

Research Report | XXVI Annual Session

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# Security Council

## The situation in Iraq and Syria



<b>Forum</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>Issue:</b>	The situation in Iraq and Syria
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## Introduction

Large areas of Iraq and Syria have been seized by organization named the Islamic State (IS). The organization has been known to use violent methods to seize assets as well as spread their message. Millions of people live under the control of this organization in the areas of these nations under their control, it has been estimated that 4 million people have been forced to seek refuge in foreign nations due to their introduction into the area (Khedery, 2014). The United States (US) coalition lead airstrike campaign against IS has only seen limited success due to the large expansion of IS forces and the frequent fluctuations in the areas they hold. IS has made successful use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter to spread their message and propaganda content in the form of videos of explicit nature including executions, propaganda messages and suicide bombings, as well as recruiting new members. This group can be referred in many ways such as, ISIS, IS, ISI or ISIL, but for the purpose of this research report it will be referred to as IS.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Extremism

The belief in and support of an extreme political and/or religious view, in the sense that this belief makes the person act radically when voicing this belief.

### Coalition

A temporary alliance for nations who commit to combined action on a common target.

### Islamic Sharia Law

The law system that governs those who belief in the Islamic faith, derived from religious precepts of the Islam within the Quran and the Hadith. It regulates both the social and personal conducts (what a person is or is not allowed to do) as well as criminal justice.

### Terrorism



An unauthorized act of violence and intimidation to pursue political means.

## Jihad

A holy war against non-believers of Islam, used amongst believers of Islam.

## Caliphate

An area under the rule and control of a Muslim chief or caliphate.

## General Overview

The Islamic State is an organization with large influence over the Middle Eastern theatre. It is however also showing that its sphere of influence spans into sections of the world such as Europe, Southern and Northern America and parts of Africa, through terrorist attacks carried out by lone-wolf followers and organizations which affiliate itself with IS such as Boko Haram in Africa.

## History of creation of the Islamic State

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2003, the United States lead a coalition of allied nations into the borders of Iraq. The objectives of the invasion were to overthrow the dictator Saddam Hussein who had ruled the nation for decades before hand and secure Iraq's economy to bring stability back to the region of the Middle East. With the eventual capture of Saddam Hussein, the nation of Iraq was left with a lack of a leading government presence, creating a power vacuum in which multiple factions aimed to improve their influence within the country. The group named "Jamaat al-Tahwid wa-i-Jihad" (Khedery, 2014) was one of these. Their adherence to Osama bin Laden caused them to change their name to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The main aim of AQI was to bring Islamic Sharia Law to the land of Iraq and was willing to use methods deemed illegal or demonized by Western nations, treaties and pacts. In 2006, AQI would split from Al Qaeda to warrant the use of even more brutal techniques to achieve their goals and newly designated them as Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The unstable nature of the situation in Syria allowed ISI to spread extremist influence to anti-government protesters who were enraged by the recent use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime against protestors in 2013. Due to the rapid expansion in manpower that this caused, it allowed ISI to spread and seize parts of Syria. This group once again would rename themselves to the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS).

## The Islamic State's mission





IS states openly that their main objective is to seize control of the Western world and install a Sunni Islamic caliphate under their interpretation of the Islamic Sharia Law. The group currently is known to hold key states within Syria and Iraq which include: Raqqa, Rutba, Mosul, Fallujah and Ramadi. IS controls the population of these regions through frequent outbreaks of violent actions including but not limited to executions and beatings. It has been estimated that over 200,000 people have been murdered by IS in Iraq alone. (Khedery, 2014) Along with the troubling nature of their methods, the size of the Islamic State cannot be underestimated. The beginning of 2015 it was estimated that there are more than 35,000 ISIS fighters present in and around the nations of Iraq and Syria. (US Department of Defense, /) The American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates these numbers to have decreased slightly since the start of 2016 to around 19,000 fighters (US State Department, 2015). IS has also been known to have active cells in several Middle Eastern and African nations such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Somalia and Nigeria. Isolated cells of possible IS sympathizers have also been discovered within European nations like Belgium and Germany.

**Iraq and Syria: ISIL's Areas of Influence, August 2014 Through April 2016**

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL's) frontlines in much of northern and central Iraq and northern Syria have been pushed back since August 2014. Compared to its peak of territorial influence in Iraq and Syria in August 2014, ISIL probably can no longer operate openly in approximately 30 to 35 percent of populated areas, although the group is able to conduct attacks in many areas where it has ceded control. During April 2016, Iraqi forces captured territory from ISIL in Hit and west of Makhmur. In Syria, ISIL lost territory to Syrian regime-backed forces in central Homs Province and opposition forces

in Dara' Province. The map depicts ISIL's net territorial losses, which translate into approximately 25,000 to 26,000 square kilometers, or about 45 percent of the territory it had dominated in Iraq as of August 2014. ISIL also has lost a net of 9,000 to 9,200 square kilometers, or about 20 percent of the territory it had dominated in Syria as of August 2014. ISIL probably has a presence and freedom of movement in much of the unpopulated areas depicted on the map, but we cannot determine if it is the dominant actor. Our estimates are subject to change because of the dynamic nature of the conflict.

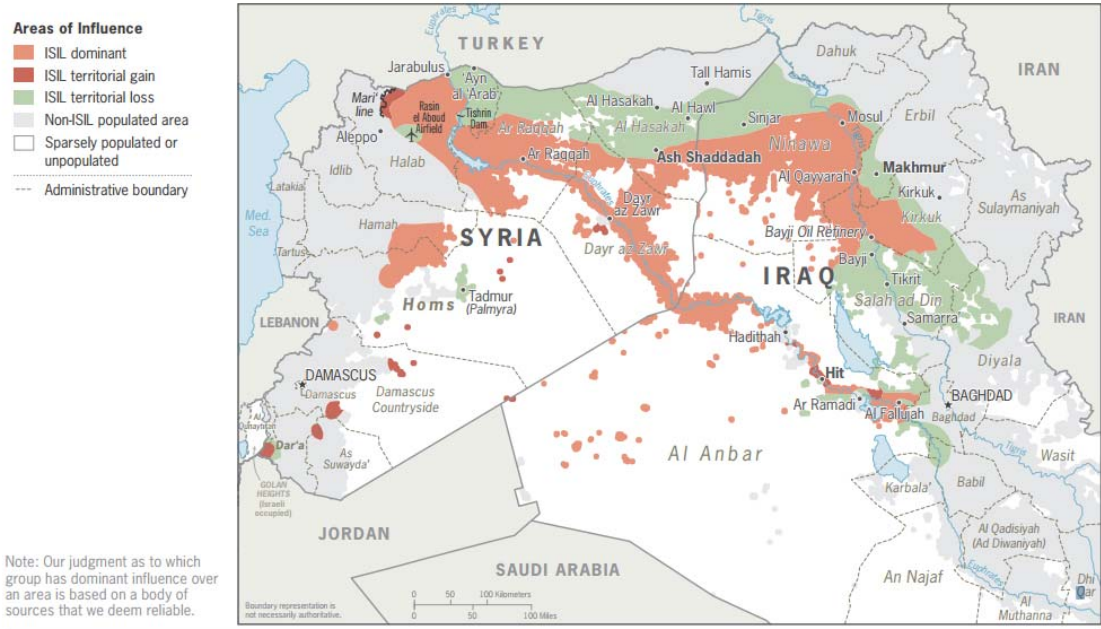


Figure 1. Diagram showing the physical control and sphere of influence of the Islamic State/Daesh within Iraq and Syria.

US Department of Defense. (/, / /). *Special Report: Operation Inherent Resolve*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from Defense.gov: [http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814\\_Inherent-Resolve](http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve)

## Coalition against IS in Iraq and Syria

The ideology that IS applies as justification for their actions is a large factor in the threat the group presents to the international community. The presence of the group and its activities in the middle eastern theatre has played a large role in fostering economic and social instability in the regions they are practice their methods. In response to this, the United States formed a coalition of nations who were willing and able to combat IS presence and violent tendencies. This coalition was officially created in late August 2014. The US State Department holds the list of nations who are part of 'Global Coalition to Degrade and Defeat ISIL.' It was introduced by President Obama with these clear words, "Our objective is clear: We will degrade, and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy".

The list contains the names of the 66 nations that signed and ratified the agreement. The degree of involvement ranges from nation to nation. Some have provided military resources such as aircraft and armaments and military aid, others have provided humanitarian aid for the people living in the regions affected by the presence of IS. All 66 nations however have morally condemned the actions of the Islamic State. Nations and organizations who have provided military aid and resources are as followed; United Kingdom, France, Germany, The Netherlands, United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Jordan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, NATO, Spain, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Canada, Greece, Italy, Kuwait, Singapore and Albania. The air campaign to intervene in IS presence in Iraq began on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2015 when they were successful at bombing and destroying Key strategic positions. "The United States and its coalition partners have targeted ISIS with 8,216 airstrikes -- 5,383 in Iraq and 2,833 in Syria, through November 16, the Pentagon says." (US Department of Defense, /) The United States is the only nation who openly states that it has deployed Special Operations forces into this theatre with Army Delta Force and Navy SEALs operators embedded with the Kurdish armed forces and other resistance groups in the area.

## Non-Coalition affiliated attempts to combat IS in Iraq and Syria

As well as the presence of the Global Coalition to combat ISIL, Russian aircraft and military forces have made their way into Syria to support the current Assad regime, which is still the officially recognized governing force within the borders of Syria.

Along with the aid of Iran's military forces and the Syrian government forces, Russian



military assets have seized several thousands of miles of previously captured Syrian land from the Islamic State. Estimating the size of Russian personnel present in Syria to be little over 4000, and just under 100 aircraft (Wikipedia Inc., 2016). As well as Russian presence in Syria, it has been noted that the Free Syrian Army and other moderate rebel groups have been joining the fight against ISIS. Other examples of groups are Kurdish Resistance forces like the YPG or the Peshmerga who have joined the fights in large numbers to push back the presence of IS. Lastly it has been brought to the attention of NATO that groups such as Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and the Taliban have been actively combatting the spread of IS influence within Iraq and Syria but little more is known about this effort to date.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### Kurdish Iraqi and Syrian Resistance

The Kurdish resistance are an active ground force opposing the Islamic States attempts to increase territorial gains throughout the regions of Northern Iraq and Syria. The organisation has backing and receives aid from several Western nations. These include Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

### United States of America

The United States of America leads the Global Coalition against ISIL, it has spent an estimated 7.5 billion dollars on the campaign against the terrorist group in Iraq and Syria as of May 2016. (US State Department, 2015) It has estimated to have lead over 10,000 airstrikes on the Islamic State and estimates to have destroyed over 20,000 material resources of the Islamic State (US Department of Defense, /). The United States is currently committed to its coalition duties and still supplies large quantities of aircraft to the region to commence activities for Operation Inherent Resolve. The American public is convinced that its current actions in Syria and Iraq are justified, this in turn seems justified due to the recent terrorist attacks in several Western nations seeing large amounts of civilian casualties and violent methods on the Islamic States behalf.

### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has provided the coalition effort against ISIS with two squadrons of GR4 Tornado Fighter Bombers. A long side their military aid, the United Kingdom has provided more than £80 million in aid and resources (Foreign Office, 2015) to help refugees make safe passage to non- war torn nations. The United Kingdom announced that they would be providing Security Advisory personnel to Iraqi headquarters as well providing extra



training for Peshmerga forces. Although not publicly commented on, it is known that British Special Operations forces have boots on the ground in Iraq and Syria and are carrying out High Value target missions. (Foreign Office, 2015).

## Germany

Much like the United Kingdom, Germany provides multiple Squadrons of aircraft, which aid in the coalition air offensive against known Islamic State positions. The German government is gearing towards the curbing of IS propaganda and recruitment from within Europe and in line with this Germany banned activities that state support of the Islamic State like flying its flag. German military special operations have been rumoured to carry out high-risk missions in the region in the past but do not actively operate in the area as the Americans do. (Fantz, 2015)

## Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an active member of the coalition, offering 6 aircraft to the air offensive over Syria. It is also known that Saudi Arabia has offered special combat training to groups willing to combat IS in Syria.

## Turkey

Turkey is a main member of the coalition targeting the Islamic State in the skies above Syria and Iraq. On the 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2015 an incident took place in which a Russian warplane, returning from a strafe-run in Syrian airspace, proceeded to pass through Turkish airspace. The Turkish Air Force claimed to have warned the Russian warplane about aerospace infringements several times without response from the aircraft. As standard procedure, the Turkish Air Force proceeded to shoot down the aircraft, marking the only time in history a Russian plane being shot down by a NATO member state since the Korean war. (BBC News, 2015)

## Russian Federation

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## Syrian Arab Republic

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100 aircraft to aid the ground and air offensive of the Syrian Arab Republics military forces. The Syrian Army lays its priorities in removing all rebel forces from the borders of Syria, this includes the American backed Kurdish forces as well as the Islamic State.

**Islamic State**

The Islamic State is an Islamic extremist group that dates back its roots to groups like Al Qaida. It creates its own rule of law and system of social conduct based on a form of Islam called Salafism, commonly known for its strict and harsh approach to law of the land. The Islamic State operates in multiple countries, its largest headquarters are known to be in the city of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. The organization believes itself to have the religious privilege and standing to form a large caliphate under Islamic Sharia law. The US state department estimates the total number of IS fighters within these regions to be almost 19,000 **(US State Department, 2015)**. IS has been known to have seized large amounts of military resources while combatting with Syrian and Iraqi government forces in the form of armed vehicles, aircraft, artillery and advanced small arms. The majority of the wealth that the organization holds and builds is due to their access and control over the North Syrian oil fields and the control over trade in large parts of Syria and Northern Iraq.

**Iraq**

Islamic State violence has taken large tolls on the nation of Iraq. This nation has been suffering since the presence of large radical organizations were introduced in large numbers and with popular demand. The demand for these groups created of course by the Coalition invasion in 2003 and the removal of the oppressive yet stable form of government under the rule of the dictator Saddam Hussein. Iraqi armed forces now work in tandem with US special operations members to further train and rearm in attempt to fight the IS forces within their borders.

**Timeline of Events**

This timeline includes all the major events, advances and military interventions within the entire conflict in Syria and Iraq. It also includes events that happened outside of Syria and or Iraq, these events are important nonetheless to understand the spread of influence, propaganda acts and the nature of the Islamic State in the Middle East and the Western world.

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Date	Description of Event
March 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2003	US led coalition invades the borders of Iraq

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December 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2003	Dictator Saddam Hussein captured by American forces.
June, 2004	Abu Musab al Zarqawi establishes Al- Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in a power-vacuum, unstable Iraq.
June 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2006	Zarqawi is killed in a U.S. air strike. Abu Ayyub al Masri takes his place.
October 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2006	al Masri announces the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), with Abu Omar al Baghdadi as its leader.
Jan. – Dec., 2007	Following the surge of U.S. troops in Iraq, ISI is driven from Baghdad into Diyala, Salahideen, and Mosul. The organization retains only a fraction of its leaders, cells, and capabilities, which are concentrated in Mosul.
Jan. – Dec. 2008	ISI membership is strongly diminished. By early 2008, 2,400 ISI members had been killed and 8,800 were captured, out of a previous membership of 15,000. The influx of foreign fighters reduces from around 120 people per 6 months to about five people per six months
Jan. – Dec. 2009	Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki targets Sunni leaders, increasing sectarian tensions. Support for ISI begins to increase in Sunni tribal areas, and ISI claims responsibility for suicide attacks that killed hundreds in Baghdad.
April 2010	Abu Bakr al Baghdadi becomes the leader of ISI after joint U.S.-Iraqi operations kills Abu Omar al Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al Masri.
July 2011	Abu Bakr al Baghdadi sends operatives to Syria. One of them, Abu Muhammad al Julani, becomes the leader of the Nusra Front in January 2012
July 2012 – July 2013	ISI launches its “Breaking the Walls” campaign. It carries out 24 bombings and eight prison breaks, freeing jihadists who had participated in AQI attacks in 2006 and 2007. -
4 <sup>th</sup> March, 2013	Raqqa falls to the Syrian opposition, and secular opposition groups, the Nusra Front (a AQI puppet group), and ISI are all operating in Raqqa. ISI begins moving military assets to



	consolidate control and break into new battle fronts in Syria.
11 <sup>th</sup> April, 2013	Baghdadi moves from Iraq to Syria, and claims that the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) merged with the Nusra Front in Syria to become “The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.” But Julani (leader of the Nusra front) rejects the alliance and declares allegiance to al Qaeda.
30 <sup>th</sup> December, 2013	IS militants in Iraq take control of Fallujah and parts of Ramadi.
2 <sup>nd</sup> January, 2014	IS takes over Raqqa and declares it the capital of the ISIS emirate.
3 <sup>rd</sup> February, 2014	Al Qaeda officially cuts ties with ISIS.
10 <sup>th</sup> June, 2014	IS takes over Mosul, launching its largest offensive to date. Militants kill at least 600 Shiite inmates from the Badoush prison during the attack
12 <sup>th</sup> June, 2014	Iran deploys forces to fight ISIS in Iraq, and helps Iraqi troops regain control of most of Tikrit after its fall on the 11 <sup>th</sup> of June
7 <sup>th</sup> August, 2014	President Obama announces the beginning of air strikes against ISIS in Iraq to defend Yazidi citizens stranded in Sinja.
19 <sup>th</sup> August, 2014	ISIS kills American journalist James Foley.
2 <sup>nd</sup> – 13 <sup>th</sup> September, 2014	ISIS posts video of the execution of British aid worker David Haines and Journalist Steven Sotloff
23 <sup>rd</sup> September, 2014	The United States launches its first air strikes against ISIS in Syria.
15 <sup>th</sup> October, 2014	The Pentagon names the campaign against ISIS “Operation Inherent Resolve.”
6 <sup>th</sup> December, 2014	A gunman allegedly acting on ISIS’s behalf seizes 17 hostages in a cafe in Sydney, Australia.
7 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015	Two gunmen, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, attack the offices of French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris, killing 11 people. A



	<p>third assailant, Amedy Coulibaly, carried out a synchronized attack on a kosher supermarket, taking hostages and killing four people. Coulibaly reportedly declared allegiance to the Islamic State.</p>
26 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015	<p>Kurdish fighters, with the help of U.S. and coalition airstrikes, force out ISIS militants from the Syrian border town of Kobani after a four-month battle marking the first significant loss of land to the Islamic State faction.</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> - 16 <sup>th</sup> February, 2015	<p>Libyan militants allied to ISIS release a video showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians, who had been kidnapped on January 12. Egypt launches airstrikes in Libya in retaliation.</p>
17 <sup>th</sup> May, 2015	<p>ISIS seizes control of Ramadi, Iraq.</p>
30 <sup>th</sup> September, 2015	<p>Russia begins airstrikes in Syria. It claims to target ISIS, but U.S. officials allege that many of the strikes target civilians and Western-backed rebel groups.</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> October, 2015	<p>Iraqi forces recapture the Baiji refinery, the largest oil refinery in the country, from IS.</p>
22 <sup>nd</sup> October, 2015	<p>A member of a U.S. special operations force is killed during an ISIS hostage rescue mission in northern Iraq - the first American to die in ground combat with ISIS. Twenty ISIS fighters are killed during the mission, and six more are detained.</p>
13 <sup>th</sup> November, 2015	<p>ISIS carries out a series of coordinated attacks in Paris, killing 130 people.</p>
1 <sup>st</sup> December, 2015	<p>Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announces that U.S. special operations forces would be sent to Iraq to support Iraqi and Kurdish fighters and launch targeted operations in Syria.</p>
10 <sup>th</sup> December, 2015	<p>U.S. officials announce that airstrikes killed ISIS finance minister Abu Saleh and two other senior leaders in Tal Afar, Iraq.</p>



22 <sup>nd</sup> March, 2016	Three explosions at the Zaventem airport and a metro station in Brussels kill at least 30 people and injure dozens of others. ISIS claims responsibility for the attacks.
23 <sup>rd</sup> May, 2016	Iraqi forces, aided by U.S. and coalition airstrikes, advance on Fallujah, which ISIS has held since 2014.
24 <sup>th</sup> May, 2016	Kurdish forces backed by U.S. airstrikes launch an offensive on territory north of Raqqa, Syria.
12 <sup>th</sup> June, 2016	A gunman attacks a popular gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing more than four dozen people and injuring at least 53. The attacker, identified as Omar Mateen, reportedly called police during the attack and pledged allegiance to ISIS, who later claimed responsibility for the attack.

## UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Many UN resolutions and treaties have been created in the past to attempt to reduce and or stop terrorism and its affects. The majority of these resolutions cover the breach of human rights and the social or economic effects terrorism has on a society. The majority of them will also contain some type of military action. The following are just a small collection of the wider range available:

- Resolution 2170, adopted by the Security Council on 15th August 2014 (**S/RES/2170**)
- Resolution 2178, adopted by the Security Council on 24th September 2014 (**S/RES/2178**) Model United Nations International School of The Hague 2015 | XXV Annual Session Research Report | Page 8 of 12
- Resolution 2199, adopted by the Security Council on 12th February 2015 (**S/RES/2199**)
- Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), launched by the United States on 10th October 2014 until present.
- Condemns ISIL Terrorist attacks, 20 November 2015 (**S/RES/2249**)





## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The war in Syria and Iraq has seen a large amount of fluctuations in physical territory, which were captured and retaken from the Islamic state. The majority of the fighting done on the ground is carried out by rebel resistance groups who are supported by coalition nations as well as Kurdish armed forces. After the initial commence of coalition intervention against the Islamic State, chances of resolution of the situation in Iraq and Syria seemed hopeful.

The vastly outnumbered Islamic State forces seemed to be little match for the coalition backed rebels. Within the first few months of fighting the rebel forces saw the recapture of the Syrian town of Kobani near the Turkish border. The city of Tirkrit is another example of one of the many individual campaigns in which land was taken from IS control in Iraq. The international agreement on the need to shut down IS seemed to work efficiently however by late spring 2015, both these major strategic cities were recaptured by IS forces. Lately we have seen the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) amending and adapting resolutions on creating groundworks against the extremist organization. It has yet to be seen if these amendments have been successful as it is assumed that their effects will be briefed to the coalition military command by the end of the fourth quarter of the year (December 2016). The largest attempts have been to cut off the financial supply and munitions supplies that the Islamic State receives.

## Possible Solutions

To many, the belief of a peaceful solution to the conflict in Iraq and Syria is little to non-existent. It is thus a good idea for delegates to consider the continuation of coalition air strikes in the areas that are known terrorist hotspots for IS fighters. Many coalition nations have decided that working with the current Syrian government is no longer an option due to the level of atrocities, clash in beliefs on what's best for area and the fact that many believe that the Assad regime runs the country in a dictatorial manor means that making significant progress politically in the region is a challenge which delegates could discuss.

Communication channels created between the Assad regime and the coalition nations could help to speed up the process as well. Furthermore, response against IS could also aid the process of clearing up the humanitarian crisis situation in Syria due to the four years of civil war that has been taking place in the area. Tackling the issue of the Islamic State requires both military as well as non-military intervention such as the destruction of the Islamic State propaganda machine and taking in to consideration the fact that the majority of IS recruits are found via social media. The Islamic States Al Hayat, which operates as the



groups' public relations and media center, publishes magazines and videos promoting the life of Jihad under the caliphate, which it does in multiple western languages. Delegates should focus on the economic choke that should be placed on the Islamic States financial, raw and munitions resources through sanctions on known affiliates.

In short, delegates should strive to tackle the force of terrorism, commonly referred to as the Islamic State, through multiple forms of sanctions as well as potential lethal force. It is important to note the use of brutality by the Islamic State, which continues to fuel the fire of Religious extremism within the region, needs to be tackled swiftly and forcefully.

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