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In the aftermath of the deadly attacks in Paris last week, we have learned that the organizers were “homegrown terrorists” with Islamic State links. They were not refugees. And yet, officials across Europe and the United States have called for a moratorium on refugee flows from Syria, claiming that migrants pose a security threat.

For IS, the attack was not just about killing 130 people; it was a chess move in its global game, aimed at provoking exactly this reaction. But those of us who have studied *jihadist* extremists for years are not fooled. We have analyzed their internal messages in every language, tracked their financial resources, and dissected their strategies across the world. This move was predictable. We have known for several months that IS has been trying to seal European borders and incite hostilities against refugees as part of its broader strategy.

How we react to the Paris attack is therefore critical. It will not only determine the fate of the refugees, but will also tip the balance of power on the battlefield. If we take the bait, we will enrich and empower IS even further. But if we respond strategically, we have the ability to undercut the financial base of IS, disrupt its recruitment, and prove that its toxic ideology holds no weight. Saving the refugees is not just a moral issue; it is an inseparable part of the strategic plan to destroy IS.

The fact is that the refugee crisis hurts IS badly. The compassionate response of many Western nations toward refugees undercuts the so-called caliphate in three key ways: money, men and messaging.

The first factor is financial. IS is the richest terrorist organization in the world with assets estimated at \$2-billion, and almost all of that revenue is internally generated. Recent estimates indicate that the extremists collect nearly \$1-million a day through taxation and extortion of businesses and households, arguably even more than profits from oil and antiquities smuggling.

The refugee exodus undercuts this gain. The more families that escape their violence, the fewer people the so-called caliphate has to extort. The nearly 12 million refugees who have already fled the battlefield therefore constitute a tremendous financial loss. Leading IS operatives are well aware of these costs, and are trying to force people to remain inside their turf.

To stop the flow, IS has directly threatened refugees through its media wing, explains Christopher Anzalone, an expert on *jihadist* information operations. In one document, IS states: “it should be known that voluntarily leaving Darul-Islam [land of Islam] for darul-kufr [land of disbelief] is a dangerous major sin [kaba’ir]”.

The second reason is recruitment. We know that IS relies heavily on foreign fighters and devotes considerable effort both finding and cultivating new conscripts. With air strikes hammering rebel strongholds across Syria and Iraq, IS needs as much new cannon fodder as possible to stay in the fight.

To accomplish this goal, IS has repeatedly stated that it wants Muslims in Western countries to face increased persecution, because they believe this will catalyze a *hijra* (migration) to their lands. Official IS statements are unequivocal on this point – attacks like those in Paris are designed to incite violence against local Muslim communities in order to facilitate recruitment and force migration.

The third issue is message control. IS has invested tremendous resources into constructing a narrative that portrays itself as a sanctuary for Muslims. When millions of Muslim families run for their lives, IS loses this legitimacy battle on the world stage. Every horror story told by a refugee family shows these claims of being an idyllic caliphate to be utterly ludicrous.

To compensate for this damage to its image, IS has ramped up its propaganda machine, explicitly targeting the refugees. Its media wing has released 12 heavily produced propaganda films, each warning people to remain in Syria. “These media materials portray Western xenophobia, racism and indifference toward refugees” says Mr. Anzalone. These messages aim to tell potential refugees that non-Muslims hate them and that running away will result in abuse and exploitation at the hands of foreigners.

The fact that people across the Western world have reached out to help refugees has been incredibly damaging to this *jihadist* narrative.

Nothing has countered the message of hate more effectively than the countless church groups, community centres and humanitarian aid organizations that have welcomed Syrian refugees from all backgrounds with kindness, respect and goodwill. Our compassion and empathy have exposed the terrorist narrative as fraudulent.

Realizing these trends, IS is using the refugees as pawns in its global game. Believing the world will betray the migrants, it has bet heavily that a post-Paris xenophobic backlash will seal off the borders and leave the refugees stranded. Our next move is therefore critical. If we react as they hoped, we will have kept IS’s tax base under its control, fed its recruitment campaign and reinforced its ideological message.

But we can both save the refugees and tip the balance of power on the battlefield in our favour. We can deplete their resources and disable their propaganda machine.

The strategic move in this case is to stand firm on providing assistance in the refugee crisis. By holding onto the moral high ground, we can also win this war.