UNESCO

Research Report

The Question of:
The revival of cultural heritage in a post-ISIS Middle East.

Introduction

On the 23rd of March 2019, ISIL/ISIS surrendered their last major land holdings in southeast Syria. This marked the end of a 5-year battle with the terrorist organization. Research carried out by the UN in accordance with the Saudi Research group, predicts the death toll to be at 400,000.

As recovery occurs in this post-ISIS Middle East, it is observed that ancient artifacts, some of which are 3000 years old, have been destroyed. What should be understood is that each artifact carries great history and culture. Ergo, destroying these artifacts represents the death of culture. This ultimately raised the question of;

The revival of cultural heritage in a post-ISIS middle east.

The Committee

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. UNESCO's vision is to provide lasting and sincere support among people. Also, in order to provide this sincerity and support, it is stated that peace must be founded upon dialogue and mutual understanding and must be built upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity. UNESCO has ongoing projects to ensure peace and help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance.

In Leiden Model United Nations, in the UNESCO committee, we expect delegates to prepare resolutions whilst considering the vision and principles of UNESCO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The rules of procedure of the committee is the standard MUN procedure with lobbying, submission of resolutions, then debate about the agenda issues. Since UNESCO is a committee that aims to ensure peace through international cooperation, the decisions made in the committee and new implementations should be routed from their vision, in peaceful and cooperative manners.

Key Terms

Caliphate – A Caliphate is a person who takes on the role of a political-religious leader of an Islamic state.

ISI – The ISI (Islamic State of Syria) were an old terrorist group that aimed to establish an Islamic state in Syria. They later merged with ISIS.

Chaldean Catholic – A type of church whose bishops descend from churches in the East.

General Overview

Words highlighted in bold have been defined in the "key terms" section above.

History - Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (referred to as al-Baghdadi from now on) was born in Northern Iraq. He studied Islamic law in the Islamic University of Baghdad (later known as Iraqi university). By the end of his educational career, he had his BA, MA and PhD in Islamic law.

On 2010, al-Baghdadi became the leader of **ISI** (the Islamic State of Iraq), a terrorist group in Iraq. Over time, the ISI increased its territories in Iraq. Eventually, it started expanding its reach into the bordering country, Syria. As the leader of ISI grew its territories into Syria, it clashed with other Jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda. In February 2014, al-Qaeda publicly disavowed ISI. Although this did not matter much to the ISI.

Shortly thereafter, ISI changed its name to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) which can also be translated alternatively to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This was the beginning of a five years battle with terrorism.

On 29 July 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced himself as the worldwide **caliphate**.

History – ISIL

The first official victory of the newly formed terrorist organization, ISIL, came with the capture of the Syrian city, Zumar. A few months later, many other radical groups across the world vowed allegiance to ISIL, examples of such pledge include;

- The Nigerian terrorist group, Boko Haram.
- The terrorist group from Uzbekistan, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

By the end of October 2014, ISIL was at its peak in power and had a lot of territory in Syria and Iraq. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034. However, at the same time, with the invitation of the Iraqi government, the United States of America started their intervention in Iraq. The intervention was mostly conducted through aerial bombings. Subsequently, other countries started joining the US-Led intervention: Australia, Britain, Canada, The Netherlands, France, Jordan, Morocco and Turkey.

Although not as grand as the US-Led intervention, Russia formed its own intervention. It led Iraq, Iran and Syria. Turkey also participated in its own intervention with sending 60 special ops soldiers to take over a village with 100 ISIL militants. Yet, as time progressed, Turkey joined the various other coalitions such as the US-Led coalition or the Muslim coalition.

Many Middle Eastern countries joined the battle against terrorism by forming a Muslim coalition. It was led by Saudi Arabia and was made up of the following countries: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Guinea, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Maldives, Mali, Malaysia, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey, Togo, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen

The multiple interventions by various countries caused ISIS to lose a lot of land. In fact, by early 2017, the USA, Russia and many other countries had concluded that ISIS was defeated. Unfortunately, ISIS decided to change its strategy from direct combat with military to suicide bombings across the globe.

Many countries such as France, Belgium, Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia were the victims to horrible terrorist attacks. In response to these events, many coalitions were re-formed, and we witnessed another offense on ISIL.

Like stated in the introduction, after a lot of fighting, on 23rd of March 2019, ISIL lost its major land holdings in Syria. Many people say that this is the end of ISIL; however there have still been a few terrorist attacks after March 23rd. For example, on Easter Day in Sri Lanka, multiple suicide bombings caused the death of 235 individuals and 500+ injuries.

The Problem

Although the problem with ISIS had been solved, there was another issue at hand; hundreds of cultural artifacts had been destroyed and with it, the valued cultural heritage. Many people believe that there are two reasons for such destruction;

- ISIS strong believes in its own ideologies and has little acceptance to foreign ideas. Ergo, artifacts (buildings, roads, etc.) that belong to other religions were instantly destroyed.
- The destruction of these buildings brings a lot of worldwide attention. This helps the main goal of terrorists: to spread terror.
- Destroying cultural heritage results in ISIS starting off with a "clean" slate. All notions of previous ideologies are wiped when the artifacts are destroyed.

A great deal of cultural heritage has been destroyed. Below are a few;

St Markourkas Church [Source: Al Jazeera]

St Markourkas was built during the 10th century. It was a **Chaldean Catholic** church. According to the official Iraqi government, ISIS destroyed the church on 9th of March 2015. A commentary nearby the church was bulldozed. When they destroyed the building, it was a destruction of 11 centuries of culture.

The Great Temple of Hatra [Source: Getty Image]

The great temple of Hatra was 2300 years old. It withstood the attack of the Romans in 116 AD and has been a great cultural heritage. It is officially a UNESCO World Heritage site. The temple was looted and the whole building was destroyed.

Mari [Source: Getty Image]

The ancient site of Mari dates to almost 3000 BC. Although some excavations had started since the 1930s, most of it remained intact. ISIS dug 1200 pits into this site and looted thousands of paintings and artifacts. Perhaps among the greatest losses are clay tablets that describe the civilization's legal system, economy, etc.

Major Parties Involved

Syria – At one point in time, ISIS held half of the land in Syria. The country faced a lot of damage and destruction. Especially, it had a lot of damage done to its artifacts and cultural heritage.

Iraq – It shares the same story as Syria. A huge amount of cultural heritage destroyed due to the actions of ISIS.

USA – The United States led a collation with other countries, which was one of the main reasons for the retreat of ISIS.

Russia – Although the Russian coalition was small, it also played a great role in helping push back the Jihad insurgents.

Turkey – Turkey conducted many operations by its own which played a role in the downfall of ISIL. A few examples are given in the general overview section.

ISIL – ISIL was one of the main reasons for all this terror. It was also solely responsible for the destruction of many cultural heritage sites across many countries.

France – Due to the terrorist attacks on France, the country launched hundreds of attacks on ISIL. Experts say that France played a great role in the destruction of ISIL.

Jordan – In order to avenge Jordanian fallen pilot Muath al-Kasabeh, who was burned to death by ISIL, Jordan launched a 3-day airstrike on ISIL. It claims that it killed 7000 ISIL militants and destroyed 20% of the militant group's capacity.

Timeline of Events

April 2010 - Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi becomes leader of ISI.

May 2014 – A 3000 year old neo-Assyrian statue is smashed to piece by ISIS.

June 2014 – ISIS takes over Mosul, Iraq and killed 600 people in the process.

June 2014 – ISIL destroy a 1400 years tomb of prophet Jannah.

August 2014 – President Obama announces the beginning of air strikes against ISIS.

September 2014 – ISIS blow up a 12th century mosque called the "Green Mosque".

November 2014 – ISIS advance deep into Syria and Iraq.

February 2015 – Jordan and Libya start offense on ISIS. Egypt follows track.

March 2015 – St Markourkas Church, a 10th century catholic church is destroyed by ISIL

April 2016 - Sa'a Qadima Church, built in 1872 is blown up.

June 2016 – Iraqi army retake the major city of Fallujah from ISIS.

October 2016 – Turkish-backed Syrian rebels' retake Dabiq. Dabiq was a city in which the ISIL militants stated the final apocalyptic would be fought and victory for ISIL would come.

July 2017 – Mosul is recaptured from ISIS.

August 2017 – 73% of ISIS territory has been lost according to the USA

October 2017 – ISIS lose the city of Raqqa, Syria. One of the last strong holds of ISIS.

December 2017 – Many countries claim victory over ISIS.

2018 – Multiple sucide bombings across Europe are claimed by ISIS.

2019 – As the diminished forces of ISIS retreat or disperse, the damage left in their wake is unbelievable; thousands of artifices destroyed. The University of Mosul has declared that they have lost over 8000 books, some of which date back 5000 years.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Although no resolution directly attempts to solve our issue, there have been multiple resolutions that have attempted to solve a component of our issue. All of these resolutions are linked in the "further reading" section.

Bonn declaration – The declaration is a 4-page document condemning the crimes committed by ISIS against world heritage sites.

A/RES/69/281 – A resolution that tackles a bit of the problem at hand by protecting few of the national heritages in Iraq. They do this through means such as enforcing more police members in sites of cultural heritage in order to protect these sites from further destruction.

2015/2649(RSP) – A resolution passed by the EU parliament which calls for raising awareness regarding the destruction of cultural heritage.

Decision 196 EX/29 – UNESCO decision that makes the sales of all artefacts looted from a middle eastern country illegal.

The Future

Under ISIS, many heritage artefacts were destroyed so badly that they could not be identified later. The destruction of these artefacts represents the destruction of culture. Ergo, you, delegate, now have a grave responsibility of reviving the broken culture.

There are many ways that we can solve this issue. We could start by creating a new UN body that specifically supervises with restoration of cultural heritage in post-ISIS middle east. This body could have various responsibilities such as assessing damage, collaborating with architects, discussing the issue with locals, etc.

Another great factor that can help in the revival of culture is technology. Recently Google used a 3D printer to print an exact replica of a 3000-year old statue that was decimated by ISIS (see Further Reading section for link). You could also think of how very popular technology such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence could play a role in recreating destroyed artefacts.

Furthermore, you could also think about the problems of smugglers who smuggled a great number of artefacts from Syria and Iraq to other countries. A potential solution could be to create an international intelligence board in which countries donate all their intelligence on all artefact smuggling going on.

There are hundreds of ways to solve this issue delegate. Be creative, be considerate and be smart ☺

Remember! The above are just a few suggestions. Feel free to create your own solutions

Questions a Resolution Must Answer (Q.A.R.M.A.)

These are a few questions the resolution must answer. Do remember to not limit yourself to these questions alone! Try to also create your own questions 😊

- How do we successfully restore the cultural heritage in post-ISIS Middle East?
- Should we restore the cultural heritage fully or should we leave it as it is, to truly show history and the brutality of ISIS?
- How do we stop any current terrorists from destroying cultural heritage?
- The ancient cultural heritage sites were built in a different time era: what are the repercussions of building/restoring them today?
- Will raising awareness about the issue with common people, help speed up the recovery of cultural heritage?

Further Reading

Bonn declaration
-http://www.39whcbonn2015.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/Bonn_Declaration_on_World_Heritage_REV.en.pdf

A/Res/69/281 –
https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/281

Decision - https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232890

European parliament -
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/seance_pleniere/textes_adoptes/provisoire/2015/04-30/0179/P8_TA-PROV(2015)0179_EN.pdf

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