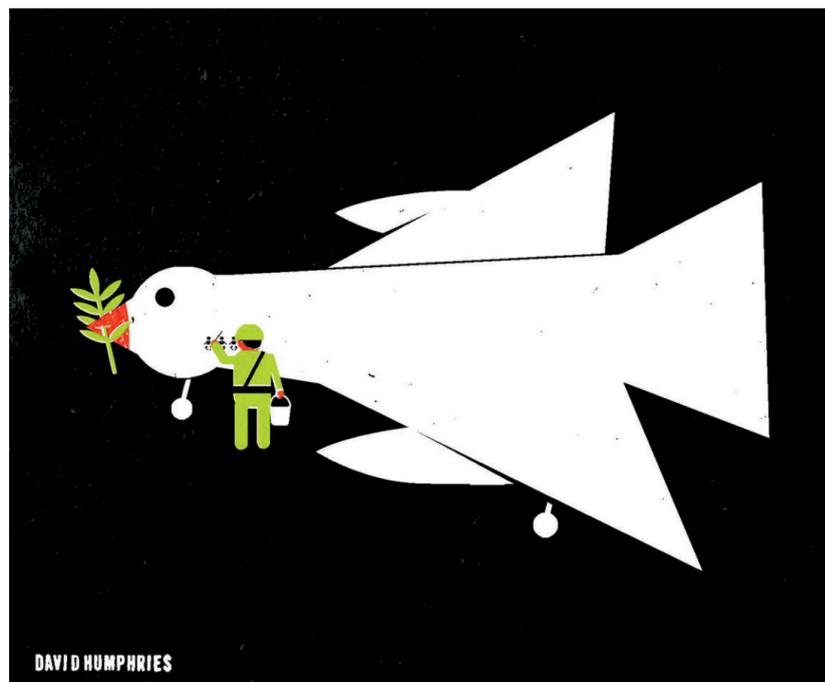
What lies behind Islamic State? Firstly, it relies upon a poisonous religious extremism which only Muslims themselves can defeat, and, secondly, it receives plenty of help from other quarters – and this is a world problem.

Firstly, let's look at the religious extremism that is at the heart of Islamic State. This extremism is fuelled by abusing the way Islam interprets and understands the Koran and the Hadith (the recorded saying of the Prophet Mohammed), and by the portrayal of Islam as being under attack. Those who incite young people to kill and to die in the name of Islam are using the Koran and the Hadith, and it is not enough merely to say that they are misinterpreting those sacred scriptures.

In addition, far too many Muslim leaders portray Islam as a victim, a victim of the West, a victim of everyone. This victim mentality is burning into the psyche of many Muslims – even those who reject fanaticism – and this gives great fuel to the extremists, enabling them to mobilise for the physical, military defence of Islam. This is the meta-narrative of the jihadis.

Due to the spread of radicalisation and hundreds of organisations like Islamic State, al-Qaeda and Jab-hat al-Nusra, it can no longer be sufficient to say that they "have nothing to do with Islam". Everything they do is in the name of Islam!

Muslims must respond to the hijacking and corrupting of their faith by the jihadis by boldly embarking on their own journey to reform and restore Islam: a new counter-narrative must be developed within Islam which gives new guidance on how to relate their scriptures to their lives today – not in a way that compromises them, but which highlights and examines the truth of many difficult passages – the very passages that the preachers of hate rely on.

The other step that Muslims must take is to learn to reject the falsehoods behind the extremists' victim mentality. Now is the time for radical reform and renewal rather than retreat and resentment.

Secondly, we need to understand the financial and logistical engines that have enabled Islamic State to become such a major power in the Middle East and beyond. This organisation had the resources to capture Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, as well as Raqqa, a major city in Syria, and its province.

There must be governments and banking systems behind Islamic State. This expansion could not have happened without huge support – financially, logistically and militarily – from someone else. Islamic State has been importing jihadis and weapons, and it has been exporting US$1 million worth of oil through Turkey every day. Of

> **We cannot justify a war-like solution before exhausting the ways to work for a political solution**

course, Turkey is not alone. Islamic State is greatly helped by some of the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia. The Gulf States and Turkey are strong allies of America and the West. How can they support Islamic State without being challenged? The West should be confronted about its apparent inaction in the face of their allies' behaviour.

What can the world do to stop Islamic State exporting religious extremism and sectarian hatred? We cannot hope to begin to contain it while Islamic State is able to call itself a "state", and it will not cease to exist while war and chaos tear asunder the communities of the Middle East. Sadly, the Syrian war has been raging since 2011, and the conflict in Iraq, started with the Western invasion of that country in 2003, has never gone away – it merely smouldered until Western leaders brought their troops home, then burst into a fire even brighter than before.

Now, nations join hands as the Security Council unanimously calls on all UN members to fight Islamic State. Does this mean the answer to warfare and violence in the Middle East is supposed to be the importation of more war and violence?

We cannot possibly justify a war-like solution before exhausting the many ways to work for a political, economic and diplomatic solution that genuinely ends the threat of Islamic State to Muslims, Christians and other minorities of the Middle East, and indeed to the world. A military "solution" will only disperse Islamic State, scattering its poison even more widely and bestowing its members with an ever-greater sense of martyrdom, victimhood and vengeance.

The nations of the world need to say that "enough is enough". It is time to end the war in Syria, and stop the chaos and the violence; this is the first step in stopping Islamic State and its stunted world view.

Wars are not stopped when there is no one left to fight: they are stopped when the parties to that conflict realise that none of them have anything to gain by continuing to fight, and that it is time to stop, and to work together to save their country. We saw this in Lebanon after 15 years of bloody civil warfare; we even saw it in Versailles after four years of world war: dialogue stops warfare, not bullets.

Only a Syrian peace can save Syria; we need the whole world to make this a reality. When the violence stops, then we can work to re-establish stability and rebuild our communities. Without war, Islamic State will wither and die as it is denied its resources; then, its very life force will be extinguished.

The Reverend Nadim Nassar is the director and co-founder of the Awareness Foundation, an international Christian charity that works to equip Christians everywhere to form an effective counter force to the intolerance and aggression that now prevail in so many communities, and to build understanding between the faiths. www.awareness-foundation.com

---

Time to discuss ethical issues of driverless cars

Franklin Koo says the tussle over the use of Tesla's software in Hong Kong highlights the concern about morality and liability that must be addressed if the technology is to be of benefit

In October, Tesla introduced its autopilot software, updating its cars in Hong Kong and across the globe. The software enabled the option for automated driving, a feature similar to what aircraft pilots use. The aim is to improve safety, minimise jams, allow the efficient use of energy and reduce stress for road users. Even so, the feature was short-lived here: last month, Tesla disabled the feature on its cars in Hong Kong following a government request. With the technology in limbo, there are crucial issues concerning ethics and liability that need addressing.

In the event of an unavoidable collision, the decision-making of an autonomous car would ultimately rest in the hands of programmers writing the algorithms. Consider a revised version of the "trolley problem" used in ethics discussion: a child suddenly dashes onto the road, forcing the self-driving car to choose between hitting the child or swerving onto an oncoming truck in the other lane. With an autonomous car, the manufacturer now has the responsibility of planning such a scenario beforehand, as opposed to a person making a split-second decision. The algorithms, which decide how the car will behave, should be regulated to ensure it reacts responsibly. Jean-Francois Bonnefon at the Toulouse School of Economics in France suggests that the algorithms will need to accomplish three objectives: be consistent, not cause public outrage, and not discourage buyers.

Uniform algorithm standards could ensure consistency and predictability. However, this is difficult to implement since vehicles differ in size, acceleration and braking. Applying the above scenario, an SUV may choose to collide with the truck since it would offer better protection to occupants, while a compact car would probably choose not to.

Keeping it simple could avoid the ethical dilemma altogether. A project called CityMobil2 tests automated transit vehicles in various Italian cities. The vehicles simply follow a route and brake if something gets in the way.

Algorithms are so integral to an autonomous car that liability may shift from the traditional role of the driver to the manufacturer. Nonetheless, increasing liability may be premature since the use of autonomous cars could save lives.

> **Unlike a person, self-driving cars never get tired or distracted, and can foresee the traffic based on radar**

According to the World Health Organisation, about 1.25 million people die on roads worldwide every year. It is hoped that autonomous cars could significantly lower the number of fatalities, since, unlike a person, self-driving cars never get tired, drunk or distracted, and can foresee the traffic based on radar. Burdening the automaker with additional legal liability at the outset would only slow development of the technology.

By contrast, a vehicle in the hands of an irresponsible driver can be a lethal weapon. The same, of course, can be said for a malfunctioning or neglected autonomous car. The automaker should be held liable if an accident occurs due to inaccurate data updates affecting a car's navigational system, for instance. Furthermore, car manufacturers must respect local laws, ensure timely maintenance and prevent vulnerabilities such as hacking.

The legal position is currently unclear for autonomous cars. Hong Kong law does not yet make a distinction between an autonomous car and one driven by a person in its Road Traffic Ordinance. However, the commissioner for transport does have the power to ask Tesla to disable its autopilot software. Currently, there is no legal framework even at an international level.

A simple implementation of the technology could overcome some of the ethical issues involved. It is a manufacturer's duty to ensure the car is safe, though a unilateral shifting of the owner's liability to the manufacturer may not be desirable. The government must tread carefully in achieving a fair balance.

The time is ripe for consumers, the government and automakers to discuss legislation and safety standards to ensure issues of ethics, liability and law are addressed so that autonomous cars can be allowed on Hong Kong roads again.

Franklin Koo is an accredited mediator and author of Power to the People: Extending the Jury to the Hong Kong District Court. franklin.koo@gmail.com

A Tesla car equipped with autopilot software is taken for a test drive in California. Photo: Bloomberg

---

Helping with all the homework is not just a job for mum

Kelly Yang says the expectation that a woman, even one with a full-time job, should take on the bulk of housework and childcare duties is a big part of what's holding women back, and it has to change

The other day, my son's teacher sent me an email to tell me that my son, who is five years old, had not completed his online maths homework in about three weeks. As soon as my husband found out, he turned to me and asked, "How could you drop the ball on this?"

Guilt and confusion morphed together into a lump in my throat. Part of me wanted to apologise – to my son, my husband and my son's teacher. The other part of me wanted to ask: Wait, when did it become my ball to drop?

Like many couples, we both work full time. We work roughly the same number of hours at similarly intense and stressful jobs. Yet, these days, I find myself taking on the bulk of the homework duty. With three children and maths, English and Chinese, that's a lot of homework. I tell myself it's because I'm good at it. After all, I am an educator. However, let's be honest, even if I wasn't, I'd probably still be the one who does it.

That's because mums on average take on more childcare duties than dads. A new study released in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* followed nearly 200 couples in Ohio State University's New Parents Project over a period of years. Some 95 per cent of these couples said they wanted an egalitarian marriage, to split the housework and childcare equally.

Then they had a baby. As soon as that happened, the 50/50 deal went out the window. By the time the baby was nine months old, the mothers were putting in 37 hours of housework and childcare each week on top of working full time. The fathers, on the other hand, were only putting in 24 hours.

A 13-hour difference may not sound like much but they can mean the difference between going for that next big project or taking a back seat.

It's little wonder only 5 per cent of Fortune 500 CEOs in the US are women. Globally, women represent only 10 per cent of board-level positions, despite making up 40 per cent of the workforce. Here in Hong Kong, only 4 per cent of the CEOs of listed companies are women.

All this is depressing. Yet, when I step into the classroom, I am continuously amazed by the sharp and insightful observations my female students come up with.

Earlier this week, I led a group of spirited female students to debate against women from all around the world in the BBC 100 Women global debate. I watched as these girls ripped through questions like "Does a woman need to act like a man in order to lead?" They said things like, "You don't have to wear pants in order to be a leader. All you need is your strength of will and, when it comes to that, women can easily match up to men."

Hearing these young girls speak their minds with gusto and passion, I was never more optimistic about the future of women.

At the same time, I couldn't help but wonder: if this is the way girls start off – full of energy and the determination to go out and conquer the world – then why don't more of them do just that? What happens along the way that stops them in their tracks?

Homework duty, that's what. It's the automatic expectation that women would and should take on the bulk of the child rearing, no matter how many hours they are working.

Whether it's making the cupcakes for the class birthday party or checking over spelling on a rainy Sunday afternoon, people still think of these activities as *mum* activities. Well, they're not. They're everyone activities.

So, after my husband asked the question, I turned to him and said, "I didn't drop the ball on the math. Honey, *we* dropped the ball."

Kelly Yang teaches writing at The Kelly Yang Project, an after-school centre for writing and debate in Hong Kong. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and Harvard Law School. www.kellyyang.edu.hk

---

Climate risks affect all

John Chai says Hong Kong businesses must ensure decision-making takes into account the potential impact of global warming, and learn to adapt

Climate change may seem an issue far removed from Hong Kong. However, it affects our prosperity. Hong Kong's business sector should begin, without delay, to take climate risks into account in investment and operational decisions. Managing these risks also presents an opportunity for us to demonstrate leadership in China and beyond.

With this in mind, we are publishing a road map for business. It offers a set of practical steps to increase resilience, and measures the government can take, building on its work set out in its Climate Change Report 2015.

The road map recognises the good work so far of government and business. The government has developed excellent landslide protection, enhanced drainage systems and put in place building standards for high wind speed and energy efficiency.

Businesses across different sectors have taken huge steps forward. The energy companies have, for example, implemented flood defence measures and design standards to safeguard power stations and substations from flooding. There are systems in place to maintain supply and monitor assets through adverse weather. Construction companies have begun to develop safe ways of working in hot weather. Hong Kong, as a subtropical coastal city that has been buffeted by extreme weather, has taken major strides in safeguarding the city.

The road map emphasises that more must be done to address longer-term risks. Climate change effects will not only stretch the capability of our engineering systems, but also the very fabric of our social and economic system through increased incidences of disease, a stressed food supply network, and a banking and insurance sector open to large losses.

We need to address risks in a systematic and joined-up way, so institutional structures are fit for the enormity of the challenge.

Critical business sectors and the government must work together, sharing information and developing an integrated approach. In addition, a ministerial body is needed so that long-term strategic decisions are taken, implemented and progress monitored.

Finally, a focus on resilience does not mean giving up on reducing emissions. One way to cut emissions while reducing the cost impact of rising temperatures, and avoiding sudden surges and possible blackouts, is through energy efficiency. Reducing carbon emissions, adapting and ensuring resilience go hand in hand.

Hong Kong can confidently take the lead in climate adaptation, showing that a climate-resilient city is more secure, more liveable and better for all our well-being.

Professor John Chai is chairman of Business Environment Council