

**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** Question of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

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## Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), is a militant group that follows a jihadist doctrine of Sunni Islam. The group has been designated a terrorist organisation by the United Nations as well as by many international organisations and individual countries, and has a presence in 18 countries. ISIL has claimed responsibility for hundreds of terrorist attacks that have occurred globally over the past decade. Since 2017, ISIS and its followers have carried out attacks in at least 25 countries. In addition, they claim to have destroyed priceless monuments, ancient temples, and works of art from antiquity. ISIL's war crimes and atrocities are some of the worst in history, and have resulted in millions of casualties.

## Definition of Key Terms

### The Levant

The Levant is a broad geographical region that includes Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Jordan. Many experts believe that the acronym "ISIL" is more accurate than "ISIS" (as "ISIS" exclusively refers to the regions of Iraq and Syria), which is why it will be referred to as such in this report.

### Mass Shooting

In basic definition, a mass shooting is an incident involving multiple victims of firearm-related violence. The United States' Congressional Research Service acknowledges that there is no set definition but defines a public mass shooting as an event where someone chooses four or more victims indiscriminately and kills them, similar to the FBI's definition of "Mass Murder".

### Terrorism

There are two primary categories of terrorism: international terrorism and domestic terrorism. Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored). Domestic terrorism: Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political,

religious, social, racial, or environmental nature. ISIL is affiliated with both of these categories of terrorism, based on their history of global and domestic conflicts.

## Background

### Origins of ISIL

The origins of ISIL can be traced back to Al-Qaeda (AQ), a militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in 1986. Al-Qaeda began as a logistical network to support Muslims fighting against the Soviet Union during the Afghan War; members were recruited throughout the Islamic world. Over the next few years, Al-Qaeda began to merge with a number of other militant Islamist organizations, including Egypt's Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group, and on several occasions its leaders declared "holy war" against the United States. The organization established camps for Muslim militants from throughout the world and its agents engaged in numerous terrorist attacks. These international terrorist attacks included the bomb attacks of U.S. embassies, U.S. warships, and in 2001, the September 11 attacks.

#### *Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)*

In 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was originally part of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda Network, founded the militant group "Al-Qaeda in Iraq." The U.S. invasion of Iraq began in 2003, and the aim of Al-Qaeda in Iraq was to remove Western occupation and replace it with a Sunni Islamist regime.

#### *Formation of ISIL*

When Zarqawi was killed during a U.S. airstrike in 2006, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and other aliases, became the new leader and renamed the group "ISI," which stood for "Islamic State of Iraq." Masri served as the prime minister of ISI until 2010, when he died in a US-Iraqi operation, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took power. When the civil war in Syria started, ISI fought against Syrian forces and gained ground throughout the region. In 2013, the group officially renamed themselves "ISIS," which stands for "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," because they had expanded into Syria. Now, most experts and governments refer to the group as "ISIL" as the group occupies regions across the Levant, rather than exclusively Syria.

### Mass shootings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The global community has suffered from a multitude of mass shootings over the last decade, many of which have been affiliated with ISIL. These mass shootings have come in various forms, including but not limited to school shootings, terrorist attacks, and violent crimes. Due to social media in this digital age, many of these shootings have caught the attention of netizens and media reporters alike, who have in turn showed support to the victims of the shootings.

### Paris attacks

On the night of November 13, 2015, the city of Paris suffered from a series of terror attacks involving firearms which claimed the lives of 129 innocent people. The event provoked responses from many world leaders, most of whom issued statements in support of France. Former President Obama, who was in the US executive presidential office at the time of the Paris attacks, condemned the atrocities on behalf of the White House: “It’s an attack not just on the people of France. But this is an attack on all of humanity and the universal values we share. We’re going to do whatever it takes to work with the French people and with nations around the world to bring these terrorists to justice and to go after any terrorist networks that go after our people.”

In addition to the statements and vows made by world leaders, over 70 million people shared their prayers and support for Paris on social media on the weekend of the shooting.

### Europe attacks

Such proceedings were also taken for the series of terrorist attacks that other countries in Europe suffered in 2016, such as the Brussels and Nice attacks (refer to Timeline of Events).

The attackers for each of the mass murders in the European cities were affiliated to ISIL. According to the Conflict Armament Research field investigators and a Belgian research group that studied the issue, “the majority of weapons used by ISIL since 2014 originated in China, Russia and Eastern Europe.” Other items, including “ammunition as well as chemical components procured... to manufacture improvised explosive devices (IEDs)”, were studied and discovered to originate from the same three countries. However, the report also noted that many of the items were originally supplied from the US and Saudi Arabia.

## Territorial Control and Claims

As a self-claimed “caliphate”, ISIL claims religious, political and military authority over all Muslims worldwide. ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani stated that “the legality of all emirates, groups, states and organizations becomes null by the expansion of the khilafah’s [caliphate’s] authority and arrival of its troops to their areas.” Thus, ISIL rejects the political divisions, such as the ones established by Western powers during World War I in the Sykes–Picot Agreement as it absorbs territory in Syria and Iraq.

The group has carried out a multitude of threats, bombings and attacks against these countries – notably Syria, Iraq and Turkey – with the goal to not only claim territory, but also to maintain authority and a state of fear in those regions. Countries, such as Turkey, Libya and Syria’s, involvement in the Syrian Civil War and Libyan Civil War and radical internal political elements have only added to the alleged terrorist incidents.

On December 9, 2017 Iraqi military forces announced the war against ISIL in Iraq had been won and that they no longer controlled territory in Iraq. By March 2019, ISIL lost most of its territory in Syria and Iraq.

### Recent Events

Despite its loss of territory in its former core areas, the group's acolytes have continued to carry out attacks both in and outside of the Middle East. The group has shifted their military strategy towards hit-and-run tactics, which rely on methodical surveillance and secretive networks to deliver targeted attacks. These tactics have allowed the group to remain effective in Syria, and have also been applied to their attacks outside of the Middle East, such as the Philippines attack. They have also returned to guerilla tactics that were used in their past, including targeted assassinations, bombings, ambushes and raids. According to US Army General Joseph Votel, the group still has tens of thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria.

Another recent event that has greatly impacted the ISIL situation was the death of the head of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He was reported to have committed suicide on October 27, 2019, and ISIL confirmed his death on October 31, 2019. His position as caliph of ISIL was quickly replaced by an unknown identity by the name of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. Al-Baghdadi's death does not seem to have delayed the group in any way as the majority of ISIL fighters remained loyal to the ideology of ISIL and stressed their allegiance to ad-Dawla al-Islamiya, the Islamic State, not to its leader.

As of now, the group continues to operate in West Africa, Libya, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula), Afghanistan and the Philippines, and has followers worldwide. In addition, according to a report issued by the Pentagon's Inspector General, as many as 18,000 fighters are still on the loose between Syria and Iraq.

## **ISIL Funding**

Like many insurgent groups, ISIL relies on a variety of funding streams. While estimates vary, the group was said to have made \$2 billion in 2014 alone. The group has supported itself through crimes such as extortion, ransom kidnappings, the theft of oil, and trafficking in stolen vehicles. It should be noted that, according to a report released in 2017 by the British International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), ISIL's financial revenue has dropped dramatically in recent years.

## **Major Parties Involved**

### **United States of America (USA)**

Ever since the September 11<sup>th</sup> incident, the USA has taken action towards eradicating the terrorist organization. On September 10, 2014, the USA announced the formation of a broad international coalition to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. The U.S. government stated that "five mutually reinforcing lines of effort to degrade and defeat ISIS were put forth at an early September 2014 meeting with NATO counterparts." These lines of effort include:

1. Providing military support to our partners;
2. Impeding the flow of foreign fighters;
3. Stopping financing and funding;
4. Addressing humanitarian crises in the region; and
5. Exposing ISIL's true nature as being a terrorist organization responsible for mass atrocities.

As of now, the U.S. military response to ISIL has been characterized by strategic bombing. They have also continued to actively contribute to the campaign through military efforts, the air campaign against ISIL targets, and efforts to prevent the flow of funds and fighters to ISIL. The U.S. is beginning to send more troops to the region to assist the Iraqi military; however, most of the fighting remains in the hands of Shi'I militias.

## Timeline of Events

ISIL has claimed responsibility for numerous conflicts in the Middle East, as well as terrorist attacks around the world. Some of the most impactful events that have been related to ISIL have been listed below.

Date	Description of event
<b>September 11, 2001</b>	The September 11 attacks, also referred to as 9/11, were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda against the United States. An estimated 2,606 people who were in the World Trade Center and on the ground perished in the attacks on and the subsequent collapse of the towers.
<b>September 10, 2014</b>	The USA announced the formation of a broad international coalition to defeat ISIL.
<b>April 2015</b>	ISIL expanded into Syria and claimed nine Syrian provinces, covering most of the country and lying largely along existing provincial boundaries: Al Barakah, Al Khayr, Raqqa, Homs, Halab, Idlib, Hamah, Damascus, and Latakia.
<b>February 2015</b>	ISIL forces took over parts of the Libyan city of Sirte.
<b>May 2015</b>	ISIL seized Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's al Anbar province
<b>November 13, 2015</b>	Paris attacks: The city of Paris suffered from a series of terror attacks involving firearms which claimed the lives of 129 innocent people.
<b>December 2, 2015</b>	San Bernadino attack: A married couple opened fire at the Inland Regional Center in California and killed 14 people.
<b>March 22, 2016</b>	Brussels bombing: Bombings at Brussels Airport in Belgium and a nearby Metro station killed 32 people.
<b>June 12, 2016</b>	Pulse Nightclub shooting: A gunman opened fire inside a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and killed 49 people.
<b>July 14, 2016</b>	Nice attack: In French Riviera town, 86 people in a crowd were killed by a terrorist driving a truck mowed down a crowd of people.
<b>December 19, 2016</b>	Berlin attack: A man hijacked and drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing himself and 11 others.
<b>April 3, 2017</b>	Saint Petersburg Metro bombing: a terrorist attack using an explosive device took place on the Saint Petersburg Metro. The bomb blast killed a total of 15 people, as well as the main suspect of the bombing, Akbarzhon Jalilov.

<b>May 22, 2017</b>	Manchester attack: A single suicide bomber killed 22 people during an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena in England.
<b>Mid-2018</b>	ISIL began to refer to its territory in the Levant simply as Wilayat al-Sham, and has done the same with Iraq, calling it Wilayat al-Iraq.
<b>January 27, 2019</b>	Jolo church attack: two ISIL acolytes set off two bombs at a Roman Catholic cathedral in southern Philippines, killing 20 people and injuring dozens more.
<b>October 26, 2019</b>	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's death.

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- International Convention on the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (ICSFT): adopted by Resolution 54/109 of the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1999, the Terrorist Financing Convention is a landmark treaty and incriminates the act of sponsoring terrorism. Although the treaty has been ratified by most UN member states, its use is sparse. Ukraine did try to prosecute Russia in 2017 under the convention, but no conclusion has been reached.
- UN Security Council Resolution 748: condemns terrorism and raises concern against several nations such as Libya, which it imposed sanctions against, who are responsible for several airline crashes.
- UN Security Council Resolution 1373: a legally binding resolution that creates a anti-terrorism agency within the United Nations itself.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2249: calls upon UN member states to increase efforts in combatting ISIL and other terrorist groups.

## Possible Solutions

- Increased financial support for anti-ISIL operations authorized by the Security Council. More supplies, investment, and aid would assist the fight against ISIL, potentially leading to a quicker resolution to the conflict with the defeat of ISIL forces.
- Authorization of peacekeeping forces to be sent to vulnerable locations that may be attacked by ISIL, such as key cities in the region.
- Anti-ISIL media campaigns in affected countries to counteract ISIL propaganda. These campaigns could include Public Service Announcements (PSAs), television ads and more, all aimed with the purpose of reducing support for ISIL.
- Greater awareness campaigns in non-affected countries such as the US to encourage public support.
- More support programs for assisting locals affected by ISIL, such as medical resources, food, and water to communities and people rescued from ISIL control. Could also include psychological support services for those that have become victim to ISIL abuse, trauma, and rape.

- Organized tribunals and international prosecution of ISIL leaders, ensuring they are brought to justice and that they cannot escape responsibility. Once ISIL is defeated, this will be important in prosecuting people who are responsible for atrocities but who have escaped the public attention.

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