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The Question of the Islamic State



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Introduction

The Islamic State (IS), also referred to as *the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, *the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)*, *al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)* or *Daesh*, has become a topic of prominent importance not only within the political setting of the Middle East, but within all member nations, as their influences have spread far beyond their territorial borders. *IS*, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, seeks to create a caliphate under which all Muslims would be united. This terrorist group, per defined by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2253, is a Salafi-jihadist militant group, meaning that they follow the conservative branch of Sunni Islam. They use their ideological beliefs to motivate their extremist actions against non-Sunni Muslims, a wide spectrum of people from the Kurdish to the Christians to simply the Shia Muslims. *The question of the Islamic State* is a difficult topic to breach for many UN members, as *IS* functions at various multitudes, ranging from amateur car bombings to calculated political attacks, for example the bombing of Russian passenger plane over the Sinai Peninsula on 31st of October 2015. The UN, more specifically the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' (UNCHR) immediate concerns are the violation of human rights within these conflict-stricken areas, as it can be understood that *IS* "seeks to subjugate civilians under its control and dominate every aspect of their lives through terror, indoctrination, and the provision of services to those who obey", ("New UN Report Depicts 'relentless Assault' on Civilians inside ISIL-controlled Syria." *UN News Center*) and the hindrance of any further growth, albeit in recruitments, finances or any other applicable matter. *The question of the Islamic State* encourages all member nations to actively discuss these two presented immediate concerns, alongside other applicable issues, such as their use of social media to indoctrinate new recruits and broadcast their controversial actions and messages.



Definition of Key Terms

Allegiance

Loyalty to a superior group or cause.

Al Nusra Front

Abu al Julani, one of many seasoned *IS* members sent to Syria during the political instability of the March 2011 protests against the Syrian al-Assad government, formed the *al Nusra Front* in January 2012. The *al Nusra Front* created tension when it denied merging with *IS*, and instead pledged allegiance to *al Qaeda*.

Caliphate

A political-religious nation under the rule of a Muslim leader, more specifically referred to as a Caliph.

Salafi-jihadist militant group

An Islamist militant movement adhering to the conservative ideology of Sunni Islam.

Sanction

A threatened penalty for disobeying a law.

Shia Islam

Shia Islam followers base their interpretation of the Quran on their ayatollahs, similar to the Catholic priest, as they are believed to be the reflections of God on Earth.

Sunni Islam

Accounts for 80% of the Muslim population, with their interpretation of the Quran being based upon the “sunna” or Prophet Muhammad’s teachings.

Yazidi citizens

An ethnically Kurdish religious community inhabiting the northern Mesopotamia by Mount Sinjar.

General Overview

The *Islamic State (IS)* was founded in 1999, under the name of *Jama'at al Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ)* by Abu al Zarqawi, a Jordanian national in Afghanistan fleeing the US led invasion in Iraq. It was established with the intentions of overthrowing the Kingdom of Jordan, as al Zarqawi believed it to be 'un-Islamic'. On the 17th of October 2004, al Zarqawi pledged his allegiance to Osama Bin Laden in an attempt to revive his militant movement, consequently changing the militant group's name to *al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)*. After al Zarqawi's death in 2006, *al Qaeda* appointed the new leader Abu-Mamzah al Muhajir. Following this change in leadership, *AQI* decided to merge with other Jihadist movements in Iraq, now creating the *Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)* with Abu Omar al Baghdadi as its leader. A joint US-Iraqi operation in 2010 killed Abu Omar al Baghdadi, resulting in Abu Bakr al Baghdadi assuming leadership. On the 9th of April 2013, after having sent militants to Syria to establish *ISI* cells, which thereupon created the *al Nusra Front*, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi called for a merger, pre-emptively changing his militant group's name to the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)*. However, *al Nusra* denied this unification, and instead pledged their allegiance to *al Qaeda*, ushering *al Qaeda* to disavow relations with *ISIS*. On the 29th of June 2014, *ISIS* announced its establishment as a worldwide caliphate, rebranding itself as the *Islamic State (IS)*, which it has stayed up until present day.

The *Islamic State (IS)* is in violation of not only international law but also internationally ratified UN resolutions. It has been accused of humanitarian rights abuse; the persecution of [religious] minorities, the ill-treatment of civilians (contradictory to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which narrates the protection of civilian persons during the time of war), the use of child soldiers, the participation in sexual violence and slavery, attacks on members of press, beheadings and mass executions, and the destruction of cultural and religious heritage (for example, the destruction of a Shiite mosque in Kuwait in 2015). Further, *IS* can also be held accountable for the war crime of using chemical weapons, which is declared illegal in UNSC resolution 2118.

The issue with counteracting or eventually hindering the possibility of these actions being pursued again by *IS* is that this terrorist group has such a large foundation, with territorial claims in Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Northern Caucasus, alongside national terrorist associations pledging their obedience to al Baghdadi, as is the case in Somalia, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Further, it has been made very difficult for opposing forces to 'cut the problem at its roots', as *IS* are indirectly provided with arms by Russia and Iran, with these nations supplying President Assad during his struggle within the Syrian Civil War against the rebels. They also

have created a large arsenal of stockpiled weaponry from weapons that were freely imported by 25 countries, such as the UK and France, into Iraq during the US-occupation in 2003.

The terrorist group is economically able to sustain its activities, despite sanctions being placed upon its territories, through five primary sources of revenue, which according to the Financial Action Task Force in 2015 were proceeds from occupied territories (for example petroleum reservoirs), ransoms paid to release prisoners, donations from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states disguised as humanitarian charity, material support from foreign fighters and online fundraising; in 2016 it was estimated by the RAND corporation that the largest sources of income were oil revenues and taxation. In 2014, the RAND Corporation estimated that outside donations accounted for a mere 5% of *IS*'s operating budget, with *IS* cells being required to pay 20% of their income from their activities to the ruling body, which is then redistributed over the various cells.

IS extensively uses propaganda to recruit [foreign] fighters, promising a utopian interpretation of the caliphate for which they are fighting for. They have successfully reached multiple target groups through the extensive variation of propaganda produced, ranging from CDs and pamphlets, to social media accounts, in particular their twitter account. In November 2014, the UN estimated the year's recruitment to consist of 15,000 fighters from 80 nations.

With a recent peak in *Islamic State* claimed attacks, especially in the UK, the *question of the Islamic State* seems to carry an even more dire purpose. The targets of *IS* attacks have shifted from internal groups, as was the case with the 2003 Iraqi insurgency, to internationally valued cities and events, no longer making the issue pertaining the *Islamic State* a negligible one.

Major Parties Involved

Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR)

CTJF-OIR is a US led coalition against the *Islamic State*, established in October 2014. It is composed of 30 countries' military forces and personnel, with their aim being to degrade and destroy *IS*. Nations who have conducted airstrikes on *IS* territories under the coalition include the USA, Denmark, the UK, Australia, France, Jordan, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia.

Lebanon

Lebanon deals with the overspill of violence created by *IS* and the influx of refugees fleeing said violence. The threat of *IS* violence being aimed at Lebanon has increased,



prompting Prime Minister Salam to encourage unity in his country facing the possibility of *IS* invasions.

Iraq

Jama'at al Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ), the founding name of *IS*, eventually established itself in Iraq due to one of its main policies in 2003 being to rid Iraq of American influence. Ever since 2003, Iraq has been one of the largest and most influential *IS* bases. The Iraqi government and citizens have been left with no say over their country, and continuously have to suffer under the actions of this militant group. In an attempt to regain their country, Iraqi troops have been trying to counteract *IS* actions, as they have successfully done in Mosul.

Iran

Iran, being a nation with a Shia government, is not as active on the issue of *IS*. It has recently however, offered cooperation against *IS* in Syria, turning a blind eye to the US sanctions in Iraq, something it has opposed strongly in the past.

Islamic State

The *Islamic State* is a Jihadist militant movement seeking to establish a caliphate to which all Muslims worldwide are responsible. This terrorist group strongly adheres to Sharia law, as they are strong believers of Sunni Islam. This movement is willing to undertake extremist actions, such as genocides, to fulfil their desire of an Islamic state.

Jordan

Jordan is an important ally to the USA when it comes to executing airstrikes targeted at *IS* cells in Syria. *IS* in the past has threatened to break down Jordan's borders, this threat being fuelled by the many Jordanian supporters; it is believed that more than 2,000 Jordanians joined the *IS* in 2012 – 2015. Therefore, Jordan motivates its support for the USA with the intent of stopping potential threats before they could truly realise themselves, even expanding this ideal by mobilising troops along the Iraqi border.

Qatar

Qatar was a participant within the US led militaristic action taken against *IS* in Syria, alongside Iran and Jordan. Despite this, the Qatari government has still had to deny on many occasions to accusation of Shia leaders providing monetary support to *IS*. The nation has also been accused of allowing wealthy citizens to make personal donations to the terrorist group, and housing al Nusra Front and al Qaeda affiliates in Doha.

Russia

Russia has carried out airstrikes on Syria, outside of the US led coalition. Putin means to target *IS* strongholds and other militant fighters, however the USA fears that in actuality they are targeting the opponents of Syrian President al Assad, a Russian ally.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a member of the US led coalition targeting *IS* within Syria, but also supports the cause against the *IS* by donating to Syrian rebels. This nation too, together with Iran, is accused of supporting *IS* despite its contradictory actions. For Saudi Arabia, it is the same case as Iran, with wealthy citizens gifting donations to *IS* and large influxes of men travelling to Syria. Due to Iran and Saudi Arabia being in the same circumstances within the struggle against *IS*, in 2014 they agreed to cooperate.

Syria

The Syrian Civil War is based upon the unwanted leadership of President al Assad. It created the necessary political instability *IS* needed in order to expand its strongholds. The international community understands that in order to defeat *IS* political stability must be reintroduced within Syria, most easily done through the resignation of the current President. Syria permits the various airstrikes used to combat terrorism within its borders, encouraging the strong stance taken against the terrorist group.

Timeline of Key Events

The development of *IS* from 1999, its unofficial establishment, until June 2017, one of many independent terrorist attacks claimed by the *IS*.

Date	Description of Event
1999	Abu al Zarqawi founds <i>Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ)</i> , a Sunni Islamist group, with the intent of overthrowing the Jordanian government
2003	Increased amount of jihadist militant groups in Iraq, such as the al Zarqawi's movement, following the withdrawal of American troops
October 2004	Post Iraqi invasion of 2003, al Zarqawi pledges loyalty to Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda, and establishes <i>al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)</i>

7 June 2006	Al Zarqawi replaced by Abu-Mamzah al Muhajir, after he is killed in a USA strike
2007	US intervention into Iraq, dramatically decreasing IS's number of leaders, cells, and capabilities
2009	Iraqi, Shia Prime Minister Maliki targets Sunni leaders, consequently leading to a rise in IS recruitments again
April 2010	Abu Omar al Baghdadi, al Masri's successor, killed in US-Iraqi operation and replaced by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi
July 2012 – July 2013	IS launches "Breaking the Walls" campaign to free jihadist fighters arrested during 2007
11 April 2013	Al Baghdadi announces that the al Nusra Front is part of IS (forming ISIS), but Julani, leader of the al Nusra Front, denies this and pledges his allegiance to al Qaeda
21 July 2013	IS launches "Soldier's Harvest" campaign to decrease the number within the Iraqi forces whilst gaining territory
October 2013	Al Qaeda leader, al Zawahiri, demands that IS disband from the al Nusra Front, but al Baghdadi refuses
3 February 2014	Al Qaeda officially denounces ties with IS
10 June 2014	IS seizes Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, to which Saudi Arabia and Jordan respond to by mobilising their armies near their Iraqi borders
18 June 2014	Iraq asks for US support in conducting airstrikes against IS
29 June 2014	IS proclaims itself as the worldwide caliphate, responsible for all Muslims
8 August 2014	USA initiate airstrike series against IS targets in northern Iraq, in an attempt to defend Yazidi citizens
14 August 2014	Iraqi Prime Minister al Maliki resigns and is replaced by al Abadi. The UNSC and USA call upon al Abadi to create an inclusive government
22 September 2014	IS call for attacks on USA, France, and other nations involved in the coalition
23 September 2014	USA launches first air strikes against IS cells in Syria



3 October 2014	The Islamic Youth Shura Council claim Derna, a Libyan city, for IS
7 January 2015	IS gunmen attack Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris, killing 11 people, whilst a synchronized attack was initiated on a kosher supermarket, killing 4 people
5 April 2015	Yamouk, a Palestinian refugee camp (home to 18,000 people) is seized by IS militants
7 March 2015	Boko Haram swears allegiance to IS, giving them presence in Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad
17 June 2015	IS expelled by Kurdish forces from strategic Syrian town, Tal Abyad, on Turkish border
27 June 2015	IS responsible attack on Tunisian resort kills 38 and injures 39 people
30 September 2015	Russia initiates airstrikes in Syria, claiming to target ISIS, but USA alleges that these strikes are targeted at Western supported rebel groups
15 October 2015	Iraq's largest oil refinery, the Baiji Refinery, is recaptured by Iraqi forces from IS
31 October 2015	Egyptian IS affiliate claim responsibility for the bombing of Russian passenger plane, killing 224 people
13 November 2015	IS coordinated attacks in Paris, killing 130 people
22 March 2016	IS claim responsibility for the three explosions in Zaventem Airport and Brussels metro station, killing at least 30 people
12 June 2016	Gunman pledges alliance to IS over a phone call with the police, prior to killing 50 and injuring 53 people in an attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando
3 July 2016	IS's deadliest civilian bombing to date in Baghdad, killing 200 people
14 July 2016	IS claims credit for an attack by a 31-year-old Tunisian man, in which he drove a truck through a crowd in Nice and killed 84 people
6 August 2016	Syrian Democratic Forces coalition between Arab and Kurdish fighters, backed by the USA, recaptures Manbij after a two month battle with IS
12 October 2016	USA led coalition between Iraqi government and Kurdish forces reclaim Mosul



2 January 2017	3 separate <i>IS</i> suicide bombing attacks in Iraq
16 February 2017	<i>IS</i> suicide bombers attack Pakistani Sufi shrines
9 April 2017	Suicide bombings in two churches in Egypt on Palm Sunday
22 May 2017	<i>IS</i> suicide bombing at Ariana Grande concert
6 June 2017	<i>ISIS</i> supporters drive into pedestrians on London Bridge, followed by random stabbing conducted by 3 men

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations have taken an unequivocal stance against the actions of the *Islamic State* due to their extreme violations of human rights, such as the rights to religion, the rights to security in terms of safety, the rights to not be discriminated against and the rights to an adequate standard of living. Up until now the United Nations have mainly focused their efforts on assisting member states in their fight against *IS*'s influence and actions, per alluded to in resolutions S/RES/2354 and A/RES/68/276. However, after the Chair of Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria affirmed that the *Islamic State*, amongst its various other war crimes, was committing genocide against the Yazidis, the United Nations has increasingly began to take more direct action. An example of this recent development in resistance to the *Islamic State* is the adaptation of Security Council resolution S/RES/2253, in which it is proposed that the fight against the *IS* is best approached through first weakening them in terms of resources.

Security Council Resolution, 24 May 2017 (S/RES/2354)

This resolution outlines the relevance of the 'Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorist Narratives' the Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC) and the Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF). The 'Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorist Narratives' is a set of guidelines for member nations to effectively counter actions taken by terrorist groups, such as *IS*. The CTC works with member states' governments and the UN to create appropriate methods to handle *IS*'s various actions, including educational schemes, strengthening public-private schemes against terrorism, and many such other actions. The CTITF assist in supporting member states within their executions of their anti-terrorism schemes.



The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review, 13 June 2014 (A/RES/68/276)

This resolution focuses mostly on the 'United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy' and its four pillars, consisting of pillar 1: addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, pillar 2: preventing and combatting terrorism, pillar 3: building states' capacity and strengthening the role of the UN, and pillar 4: ensuring human rights and the rule of law.

Security Council Resolution, 17 December 2015 (S/RES/2253)

This resolution initiates a more offensive and direct solution compared to previously nominated responses to the issue of radicalised militant groups in the Middle East, thus addressing the *question of the Islamic State*. This resolution proposes to freeze the financial assets of all those involved within these terrorist organisations, no matter what form these funds are found in or whether it is possessed within their territory or not, to prohibit traveling within said terrorist organisation's territory, and implementing an arms embargo.

Possible solutions

As consistently stated throughout the resolution, *the question of the Islamic State* is a multifaceted problem. Resolutions should try to address the crimes against humanitarian law and war crimes, which includes the genocide being committed towards Yazidis, the denial of basic living necessities and the general abuse of citizens, more specifically perhaps women; clauses pertaining to the safety of citizens within the afflicted territories should focus on ensuring that no more people become part of the aforementioned victims of war crimes, the establishment of some sort of body that focuses on relieving those under the discussed conditions, but most importantly, perhaps drawing inspiration from the Chair of Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, the creation of a body whose aim it is to [numerically] understand to what extent these crimes are affecting citizens, i.e. how many citizens are affected, how are they affected, etc. so that member nations can truly comprehend the situation they are involving themselves in. The resolution could also build upon the clauses mentioned in resolution S/RES/2253 in which the hindrance of finances reaching the *Islamic State* is discussed, as a means of mitigating any further growth, however the mitigation of growth can also be tackled in respect to the number of recruits and the size of their weaponry stockpile.

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