Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2015
~ fresh ideas, new solutions ~

Forum: *First Committee of the General Assembly*
Issue: *Territorial ambitions of terrorist organizations*

Position: *Chair*

Introduction

Over the past year, terrorist organizations have been on the news and in the papers constantly, drawing the international eye to the many new issues that consistently arise and boggling the minds of many world leaders with uncertainty. While at first it seemed that these organizations were driven by terrorist ambitions, it has slowly become clear that while terrorist ambitions play a major role in driving terrorist organizations in their actions, what is fundamental to these groups is a territorial ambition. Terrorist organizations demonstrate sophisticated territorial strategies that link their specific operations with aggressively implementing their rule. One such group that sticks out like a sore thumb due to their recent developments and pernicious use of force is the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (also known as ISIL, ISIS, or simply IS. In this research report, we will stick to IS as the abbreviation).

This radical Sunni-Islamist group has taken over and claimed large swaths of territory in both Syria and western Iraq, where they are primarily located. The organization is headed by Iraqi-born Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badry, who goes by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and is the self-declared caliph of the Islamic State. Formerly known as a branch of al-Qaeda, bin Laden's organization, the group has split due to strategic and ideological differences.

In 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations in Syria escalated into a civil war that kept intensifying, creating a vacancy for power as the government struggled to keep its population under control. This, and the withdrawal of United States troops from Iraq, has created a perfect opportunity for the Islamic State to declare themselves as the ruling party amid a power vacuum. After having established themselves as a militant terrorist organization, they seized power in numerous big cities such as Mosul and Fallujah, connecting Syria and parts of Iraq in what is known as a caliphate. The IS implements a strict interpretation of the Sharia, and those unwilling to cooperate face extreme consequences. These punishments as well as the brutality that the IS is known to act with has allowed them to become major players on the world stage, especially in recent months.

It is within a timespan of four years that this same group has flourished and torn apart the Middle East, and as it is becoming more and more apparent that the governments of Syria and Iraq have lost control of the situation at hand, the international

community is increasing their involvement and starting to retaliate as to try and prevent further escalation of the Islamic State's power and terror reign.

While doing research on this topic, please note that this report was written in October 2015 and as such, is only accurate up until then. Although it is highly unlikely that the situation in the Middle East will have drastically improved, it is advisable to maintain research up until the conference in November in order to guarantee that the debate will be a de facto and up to date.

Definition of Key Terms

Caliphate
A form of Islamic government that is led by a leader known as the caliph. This person is considered to be the political and religious successor to the prophet Muhammad and is the leader of the entire Muslim community.

Shia Muslims
Shia Muslims make up 65% of the Iraqi population and are the second largest branch within the Islam. They want Muhammad's successor to be chosen by his followers.

Sunni Muslims
About 70-80% of all Muslims are Sunni. They want the successor of the prophet to be a member of his family, and do not recognize the leader that the Shias elected, an act that has led to many wars between the two groups.

Power vacuum
The absence of an executive or leading power in a region or jurisdiction after it has been lost.

Civil war
A war between citizens or political factions within a country or region.

Jihad
Amongst Muslims, this is believed to be a holy war or fight against unbelievers.

Populated environment
A densely populated area where both public infrastructure and civilians can be found. Examples of this are locations where civilians work or live; places such as bus stations, office buildings, residential living compounds, and school.

General Overview

To explain what is currently happening in the Middle East, we first need to understand what the Islamic State is. In the Muslim faith there are two major divisions whose main difference lies in their beliefs about power; Sunni and Shia. The split originated when the prophet Muhammad passed away in 632 C.E., after which the Sunnis wanted Muhammad's successor to be chosen by his followers whereas the Shias wanted the leadership to stay within the family.

The Islamic State is a radical Sunni group. They are motivated and driven by the want to unite as many nations under a caliphate, forcing their religion and way of life upon them. The group has been accused of responsibility for multiple civilian massacres, the violation of countless human rights, (mass) executions, ethnical cleansing and the recruiting of child soldiers, just to name a few. The IS has been committing atrocities against local populations for nearly a decade, and is known ferocity towards captives. Examples of this are public executions and beheadings of journalists and hostages, amongst others. It is estimated that as of February 2015, the Islamic State has more than 30,000 fighters, many of whom come from all around the world to join the campaign for their cause.

As previously mentioned, the Islamic State is a former branch of the terrorist organization known as al-Qaeda (AQI) in Iraq. This militant group was led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (also known as Tawhid wa al-Jihad) and another Jihadist leader, Osama Bin Laden. After al-Zarqawi's passing in 2006, AQI created another branch of their organization called the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). United States troops in Iraq and opposing Sunni tribes made it hard for the organization to take root, and its existence was balanced on a thin line. When Abu Bakr al-Baghadi became ISI's leader, he drastically changed the way it operated, allowing it to rebuild and grow in strength and numbers. By 2011, al-Baghadi and AQI troops were advancing across the Iraqi-Syrian border and joining the Syrian Civil War to fight against the Syrian government. AQI fighters located in Syria formed a new organization in 2012 called the al-Nusra Front that began to recruit its own fighters.

April 2013 - Abu Bakr al-Baghadi releases an audiotape in which he announced a merger of Iraqi and Syrian forces. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was born. However, both al-Qaeda leaders and al-Nusra leaders renounced this merger, unable to come to agreements with each other. This did not stop loyal followers of Badhadi to join him in his newly established rule of ISIL.

With this new power in place, the ISIL focus on expanding their territory returned. The group took advantage of the issues surrounding Iraq's government in 2013 and seized control of Falluja, defeating a faction of the Iraqi army in the process. From there on out, the Islamic State have made advances towards northern Iraq, taking control of the major northern city of Mosul. Once Mosul was secured, the group's efforts expanded south towards Baghdad.

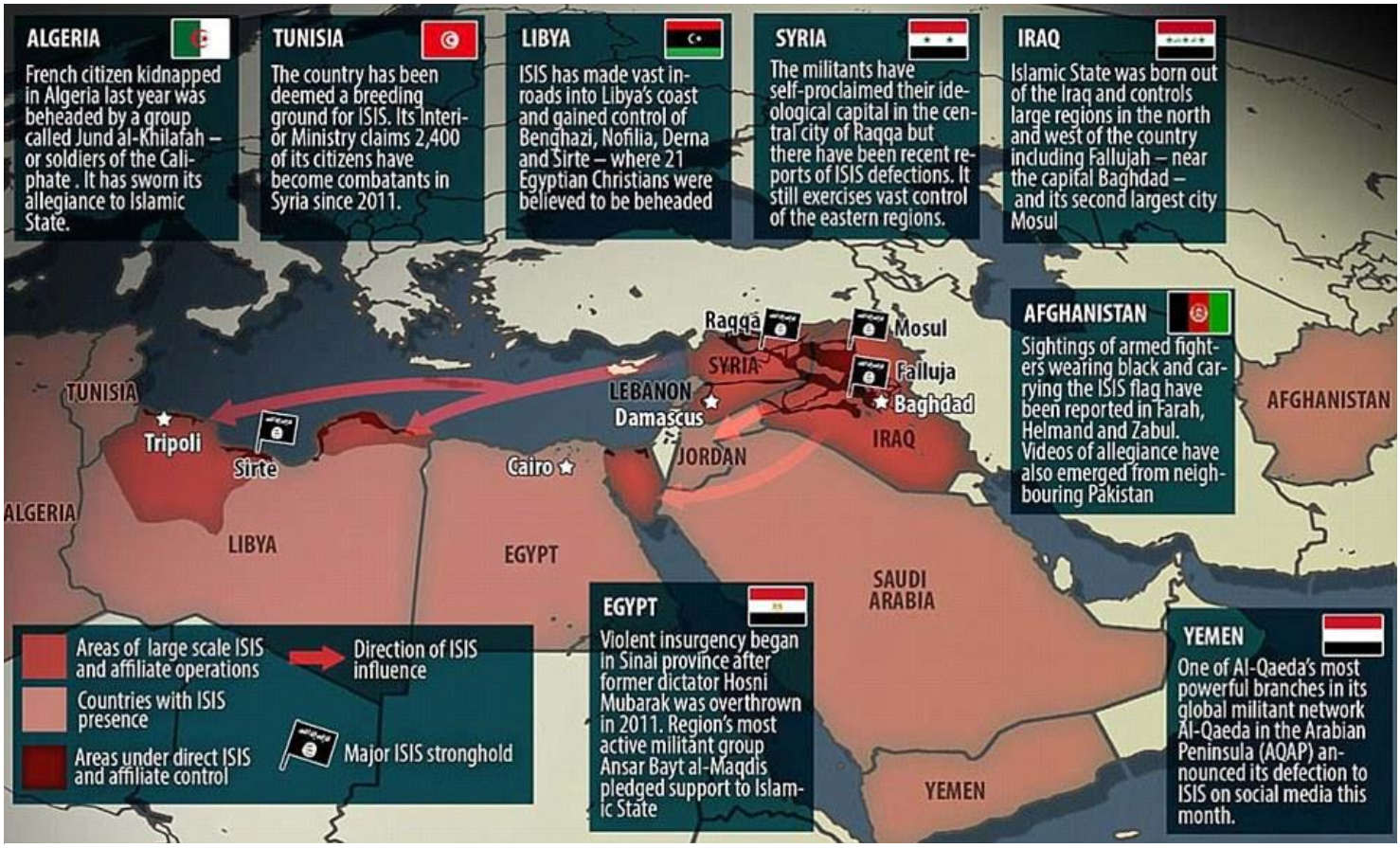
Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2015

~ fresh ideas, new solutions ~

In October 2014, a turning point was reached when the United States of America formed a coalition called the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR). This coalition is made up of several of the United States' North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies as well as numerous Asian and Arab countries. The objective of the CJTF is to combat and eliminate the Islamic State, mainly by conducting airstrikes on Syrian and Iraqi territories that have been taken by the IS. Islamic State bases, oil refineries, and checkpoints are all major targets.

Despite the efforts made by the peoples and governments of the world, the Islamic State fighters are still gaining territory. Parts of the towns of Ahras and Tel Jabon were taken control of, and the group is now fighting to take territory north of Aleppo. It is up to the international community to find a way to minimize the territory that is lost and to combat not only the Islamic State, but other terrorist organizations.



http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2960463/The-terrifying-rise-ISIS-Map-shows-terror-group-s-tentacles-reach-Algeria-Afghanistan.html

In the images above, just how much territory the Islamic State has taken control of and aim to gain becomes clear.

Major Parties Involved

The Syrian Arab Republic
What started as a civil violence against President Bashar al-Assad's regime in 2011 has escalated into a full-scale civil war, resulting in conflict and instability in the Syrian Arab Republic. This conflict and instability have enabled the Islamic State to both expand in numbers as well as to capture extensive territory. The Islamic State have declared the Syrian town of Raqqa as its capital, yet the United States President Barack Obama is still ruling out the option of Syrian participation in the CJTF-OIR coalition.

Iran
The Iranian government is Shia and thus, has close relations with the Iraqi government. They started providing military aid against IS after the terrorist organization made advances into northern Iraq in the summer of 2014. Iran has gone to war in both Syria and Iraq, deploying Special Forces to cooperate with, train, equip and advice Iraqi militia.

The United States of America
The United States of America has launched a campaign targeting the Islamic State. They announced a comprehensive strategy for destroying IS in both Iraq and Syria, which will focus on an expanded air war against the group in both countries. They will also help with the provision of arms and training to local allies on the ground — the Iraqi army, the Kurdish peshmerga, and "moderate" Syrian rebels.

Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR)
This United States-led coalition conducts airstrikes on Islamic State targets located on both Syrian and Iraqi soil. Various members of the coalition also provide logistical support or troops. The objective of this coalition is to eliminate IS and remove the threat it poses to the governments and peoples of Iraq and Syria. According to the United States Central Command, a total of 4,273 airstrikes had been conducted up to June 2015.

Jordan
This country has experienced a lot of spill over from the unrest in Syria and Iraq. It has received large numbers of refugees across its borders with both countries. Jordan's involvement in the airstrikes is part of its "position on combating terrorism and protecting its security and borders."

Iraq
The country has suffered tremendous losses under the Islamic State's violence. Mosul, an important hub in the country's oil industry and the country's second most populous city, was seized by the IS in early June 2014, dealing the government an enormous and unexpected blow. The IS militants released Sunni insurgents from prison, looted banks of about $425 million, and occupied the airport, several government and military buildings, and a police station. Iraqi government troops abandoned the fight in droves

and joined civilians in fleeing the city. The militants, who were joined by other Sunni groups, pressed on after seizing Mosul, taking Tikrit and assuming control of the country's largest oil facility, located in Baiji. As the militants expanded their areas of control and the stability and future of Iraq grew even more dire, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the country's senior Shiite religious leader, in June called on all Iraqis to fight the militants, saying it is "the legal and national responsibility of whoever can hold a weapon to hold it to defend the country, the citizens and the holy sites." [1] The Iraqi armed forces are receiving support and training from many members of the coalition along with the Iranian government.

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) / Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)
This group known variously as ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) or simply the Islamic State used to be a fraction of al Qaeda in Iraq. US troops and allied Sunni Militias defeated al Qaeda in Iraq during the post-2006 "surge" – but didn't destroy them. In 2011, the group rebooted. IS successfully freed a number of prisoners held by the Iraqi government and began to rebuild strength. The Islamic State and al Qaeda "divorced" in February 2014. "Over the years, there have been many signs that the relationship between al Qaeda Central and the group's strongest most unruly franchise was strained. "Their relationship," Barack Mendelsohn, a political scientist at Haverford College, writes, "has always been a matter of mutual interests rather than of shared ideology."

Timeline of Events

January 22nd, 2014 – The Geneva II Conference on Syria is held in Switzerland

June 10th, 2014 – The Iraqi city of Mosul falls to the hands of Islamic State troops

June 29th, 2014 – The Islamic State announces the creation of a caliphate that erases all state borders, making al-Baghdadi the self-declared authority over the world's estimated 1.5 billion Muslims, and names the Syrian city of Raqqa is the capital of IS

July 2014 – In Syria, all the cities between Deir Ezzor and the Iraq border have fallen to IS, says Omar Abu Leila, a spokesman for the rebel Free Syrian Army

July 3rd, 2014 – IS takes control of a major Syrian oil field, al-Omar. It is the country's largest oil field and can produce 75,000 barrels of oil daily

September 10th, 2014 – The United States president Barack Hussein Obama presents his 2014 strategy and the coalition against the Islamic State

September 23rd, 2014 – Airstrikes, led by the United States and targeting IS in Syria, commence

[1] http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/13/iraq-shias-isil.html

October 3rd, 2014 – The Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott declares that Australia will join the coalition against the Islamic State

October 7th, 2014 – Canada joins the coalition against the Islamic State and starts conducting airstrikes in Iraq

October 10th, 2014 – Spain joins the coalition against the Islamic State and sends 300 soldiers with a non-combatant role

February 3rd, 2015 – A video and still images posted online by IS supporters show Jordanian military pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh being burned alive while confined in a cage. Jordanian state TV says that al-Kaseasbeh was killed on January 3rd, 2015

February 5th, 2015 – Jordanian fighter jets carry out airstrikes over Syria, reportedly hitting ISIS training centres and arms and ammunition depots in IS' de facto capital, Raqqa.

February 8th, 2015 – Islamic State fighters expand their territory to Libya by seizing the Libyan town of Nofaliya

February 11th, 2015 – The United States president asks Congress to formally authorize use of military force against IS

May 17th, 2015 – The Iraqi city of Ramadi falls into the hands of IS

May 21st, 2015 – The Islamic State capture the ancient city of Palmyra

March 31st, 2015 – Iraqi forces manage to recapture the city centre of Tirkit

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Several resolutions regarding terrorist organizations have been discussed and adapted by the United Nations (UN). Their main focus lies on protecting civilians and eliminating threats, yet making sure that no territorial gains are made by these terrorist militant groups is also crucial. Resolutions specifically on the Islamic State include:

- 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)
- Resolution 2199, adopted by the Security Council on 12th February 2015 (S/RES/2199)

As well as passing these resolutions, a coalition, Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), was launched by the United States on 10th October 2014. Many members of the NATO have signed and joined.

Possible Solutions

The components of instability and conflict that are found widely in the Middle East region, not just Iraq or Syria, create opportunities for extremism and radicalization of populations to occur. While dealing with the source of terrorist organizations and immediate threats seem like a good idea, we must understand underlying factors as well. How can we stop terrorist organizations from claiming more territory and expanding their power? Ultimately, this can only be done by destroying and dismantling said terrorist organizations. Defeating the Islamic State is the long-term objective that the United Nations are trying to achieve. As many members of the coalition that is currently in place have ruled out cooperation with the Syrian government, opening lines of communication to ensure cooperation between different Member States is crucial.

One of the ways in which the Islamic State is gaining numbers is through propaganda. Combatting this propaganda war would a great way to reduce the amount of people that will get influenced by the terrorist group. IS romanticizes fighting in the Jihad by using humorous images on the internet and through social media platforms, encouraging and recruiting many to join their cause.

Useful documents

This website shows the rise and fall of the Islamic State. It is an interactive page where one can learn more about the territorial gains and losses that occurred by different parties, and it tells you about the key events of what has occurred to far.

- http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/02/rise-fall-isil-150212075706347.html

A resolution that was passed by the United Nations Security Council on measures that need to be taken against the Islamic State

- http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2178.pdf

Appendix/Appendices

I. "ISIS Fast Facts." *CNN*. N.p., n.d. Web.

II. "What Is 'Islamic State'?" *BBC*. N.p., n.d. Web.

III. Piven, Ben. "Who, What and Where Is ISIL? Explaining the Islamic State." *ALJAZEERA AMERICA*. N.p., n.d. Web.

IV. Laub, Zachary. "CFR Backgrouns: The Islamic State." *CFR*. N.p., n.d. Web.

V. "Timeline of ISIL Related Events." *Wikipedia*. N.p., n.d. Web.

VI. "ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria." *SSB*. N.p., n.d. Web.