



**The Islamic State (ISIS)
High School Security Council
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Background

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, is a religiously-motivated militant group in the Middle East led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The primary goal of ISIS is to establish an Islamic Caliphate in the Middle East based on extreme Sunni Muslim teachings. These teachings leave little room for other religions, including the other main Muslim sect, the Shi'a. This mentality leads ISIS to attack Shi'ite targets as well as Western ones. Although originally part of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), ISIS was renounced by the Al-Qaeda leadership in February of 2014, who cited the violence against fellow Muslims as the primary cause of the split. ISIS has become known for their brutal tactics and the large amount of territory they control.

The rise of ISIS has been very rapid. The group has been around since 2006 as a small offshoot of Al-Qaeda, but only recently has grown in power. They first became relevant in Syria, where they joined the civil war against President Bashar al-Assad. The instability in Syria gave ISIS the safe haven they needed to expand their operations and begin recruiting in earnest. Two of their most effective recruitment tactics have been prison breaks and the use of social media. When ISIS fighters conquer a town or city, they free the prisoners, many of whom were jailed for dissenting against the government. However, the strategic use of social media has been what really makes ISIS unique from other Islamist groups. ISIS has posted many online propaganda videos such as mass executions, beheadings of Western civilians,

and talks from their leader in an attempt to attract people from around the world to their cause. Their ability to reach people all over the globe has resulted in several ISIS affiliated groups starting in Southeast Asia.

Another major reason for ISIS's sudden rise was the internal division in Iraq. The Prime Minister of Iraq from 2003 to 2014 was Nouri al-Maliki, a Shi'ite. Mr. al-Maliki refused to share power with the Sunnis, which sparked protests from the Sunni people. The Iraqi government responded to the peaceful protests with lethal force, enraging the people, so when ISIS came over from Syria in 2014, they were met with little resistance from the majority-Sunni western part of Iraq. In some cases, the Iraqi army immediately surrendered, turning over their weapons to ISIS. ISIS now has large swaths of territory in both Iraq and Syria, US-made weapons captured from the Iraqis, and have begun setting up a functioning society. In regions under ISIS control, they have instituted their own government based on Sharia (Islamic) law, started collecting taxes, and even begun coining their own money. All signs seem to indicate that it will take an enormous effort to remove ISIS from the territories it now holds.

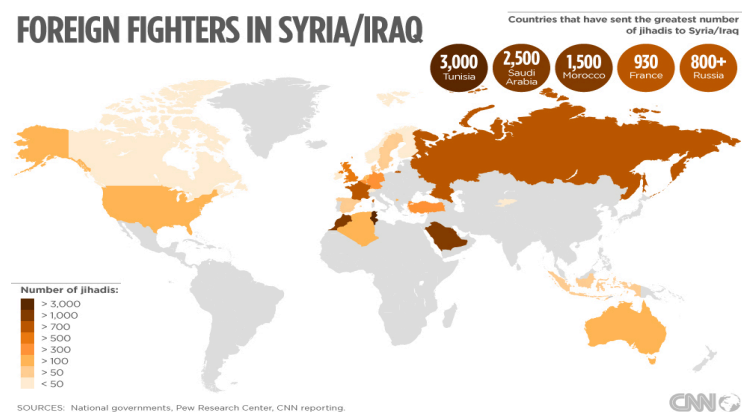
Current Issue

The international community has been split on how to deal with ISIS. Possible solutions range from an outright military invasion to ignoring the problem, with some gulf states (Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia) even indirectly funding them. The Syrian government and ISIS seem to have formed a temporary truce with each other, while each group tries to



exterminate other rebel groups in Syria. However almost all countries publicly agree that ISIS is an international threat and needs to be stopped.

In previous wars against terrorism, an effective tool has been to cut funding that terrorist groups receive, and to turn public opinion against them. ISIS is extremely well funded and popular, with its oil sales alone generating an estimated \$1 million dollars a day. In order to combat this, the U.S.-led coalition has bombed oil fields held by ISIS. Gulf States previously funding ISIS, have cut off their funds and tried to limit wealthy citizens from donating privately. Another strategy is to limit the number of people going to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. France and other European countries have placed a travel ban on Syria and Iraq, and intelligence agencies observe any person entering the region.



Many Western nations are contributing in some way to the airstrikes campaign against ISIS, however some countries and factions want the military action to be escalated further. Possibilities range from supplying opposition groups (such as the Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi army) with weapons, to an all out invasion. In the Netherlands, a biker gang has joined the Kurds in Iraq fighting ISIS. In the U.S. a poll shows that Americans favor a “boots on the ground” approach to dealing with ISIS. This raises the question of sovereignty. Do foreign countries have the right to interfere? Syria insists that any strike against ISIS should be cleared by the Syrian government. Some Iraqi and Kurdish Officials have said that the West should not install combat troops, to only supply them with the necessary weapons and training to effectively combat ISIS. The general trend is that Middle Eastern States want the U.S. to stay out of the actual fighting.

Guiding Questions:

- Does your country have a Muslim majority? If so, is that ethnicity predominantly Sunni or Shi'a?
- Does ISIS pose a threat to any territory controlled by your country?
- Does your country typically support military intervention?
- Is there a reason your country wouldn't want to support the Iraqis or the Kurds?

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