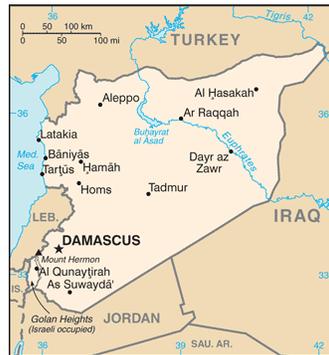# Information Paper

Conflict with the
Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

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October 2014

Introduction

The world was taken by surprise with the rapid conquest of large areas of Syria and Iraq by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Although the jihadist organization has been in existence for a number of years it was only in late 2013 and early 2014 that it started to gain traction in conquering territory in both Syria and Iraq. There are many reasons for this fast rise in power which will be examined in detail in this paper.

The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the conflict with ISIS to people who are working on issues or projects associated with the "degrading, defeat, and destruction" of ISIS. The paper will provide a history of ISIS, examine the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) as well as strategy of ISIS, review the political landscape of Syria and Iraq, assess the current situation (as of early October 2014), and provide some recommendations on the way forward for policy makers and military leaders.

All information in this paper is unclassified and acquired through open source references on the Internet. Much of the information is footnoted to allow the reader to delve deeper into a particular topic or to look at the source of information stated in the paper. In addition, there is a listing of references, bibliography and glossary. The Table of Contents has bookmarks to bring you quickly to a specific topic and there is a bookmark located just above each of the major paper sections that will return you to the Table of Contents.

The information is current as of early October 2014. Some of the information will become less relevant and possibly incorrect in this rapidly changing environment with the passage of time.

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Invasion and Occupation of Iraq (2003 – 2004)

The United States invaded Iraq in March 2003 just 1 ½ years after invading Afghanistan. The justification for the invasion was to change the regime that supported al Qaeda in the 9/11 attacks and to find and destroy Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.[1] The invasion, conventional army against conventional army, went very well. The Iraqi Army was quickly defeated and the Saddam Hussein regime fled Baghdad and the remnants of the regime went into hiding. The United States consolidated its hold on Iraq and established the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headed by Paul Bremer to administer the country and establish a new Iraqi government. General Tommy Franks headed home and LTG Rick Sanchez took over as commander of the military forces in Iraq.

Unfortunately, some very early mistakes would end up haunting the U.S. occupation forces. The organization that was planned to set up the post-invasion administration (under former General Garner) was quickly dismissed and disbanded and Paul Bremer was sent to head the CPA. Policy makers did not want to address the aspects of nation-building required to ensure a functioning democracy.[2] The CPA was staffed by quickly hired personnel – some who were unsuited and untrained for the job. Two critical early decisions by Bremer would turn out to be short-sighted[3] – the dismissal of the government bureaucracy[4] and the disbanding of the Iraq Army[5]. The bureaucratic technicians of the Iraq government and Iraqi army personnel that could administer and secure the country were now out of work; many quickly recruited for the growing Sunni insurgency.

The occupation of Iraq was supposed to be short-lived with an early transition to moderate Iraqis who would establish a transitional self-ruling government. This would allow U.S. forces to depart Iraq for the United States. However, an insurgency soon developed, the Iraqis had difficulties establishing a new government agreeable to all, and the complexities of administering a country that had lost its bureaucracy and army became very evident. The United States soon realized that they were fighting an insurgency (although the word was forbidden in early 2004) and were in Iraq for the long haul.

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[1] There was never any concrete evidence that the Iraqi government played a part in the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 and we are still looking for the weapons of mass destruction.

[2] See *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency,* CSIS, Dec 05. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/051209_iraqiinsurg.pdf

[3] See "US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army", *Intelligence and National Security,* Vol. 25, No. 1, 76-85, February 2010. http://pfiffner.gmu.edu/files/pdfs/Articles/CPA%20Orders,%20Iraq%20PDF.pdf

[4] See *Iraq Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number One, De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society*, Council on Foreign Relations*,* May 16, 2003. www.cfr.org/iraq/iraq-coalition-provisional-authority-order-number-one-de-baathification-iraqi-society/p30235

[5] See *Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2: Dissolution of* Entities posted on George Washington University website at this link.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has existed since 2004. It was established as a result of the overthrow of the Sunni regime (under Saddam Hussein) of Iraq. It was first known to many Americans as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) when it gained prominence among the Sunni militant groups fighting the Americans (and its allies), fellow Muslims (mostly Shia), as well as the Iraqi government.

Zarqawi. The first known leader of the early group of Sunni militants known as AQI was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He was a Jordanian, with a criminal past, who traveled to Afghanistan in 1989 to join the fight against the Soviet Union as a member of the mujahedeen; however, he arrived too late to take part as the Soviets were withdrawing. He returned to Jordan and was associated with the international jihad movement through the 1990s. In late 1999, while the Taliban was still in power, he returned to Afghanistan. He fled Afghanistan once the Taliban were toppled and settled in Iraq.[6]

Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad. Shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 Zarqawi set up the Party of Monotheism and Jihad; with the majority of the members being non-Iraqis Sunnis. Zarqawi's group targeted the Shia population – they were an easier target - to incite a Shia backlash against the Sunni and fan the flames of sectarian strife.

In 2004, having gained international attention, Zarqawi renamed his group al-Qaeda in Iraq of AQI. His group continued its terrorist tactics against fellow Muslims (Shia targets of course) and the groups' reputation for violence grew. Much of the sectarian violence of 2006-2007 in Iraq can be contributed to AQI. In June 2006 two USAF jets dropped two 500-pound bombs on Zarqawi ending his reign as an insurgent leader. However, AQI continued to exist and remained as violent as ever.

"The Anbar Awakening". In 2007 the Sunni tribes started to pull their support from the Sunni militants – recognizing that the insurgent fight was unwinnable, the surge was establishing security within the Baghdad area, and the Sunni population was not in favor of the Sharia rules imposed upon them. The U.S. military, under General Petraeus and senior Marine commanders in western Iraq encouraged this awakening providing money and resources for the establishment of Sunni militias known as the "Sons of Iraq".

AQI is Degraded. The group - suffering from the revolt of the Sunni tribes, death of its leader, military accomplishments of the U.S. surge of troops, constant targeting by special operations task forces, and

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[6] Much of the information in this paper on Zarqawi and ISIS is taken from "ISIS: A Short History", *The Atlantic,* August 14, 2014. http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/isis-a-short-history/376030/

the seeming political reconciliation of the Sunni tribal leaders with the Shiite-led government – soon found its membership dwindling and effectiveness on the battlefield marginalized.

Survival of AQI. The militant organization was severely degraded (some say defeated) but not entirely destroyed. It was pushed underground and marginalized. The United States completed its withdrawal from Iraq by the end of 2011. At the same time AQI was being reorganized under its leader – Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group changed from one with a majority of non-Iraqi Sunnis to one made up of a majority of Iraqi Sunnis.

Withdrawal of United States from Iraq

The withdrawal of the United States military from Iraq at the end of 2011 had disastrous effects on that country. The United States lost a good portion of its leverage after 2011 and didn't exercise any of the remaining leverage that it still retained (training programs associated with police, weapons transfers, financial aid, etc.). The withdrawal was caused by the inability of the Iraqi Parliament to act favorably on a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the U.S and Iraq. Many speculate that this worked in President Obama's favor as he wanted to leave the Iraq War (that he opposed as a Senator and inherited as President) in the rear-view mirror.

Miss-Steps of the Iraq Government (2011-2013)

With the Sunni Awakening and the re-establishment of security in the Baghdad area and elsewhere the Iraqi government had an opportunity to gain the support of the Sunni population. However, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, was more intent on consolidating the position of the Shia and his own personal power-base. Promises made to the Sons of Iraq were broken (political participation, salaries, reconstruction of Sunni areas, etc.) and Sunni politicians were marginalized. Once security was established within Iraq Maliki decided he no longer needed the help of the Sunni.

When the last of the U.S. troops left Iraq at the end of 2011 the situation in Iraq was relatively stable. AQI, and other insurgent groups, had been pushed underground. Although U.S. troops were leaving there were some security assistance programs still in effect. Training for the Iraqi Security Forces would continue through the Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I) and a State Department police development program. These programs did not get much traction – the Iraqi leaders not interested in professionalization of their security forces and intelligence services.

Shortly after the United States left Iraq in November 2011 the Maliki regime started to increase the persecution of the Sunnis. He refused to share power with them, cracked down on Sunni protestors, and dismissed and tried to arrest Sunni leaders of the government. He removed high-ranking Sunni military officers and replaced them with Shia officers loyal to him but lacking military experience and training. The sectarian and ethnic divisions within Iraq widened further in mid-2012. In December 2013 the Sunnis began an uprising, in part led by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) – formerly known as AQI.

ISIS Emerges (2013-2014)

What's in a Name? The abundance of names to refer to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria causes some confusion among observers. Many commentators try to find hidden meanings or motives behind the use of the various names. This paper will use the term ISIS when referring to the Islamic State for no other reason than it is the name with the most common usage. Other names in use include the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and the Islamic State.

Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The AQI group was renamed and it soon started to attack the Iraq military and government in earnest. Many of its new members came from former disenchanted members of the Sons of Iraq. The activities of the Shia-dominated Iraqi government after 2009 led to feelings of disillusionment and disenfranchisement on the part of the Sunni population. Resentment against the Iraqi government led to support of Sunni militants.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The group, once it directed some of its attention to the fight against the Assad regime of Syria renamed itself again – reflecting its greater geographical orientation. ISIS has declared the Syrian city of Raqqah as the capital of the Islamic State. Raqqah is located in central northern Syria along the Euphrates River.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The leader of ISIS is a long-time Iraqi jihadist and militant. He is 43 years old and comes from the Iraqi city of Samarra – north of Baghdad. During the American occupation of Iraq he was imprisoned for six months and later released. Upon release from prison he joined al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

Islamic State. In an effort to further explain his groups aim Baghdadi renamed his group the "Islamic State". His group declared Baghdadi as "caliph" and stated that they had established the "caliphate". The name change, declaration of the caliph and caliphate, success on the battlefield in Syria, western Iraq, Mosul, and the Tigris River Valley – and the persecution of religious minorities such as the Christians, Turkomen, and Yazidis brought the group worldwide attention. In mid-2014 Baghdadi insisted that Muslims worldwide pledge allegiance to the Islamic State thus throwing the worldwide jihadist movement into a quandary.

Sunni Discontent. The Sunnis of Iraq and Syria feel threatened by the Shia-dominated ruling regimes of Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In addition, Lebanon – parts heavily controlled by the Hezbollah – is a threat to the Sunnis. This apprehension fuels the support for ISIS among the Sunni population.

Organizational Leadership of ISIS. Many of the leaders of ISIS come from a military background[7] – some from the old military of Saddam Hussein. Some leaders of Sunni tribes have also been integrated into the leadership of ISIS; although not all Sunni tribal leaders fighting the Iraqi regime have given allegiance to ISIS.

ISIS Use of Social Media. ISIS has gained international attention because of its rapid success in acquiring large geographical areas of Iraq and Syria, accumulation of massive amounts of discarded Iraqi military equipment, ability to finance its operations, and a steady stream of recruits from across the globe. In addition, it has a very savvy information operations campaign at work.

Beheadings. Its use of media outlets, to include the videos depicting mass executions of Iraqi and Syrian soldiers and beheading of British and American citizens, has shown ruthlessness combined with strategic use of information operations in the digital world. While many critics would argue that the beheading videos helped bring the coalition together – other observers[8] see an aim to gain worldwide attention for the establishment of the caliphate, gain popular and financial support for its jihad, and provide for a steady supply of recruits for its army. Since ISIS has rejected the international community they are less concerned about their image[9] and more concerned about recruits, financial support, and recognition.

Disinformation. ISIS will put out some accurate information but also is a big user of disinformation (or propaganda). The organization uses ". . . fake websites, made-up militia names, descriptions of bombings that never happened, and fabricated death announcements".[10]

Enforcement of Sharia Law. In the areas that ISIS controls the organization has strived to establish Sharia law. In many areas efforts are underway to form governance units providing police forces, civil services, health clinics, and other governmental functions.

Persecution of Minority Peoples of Iraq and Syria. ISIS has been relentless in its persecution of Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, Turkmen, and other minorities of Iraq. Less well-known is its attacks against the Kurds and Sheitat[11] of Syria.[12]

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[7] For more on the ISIS military council see "On the Origin of ISIS", *The Weekly Standard,* September 8, 2014. www.weeklystandard.com/articles/origin-isis_804002.html

[8] For more on the savvy use of the social media by ISIS read "Analysis: Islamic State's soft weapon of choice: social media", *Los Angeles Times,* September 22, 2014. www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-islamic-state-media-20140922-story.html

[9] For more on rejection of international community see "We Asked a War Correspondent about the Origins of ISIS", Vice.com, August 25, 2014. http://www.vice.com/read/we-spoke-to-a-veteran-war-correspondent-about-the-origins-of-isis-822

[10] *The Jihadi Hunters,* October 5, 2014. http://thanassiscambanis.com/2014/10/05/the-jihadi-hunters/

[11] Read about the killing of Sheitat tribesmen in "Islamic State Executed 700 Members of Syrian Tribe", *War News Updates,* August 19, 2014. http://warnewsupdates.blogspot.com/2014/08/islamic-state-executed-700-members-of.html

[12] Se "Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 july – 10 September 2014", Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf

ISIS in 2013. AQI (soon to become ISI, then ISIS in 2013, and finally the Islamic State in June 2014) gained strength in Iraq during 2013. The problems between the Sunni and Shia populations increased and AQI picked up support from the Sunni population.[13] The Iraq government found that peace is elusive with a still very active al Qaeda presence reinforced by the Sunni groups that oppose the Shia regime. The Iraqi police are distrusted by the Sunni population. In addition, the Iraqi Army has deteriorated due to poor leadership and lack of training and resources to develop the intelligence and capability to target the insurgents. As the United States was completing its withdrawal of troops from Iraq in 2011 there were many observers who felt that there would be a return to sectarian violence due to the Shia trying to consolidate its hold on the government, shutting out Sunni participation, and possible moves against the Kurds to diminish Kurdish autonomy and control of oil in Kurdistan.[14]

In 2013 ISIS significantly increased its operational tempo with car bombs and suicide bombings. The targets were Shia and Iraqi government targets – to include military targets. By 2013 the level of ISIS attacks exceeded the level of attacks by ISIS in 2011. Tensions intensified after a government assault on Sunni protesters in the town of Hawija on April 23, 2013. By December 2013 the Sunnis were in a sustained revolt – led in part by ISIS.

2014 ISIS Iraq Campaign. The ISIS campaign in 2014 took control of huge amounts of territory. It started at the beginning of the year with conquests in Fallujah and other smaller cities and towns in Anbar province. In June the campaign then moved north to the city of Mosul where the Iraqi Army disappeared and the city fell. Then ISIS moved south along the Tigris River Valley taking Tikrit and several other Sunni cities. In August the conflict moved to the northeast of Baghdad and to the west of Mosul and even to the northeast threatening Erbil – the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Less is known about the ISIS campaign in Syria; however it has been just as successful. Currently (October 2014) ISIS is in a fight with Syrian Kurds and is attempting to capture one of three Kurdish enclaves along the Turkish border. ISIS has consolidated its hold on parts of central and eastern Syria.

Military Strength of ISIS. Earlier reports by government sources indicated there were 10,000 members. In early September the numbers were revised by the CIA[15] indicating that the Islamic State could muster up to 31,500 fighters. The numbers of how strong ISIS is varies depending on the source. Most open source information indicates that ISIS has about 40,000 fighters spread between Syria and Iraq (as of September 2014).

Recruitment of Fighters. The rapid fall of Mosul, battlefield successes in Syria, a robust and effective social media capability, hundreds of millions of dollars to pay fighters, and Sunni disenchantment with

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[13] See "A Resurgent AQI in Iraq", *Security Info Net Blog,* January 8, 2014. www.securityinfonet.blogspot.com/2014/01/a-resurgent-aqi-in-iraq.html

[14] See "Sectarian Violence in Iraq May Start Again with U.S. Withdrawal", *Security Info Net Blog,* December 24, 2011. http://www.securityinfonet.blogspot.com/2011/12/sectarian-violence-in-iraq-may-start.html

[15] See "ISIS can 'muster' between 20,000 and 32,500 fighters, CIA says", CNN World, September 12, 2014. http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/11/world/meast/isis-syria-iraq/index.html

the Shia regimes in Iraq and Syria all contribute to the numbers of fighters recruited in Iraq, Syria and from other countries.

ISIS Funding. The organization has in their possession millions of dollars. Some of the money was acquired during the takeover of Mosul where the banks were looted. Much of the money that ISIS is depending on comes from the oil wells in both Syria and Iraq. The oil is sold on the market in the areas that ISIS controls, smuggled into Turkey, or sold to black market operators who smuggle the money into the areas held by pro-Assad forces. It is speculated that more than one Middle Eastern country is providing funds to ISIS. In addition, ISIS has an international network of money-raisers that raise money for the cause and have it sent to Syria and Iraq.

Public Administration. The Islamic State has been very successful in establishing civil administration within the areas that has conquered and now occupies. Police units, courts, administrative bodies, public services (fire, garbage disposal, electricity, fuel distribution, etc.), and schools have all been established and are running. There are some institutional mechanisms outside of the Islamic State reach but which will soon be co-opted. The schools are an important aspect of ISIS's consolidation; providing a venue with which to indoctrinate younger people in ISIS's brand of Islam. The Islamic State seems to have a good plan that was superbly executed in deploying its public administration structure upon conquering new territories.[16]

Future ISIS Operations. The Islamic State will continue to seek advances against the Iraqi and Syrian regimes. They will consolidate their holds on territory that they currently occupy and eliminate pockets of resistance in areas of their control. ISIS will continue to attack remote outposts controlled by the Syrian and Iraqi regime that are beyond effective resupply of troops, food, water, ammunition, and equipment. Defensive outposts like the one recently taken in Anbar province (Saqlawiya)[17] will be swarmed and rapidly captured.

Relationship to Other Jihadist Groups

Until early 2014 the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was an al Qaeda affiliate. However, because of its violent tendencies (even too much for al Qaeda) it was expelled by core al Qaeda leaders.

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[16] For more on the civil structure administering the Islamic State see "The anatomy of ISIS: How the 'Islamic State' is run, from oil to beheadings", *CNN World News,* October 7, 2014. www.cnn.com/2014/09/18/world/meast/isis-syria-iraq-hierarchy/
[17] Read about the capture of Saqlawiya in "Islamic State overruns Iraqi military base in Anbar", *The Long War Journal,* September 25, 2014. www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/islamic_state_overru_3.php

Jabhat al-Nusra. Syria's largest al-Qaeda group – Jabhat al-Nusra – has had an on and off relationship with ISIS over the past few years. In 2011 Baghdadi (ISIS leader) sent a core of ISA fighters to Syria to help overthrow the Assad regime. This core was instrumental in the birth and growth of Jabhat al-Nusra. The Nusra organization grew and became increasingly powerful and self-sufficient. It attracted numerous fighters to its cause, developed a donor network and increased its technical abilities (to include bomb making). In April 2013, Baghdadi (ISIS) attempted to rein in al-Nusra but was unsuccessful. Al-Nusra preferred to report directly to the core al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan. In May 2013 the core al Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri intervened to resolve the escalating dispute. Eventually al-Zawahiri decided that al-Nusra would report directly to al-Qaeda leadership and not to the newly renamed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). In January 2014 Zawahiri dismissed ISIS from al Qaeda.[18] Up until the time that the United States conducted airstrikes against targets in Syria the two groups were at odds with each other. However, once a common enemy was defined (the U.S. bombing campaign provided this) they seem to have reconciled and are reported to be conducting joint planning sessions.[19]

Other Anti-Baghdad Groups. There are a number of violent groups opposed to the Shia-dominated Iraq government. These organizations range from Salafist-jihadist to Sunni nationalist groups. Even if ISIS is defeated these groups will remain if the core grievances of the Sunnis are not addressed. Many of these groups have been in existence since the fall of Saddam Hussein and slowly diminished in activity and importance as the Sunnis gained political participation in the Iraq government. Although many of these groups cooperate with ISIS they do not share the long-term goals of ISIS. Those that do not cooperate with ISIS will fight alongside ISIS if threatened by the Iraqi security forces. Some of these groups include the General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries (GMCIR), Military Council of Tribal Revolutionaries (MCATR), Tribal Revolutionaries, and the Anbar General Military Council.

Khorasan Group

Most members of the public were surprised when it was announced that airstrikes were conducted against a group of terrorists called the "Khorasan Group". Members of this group are actually core al-Qaeda members dispatched from their operating bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan; their mission was to set up a base of operations in Syria for al-Qaeda from which to conduct a number of activities. The group is thought to be planning terrorist attacks against the United States and Syria, serving as a logistical and transportation node, providing linkage between the al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan and

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[18] Information in this paragraph extracted from *A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qa'ida and Other Salafi Jihadists,* by Seth Jones, RAND, 2014, pages 7-8. www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR637/RAND_RR637.pdf

[19] See "ISIS reconciles with al-Qaida group as Syria air strikes continue", *The Guardian,* September 28, 2104. www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/28/isis-al-qaida-air-strikes-syria

jihadist groups in Syria, and serving as a recruitment and training center. The head of the FBI recently voiced a warning about the Khorasan Group stating that the group intends to attack the United States soon.[20] They located their operations in Syria because of the ease of travel, ungovernable areas, and terrorist and jihadist support structure. In June 2014 the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command was reported to[21] have prepared targeting packets on the Khorasan Group but could not request launch authority because of an incomplete intelligence picture. On September 22, 2014 the United States conducted air attacks against personnel and facilities of the Khorasan Group citing evidence that they were in the late planning stages for a terrorist attack against United States interests.[22] The Khorasan Group is made up of jihadists from a number of different countries to include Afghans, Chechnyans, Yemenis, Egyptians, and Palestinians.[23] The group is thought to number over 200 members and is aligned with Nusra Front fighters who provide logistical support. The name Khurasan is a historical reference to a wide area of territory that included parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Persia.

Foreign Fighters

There are estimates that over 15,000 foreign fighters[24] are in the ranks of the armed opposition groups fighting in Syria (not all with ISIS). Most foreign fighters come from other nations in the Middle East.

Over 19 million Muslims live in the European Union and more than two million Muslims live in the United States. It is estimated that over 2,000 people from these countries have joined ISIS. It is reported that France has over 900 French citizens fighting for armed opposition groups in Syria and Iraq.[25] Foreign fighters generally arrive in Syria via Turkey where the border is easily crossed. Upon arrival in Syria they attend an indoctrination camp and undergo training. Once the service of the foreign fighter is completed (this varies by organization) he (or she) may go to other conflict areas (North Africa or Central Asia) or return to their homeland in the Middle East or elsewhere. The veteran foreign fighter may become part of an international network – whether to fight again in another conflict, conduct support and

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[20] See "FBI director warns of Khorasan attack", *The Hill Briefing Room Blog,* October 5, 2014. http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/219825-comey-warns-of-khorasan-terror-attack

[21] See "Exclusive: U.S. Special Ops Readied Syria Attack in June", *The Daily Beast,* October 2, 2014. www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/02/exclusive-u-s-special-ops-readied-syria-attack-in-june.html

[22] For more info on the Khorasan Group read *The "Khorasan Group" in Syria,* by Christopher M. Blanchard, CRS Insight 10155, September 25, 2014. http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/232512.pdf

[23] See "Al-Qaida Reasserts Itself with Khorasan Group", NPR, October 3, 2014. http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/10/03/353498827/al-qaida-reasserts-itself-with-khorasan-group

[24] See "How foreign fighters are swelling ISIS ranks in startling numbers", CNN World, September 14, 2014. www.cnn.com/2014/09/12/world/meast/isis-numbers/index.html

[25] See "Why are so many young French people turning to jihad?", CNN World, October 2, 2014. www.cnn.com/2014/10/02/world/europe/france-jihadis-isis-syria-iraq/index.html

recruitment activities in their country of origin, or potentially participate in terrorist or insurgent activities in their country of origin.

Returning Foreign Fighters. Many western nations have determined that a significant number of their citizens (and residents) have gone to both Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS. These people hold valid passports allowing them to return to their home country as well as permitting travel to almost any other country. The fear is that while fighting for ISIS they are recruited to conduct terrorist operations upon their departure from Iraq or Syria.

Attack on Jewish Museum in Brussels. The first incident of a returning foreign fighter conducting an attack in his home country happened in Brussels on May 24, 2014. A French citizen named Mehdi Nemmouche killed four people inside the Jewish Museum.

American Foreign Fighters. There are mixed reports about the threat posed by returning American citizens (or foreigners who reside in the United States) who have fought with the Islamic State. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has assessed that there is minimal threat. However, the Department of Defense has rated the threat as much higher. Initially it was estimated that there were about 100 Americans who joined the Syrian rebel fighters (and just a few of these have joined ISIS). However that number has grown to 300 in the latest estimates (as of September 2014). Reportedly there are some Americans involved in the Islamic State social media operations.[26]

International Measures for Foreign Fighters. The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2178 on September 24, 2014. The resolution is designed to encourage states to increase their efforts to counter violent extremism and calls for enhanced intelligence sharing among member states. Some of the requirements of the resolution will help to interrupt the flow of foreign fighters in the disputed areas of the Middle East.[27]

While it is easy to overstate the problem of returning foreign fighters it certainly deserves the proper attention of the authorities. Fortunately there are a number of steps that can be taken to mitigate the ability of ISIS to recruit, interrupt the travel of would-be jihadists, identify the returning foreign fighters, and taking steps to ensure they are not a threat.[28] In addition, there is the possibility that U.S. citizens

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[26] For more on American foreign fighters see "*American Foreign Fighters and the Islamic State: Broad Challenges for Federal Law Enforcement,* by Jerome P. Bjelopera, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Insight Report IN10154, September 19, 2014. http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/232500.pdf

[27] See "The Foreign Fighter Resolution: Implementing a Holistic Strategy to Defeat ISIL", *Just Security,* September 29, 2014. http://justsecurity.org/15721/foreign-fighter-resolution-implementing-holistic-strategy-defeat-isil/

[28] For an extensive discussion of the threat of returning foreign fighters and steps to take to mitigate the danger see "Homeward Bound? Don't Hype the Threat of Returning Jihadists", *Foreign Affairs,* by Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, September 10, 2014. www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142025/daniel-byman-and-jeremy-shapiro/homeward-bound

may be subject to "expatriation" – which could provide a deterrent factor to would be jihadists from the United States.[29]

Threats against the U.S. Homeland. Terrorist Attacks in the Homeland. Thus far there are no indications in open source that indicate there is a concrete threat against the United States homeland. However it has been determined by the Army Threat Integration Center (ARTIC) that ". . . terrorist groups and their supporters have the capability of conducting attacks with little to no warning in the Homeland and against US military installations and facilities worldwide."[30] ISIS supporters have launched Twitter campaigns threatening action against the United States several times in response to U.S. bombing attacks in Iraq and Syria. While the FBI has no information to indicate specific cyber threats to US networks by ISIS in response to US military action in Iraq and Syria there are threats that have been made on social media platforms to carry out cyber-attacks.[31]

Long-Term Goals of the Islamic State. The overall objective of the Islamic State is to establish a Caliphate under Sharia law that includes Iraq and the Levant (usually incorporating Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel). ISIS wishes to eradicate the borders of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and the United Kingdom that delineated European spheres of influence in the Middle East and established the current country borders in the region after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire.

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[29] For more on expatriation see *Man without a country? Expatriation of U.S. Citizen "Foreign Fighters",* Congressional Research Service (CRS) Legal Sidebar, September 15, 2014.
http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/232503.pdf
[30] Special Assessment: *ISIL Threats against the Homeland,* ARTIC-SA-14-0015, Army Threat Integration Center (ARTIC), September 25, 2014.
[31] See *Threat of Cyberterrorist and Hacktivist Activity in Response to US Military Actions in the Middle East,* FBI Cyber Division Private Industry Notification, September 24, 2014.

U.S. Assistance to Iraqi Security Forces (2011-2014)

The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) is composed of the Iraqi Army (IA), the Iraq Police, and the intelligence services. Prime Minister Maliki retained the three ministerial posts for himself – appointing deputy ministers who worked directly for him. There were several assistance programs in existence after the last U.S. troops departed Iraq. Most involved the transfer of weapons systems to Iraq but some involved training.

Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I). The Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I) was operating under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. It was tasked with interacting with the Iraqi military with a primary mission of administering the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs as well as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program.[32] Prior to the June 2014 ISIS-led offensive it worked out of the U.S. Embassy in Iraq and five other locations. The total number of OCS-I personnel numbered over 3,500 – many of them support and security personnel (mostly contractors). Some of the major arms purchases prior to June 2014 included M1A1 Abrams tanks, support ships which assist Iraq's patrol boats, and RAPISCAN system vehicles[33] (for Iraq's borders and checkpoints), F-16s combat aircraft, and Apache attack helicopters.

Iraq Police Development Program. The Iraq Police Development Program (PDP) began in 2011 by the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). This program was designed to assist the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI) in the further development of its law enforcement institutions. The program intended to help Iraq raise its capabilities to fight crime and terrorism while promoting rule of law and respect for human rights.[34] There was little support for the PDP among the Iraqi leadership and the program never really achieved meaningful results and wasted over $206 million.[35] The PDP yielded less than desired results and was ended in March 2013[36] after the State Department spent more than $700 million on the program. The PDP was supposed to last five years but lasted less than two years. The program was cited by critics as a waste of money.

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[32] See info on IMET at the U.S. Department of State www.state.gov/t/pm/65533.htm.
[33] See Rapiscan Systems at www.rapiscansystems.com
[34] See "Iraq Police Development Program", U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet, December 1, 2011. www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/182279.htm
[35] See *Iraq Police Development Program,* SIGIR 12-020, July 30, 2012. http://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001084938/http://www.sigir.mil/files/audits/12-020.pdf
[36] See "U.S. Quietly Ends Iraqi Police Training, Its last Major Baghdad Project", *Wired.com,* March 18, 2013. www.wired.com/2013/03/iraqi-police/

Kurds, Peshmerga, and Kurdistan

Kurdistan is an area of the Middle East where the majority of the Kurds live. This area is found in southwestern Turkey, northwestern Iran, north and northeastern Iraq, northeastern Syria. The Kurds were promised their independence at the end of World War I but European politics stymied that aspiration. At various times the Kurds have staged unsuccessful uprisings seeking either independence or autonomy. Since Desert Storm (1991) the Kurds have enjoyed some autonomy in the north and northeast of Iraq.[37]

Peshmerga. The Peshmerga (sometimes called the "Pesh" by U.S. military members) have been known as fierce mountain warriors of the Kurd regions. They have fought the Turk, Syrian, Iranian, and Iraqi militaries at some point over the past thirty to forty years.[38]

Kurdish Revolt of 1991. Shortly after the end of Desert Storm the Peshmerga revolted against Saddam Hussein (some say at the request of President Bush) and took much of northern Iraq. However, Hussein quickly crushed the revolt using T-72 Main Battle Tanks and Mi-24 HIND Attack Helicopters rushed from the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO). A similar operation was mounted by Hussein against the Iraqi Shia who revolted in the south of Iraq. The United States stood by as these uprisings were quelled. The enormity of the refugee crisis and the outcry of world opinion forced the United States to respond with a massive humanitarian aid operation called Operation Provide Comfort.[39]

Peshmerga and the Invasion of Iraq (March 2003). Prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 Special Forces (SF) teams from the 10th Special Forces Group infiltrated into Kurdistan. The SF teams coordinated the movement of Peshmerga forces against the Iraqi Army as it moved south into the cities of Kirkuk, Mosul and others. U.S. air support was also effectively used in conjunction with ground control provided by the SF teams co-located with Peshmerga units.

Peshmerga and the Fight against ISIS. During the early part of 2014 the Kurds took a side-line seat in the fight between ISIS and the Shia-dominated Iraqi government. To a lesser extent the Kurds were receiving the same treatment from the Shia government as the Sunnis. It was only after ISIS launched an offensive against the Kurds in mid-summer 2014 that the Kurds responded to the ISIS threat.

Need for Equipment, Weapons, Supplies, Ammunition and Training. While the Kurds are known to be excellent fighters they lack adequate amounts of weapons, equipment, ammunition, and supplies. In

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[37] Read more on Kurdistan at http://www.iraqwarnews.info/kurds/kurdistan.html.
[38] Read more on the Peshmerga at www.iraqwarnews.info/kurds/peshmerga.html
[39] Read more on OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT at www.iraqwarnews.info/pc/provide-comfort.html

addition, they do not have the heavier weapons needed to counter ISIS artillery, armored vehicles, and tanks. The extensive use of IEDs by ISIS requires counter IED equipment and training. Unfortunately, despite promises by the United States for quick deployment of weapons and equipment – there seems to be a "go-slow approach" by the United States in providing the Kurds the weapons that they need.[40] The reputation of the Kurds as fierce mountain fighters was quickly tarnished once ISIS dislodged the Peshmerga from the Sinjar area, the Nineveh plains near Mosul, and the approaches to Erbil. The Kurds have not fought in battle since 2003 and much of their military formations come from the cities and large towns of Kurdistan – not from the mountains as in earlier times. In addition, there was a lack of training programs within the Kurd military formations that would professionalize the force. Many of the leaders during the 1980s and 1990s retired or went in business to take part in the economic revival of Kurdistan.

Kurdish Push for Independence. Intermixed with all the other complicated issues associated with the fight against ISIS is Kurdistan. The word Kurdistan can mean many different things. To the Turks there is the concern of a resurgence of the war with the Kurdish paramilitary group called the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) – the United States has branded this organization as a terrorist group. The Iranians, although they are currently supplying arms, ammunition, and equipment to the KRG, see the Kurds as a threat in light of the significant Kurdish population within Iran's borders. The Syrian government is currently fighting – among many other groups – Kurdish resistance forces in the north and northeast of Syria. All of these countries (not to mention the Iraqi government) have great anxiety about an independent Kurdistan.[41]

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[40] See "Experts: Politics, doubts about competence delay aid to Iraq's Kurds", *Stars and Stripes,* October 6, 2014. www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/experts-politics-doubts-about-competence-delay-aid-to-iraq-s-kurds-1.307007

[41] See "An Independent Kurdistan?", *Security Info Net Blog,* September 16, 2014. www.securityinfonet.blogspot.com/2014/09/an-independent-kurdistan.html

Anti-ISIS Coalition

The international anti-ISIS coalition started to form up in late summer and continues to take shape in the fall of 2014. There are Middle Eastern, European, and an assortment of other nations from as far away as Australia. The threat of ISIS has the attention of international organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN).

According to Secretary of State John Kerry the anti-ISIS coalition is already numbering over 40 nations (as of September 25, 2014).[42] The degree of support and involvement is naturally mixed. Some nations are providing money, some equipment, some aircraft, some special operations operators, and some all of the above.

Initial United States Response. The early response of the United States to the remarkable battlefield achievements of ISIS was muted and restrained. As it became apparent that ISIS was sustaining its offensive and threatening both Baghdad and Erbil the U.S. became increasingly concerned. At first, the U.S. conducted very limited airstrikes in support of the humanitarian crises of the Yazidis[43] and of the defense of Erbil (the capital of Kurdistan).

At the same time the U.S. pressured the Iraqi government to remove Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and replace him with a Prime Minister willing to reach out to the Sunni population and extend political participation within the government to the Sunni community leaders. Maliki's replacement, Haydar al-Abbadi was inaugurated as Prime Minister.

As it became apparent that the Kurds and Iraqi Army would need additional military assistance - advisors, special operations teams, aerial ISR platforms, and combat aircraft (to conduct airstrikes) were dispatched to Iraq and adjoining countries. On September 10, 2014 President Obama articulated a wider and deeper strategy to "degrade, defeat, and destroy" ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. By mid-September 2014 there were over 1,600 military personnel deployed to Iraq to assess the Iraqi Security Forces, gain intelligence on ISIS, and assist in the airstrikes (intelligence and observation from the ground). In addition, part of the 1,600 personnel is responsible for the protection of U.S. personnel, equipment, and facilities located at the embassy, Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), and in Erbil (Kurdistan).

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[42] For more on anti-ISIS coalition members see "What the 60-plus members of the anti-Islamic State coalition are doing", *The Washington Post,* September 25, 2014.
www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/09/25/what-the-60-members-of-the-anti-islamic-state-coalition-are-doing/

[43] See *Aid to Yazidis Sect,* www.iraqwarnews.info/isis/aid-yazidis-iraq.html.

General John Allen (Ret). President Obama has appointed General Allen, a retired Marine 4-star general, as his hand-picked envoy to coordinate the anti-ISIS coalition. General Allen was the former commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan during 2011-2012. He also served as a commander in western Iraq and was instrumental in the "Anbar Awakening" where the Sunni tribal leaders and population turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[44]

European Nations. Most members of Europe are providing moral support and some are providing money, humanitarian aid, advisors, equipment, supplies, and taking part in air attacks against ISIS. British, another long-time ally of the United States was quick to provide humanitarian aid to the Yazidis trapped on Sinjar Mountain[45] in northwestern Iraq. The UK also put some of its special operators on the ground alongside U.S. SOF. France, which has demonstrated the ability to engage successfully against threats in Africa[46], is lending its support. Other "western nations" such as Australia and Canada have joined the fight. Australia is sending Australian commandos to train, advise and assist the Iraqi Special Operations Force (ISOF) as well as aircraft.[47]

Middle East Partners in the Fight against ISIS. There are no countries that outwardly support ISIS and most all nations in the region should feel threatened by ISIS. However, there are some nations that don't quite fit in the anti-ISIS coalition. Israel, for obvious reasons, needs to stay out of the fray. Some countries stand accused of providing financial and other types of support to ISIS – of note is Turkey and Saudi Arabia.[48] However, most all Middle East countries have joined the anti-ISIS coalition; many in q quiet way. Jordan has been a proven partner over the years and may already be providing training to members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) that are fighting both the Syrian government forces and ISIS.

Forming a coalition with a large number of Middle Eastern nations will initially be successful. Maintaining that coalition as each nation defines its goals, objectives, and roles will be problematic. Each nation is aligned with or threatened by other nations in the region. Each nation has a majority and minority religious population of Sunni and Shia (or the other way around). Some nations are struggling with political and religious conflict within their own borders. A few examples of some of the issues with Middle East nations follow below.

Iran. The nation that can influence the situation in Iraq the most is Iran. It is very close to the Iraqi government; Iran is a mostly Shia nation and the Iraq government is largely run by the Shia ruling elite.

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[44] See "Report: Retired Marine Gen. Allen to coordinate allied response to ISIS", *The Hill,* September 11, 2014. http://thehill.com/policy/defense/217486-report-retired-marine-gen-allen-to-coordinate-allied-response-to-isis
[45] Read more about the humanitarian assistance provided to the Yazidis Sect as a result of the attacks of ISIS www.iraqwarnews.info/isis/aid-Yazidis-iraq.html
[46] For more on France see "Does France Have the Master Plan to Defeat ISIS"?, *The National Interest,* September 24, 2014. http://nationalinterest.org/feature/does-france-have-the-master-plan-defeat-isis-11337
[47] See "Australian commandos to build up Iraqi leadership", *The Sydney Morning Herald,* October 5, 2014. www.smh.com.au/national/australian-commandos-to-build-up-iraqi-leadership-20141005-10ql8c.html
[48] Although Saudi Arabia is now offering to host training for "moderate" anti-Syrian government forces this has less to do with fighting ISIS and more to do with fighting the Assad regime. Iran is more than willing to assist in the fight against ISIS to protect Iraqi (Shia) regime and to assist the Syrian regime in its survival; but it is hesitant to "ally" itself with the United States.

Iran can assist the Iraq government with money, advice, and military aid and assistance. It can also, if it chooses to, play a major role in helping the Iraq government become more inclusive of the Sunni and Kurdish populations; an essential ingredient in bringing the Sunnis population back into the fold. The major obstacle in gaining Iraq's full participation in the anti-ISIS coalition is Iran's support for the Assad regime of Syria. Iran is providing military and economic aid to the Assad regime in its fight against the Syrian rebels (and also ISIS); putting the United States and Iran into possible conflict on more than just the nuclear material processing issue.

Turkey. The Turks have supported ISIS in the past; however, they are now redefining their goals and role. When ISIS was opposed to the Assad regime the Turks were offering support. However, the rapid success of ISIS in Iraq posed a new set of problems. This was further complicated with the 40 plus Turkish nationals held hostage for a number of weeks in Mosul by ISIS. Now that the hostages have been released the Turks have become more vocal about the conflict. The Turks have had a long-running battle with the Kurds that live in Turkey. The PKK was a resilient insurgent group that never really was defeated. A fear held by the Turks is the example of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq could lead a quest for independence from Kurds living in southeastern Turkey. It does seem as though the Turks will take a more involved role in the fight against the Islamic State as Turkey's parliament just gave the Turkish government new powers to launch military operations into Syria and Iraq as well as to allow foreign forces to use Turkey territory for military operations. This will be key in allowing the United States to launch attacks and operations from Incerlik Air Base located in Turkey but in close proximity to Syria.[49]

United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is a core member of the U.S.-led coalition to defeat ISIS. As early as September 22, 2014 it flew airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria. The UAE is hosting other international forces (France and Australia) in the fight against ISIS. The UAE has contributed substantial amounts of funds to the Syrian rebel groups (but not ISIS).[50]

Saudi Arabia. News reports state that Saudi Arabia is willing to host the training of Syrian opposition groups. The training would be done by the United States military (and others).

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[49] See "Turkey Approves Military Operations in Iraq, Syria", *Associated Press,* October 2, 2014.
[50] For a detailed report on UAE support to the anti-ISIS coalition read *The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy,* by Kenneth Katzman, Congressional Research Center (CRS) Report RS21852, September 25, 2014. http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/232518.pdf

Air Operations

Initial Requests for Air Strikes. In late June and early July 2014 the Iraqi government requested U.S. airstrikes in Iraq to support the Iraqi Army under attack by ISIS. Initially, President Obama refused to authorize airstrikes.[51] There were probably several factors in this initial decision not to strike with air power. At the time it wasn't clear that ISIS would attack the Kurds (a long-time ally of the United States). ISIS, although it was attacking the Shia population as well as Sunnis had not yet started to attack the religious and ethnic minorities on a large scale (Yazidis, Christians, and others). An additional consideration for not attacking ISIS could possibly have been (hard to determine the truth here) that part of ISIS was located in Syria and fighting the Assad regime. As the situation became more dire in early August 2014 limited airstrikes were authorized for humanitarian reasons (Yazidis plight in Sinjar, northern western Iraq) and to protect US personnel in Erbil, Kurdistan.[52]

Expansion of Airstrikes. The airstrikes increased daily, at first to support Kurd defenses or counteroffensives and then later to support the Iraqi Army in central and finally western Iraq.

Airstrikes against ISIS in Syria. The air war expanded to include ISIS targets in Syria. Oil refineries, grain silos, and ISIS headquarters and staging areas were targeted. In addition, a small terrorist organization called the "Khorasan Group"[53] was attacked.

Cost of Air Strikes. As of late September 2014 the United States has conducted over 200 airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and many airstrikes against ISIS (and other) targets in Syria.[54] The airstrikes are performed by a mixture of fighter and attack aircraft, bombers, and armed UAVs. In addition, the Navy has launched cruise missiles against targets from the Persian Gulf. It isn't difficult to spend money in a war when you deploy and use high tech equipment and munitions. The Navy has used nearly 50 Tomahawk cruise missiles ($1.5 million per) and the Navy and Air Force has flown multiple sorties of aircraft to include F-22s, F-16s, and B-1 bombers. These aircraft typically cost from $20,000 to $65,000 per flying hour.[55] In addition to the fixed-wing aircraft and drones, rotary wing aircraft were used on a limited basis for air support. Initially deployed in July 2014 to Iraq to protect U.S. personnel and

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[51] See "Iraq Wants America Back to Fight Insurgents with Air Strikes", *The Daily Beast,* June 11, 2014. www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/11/iraq-wants-america-back-to-fight-al-qaeda-with-air-strikes.html

[52] See "Airstrikes in Iraq: What You Need to Know", *The White House Blog,* August 11, 2014. www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/08/11/airstrikes-iraq-what-you-need-know

[53] Read more about this "new" group in www.iraqwarnews.info/isis/khorasan-group.html

[54] See a timeline for the conduct of U.S. and Coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria at *Iraq War News:* www.iraqwarnews.info/isis/airstrikes.html

[55] Data on cruise missiles expended and cost per flying hour from "Costs rack up in ISIS fight", *The Hill*, September 25, 2014. http://thehill.com/policy/finance/218825-costs-rack-up-in-isis-fight

facilities, U.S. Apache attack helicopters are now (as of early October 2014) being used to strike Islamist militant targets in Iraq.[56] At some point an analysis of the cost of bombing a single pickup truck with a bomb 10 or 20 times the value of the target should be done. As of early October the cost of the war has exceeded $1.1 billion since the mission began in mid-June. That includes more than $62 million just in Navy airstrikes and Tomahawk cruise missles.[57]

Effectiveness of Air Strikes. The initial air strikes conducted in Iraq were very effective. The first few airstrikes were in support of the humanitarian relief of the Yazidis refugees on Sinjar Mountain. The airstrikes against ISIS in the Sinjar area indirectly helped the Syrian Kurds who crossed the border (from Syria to Iraq) to open a refugee corridor from Sinjar Mountain to Kurdish-controlled Syria. Another set of airstrikes were in support of Peshmerga forces defending Erbil in northwestern Iraq. Although limited in nature the airstrikes in Erbil helped the Peshmerga stop the ISIS offensive against Erbil. Subsequent airstrikes have assisted Peshmerga and Iraqi army forces at other areas across Iraq. In the last part of September 2014 air strikes were conducted against ISIS targets in Syria. However, as the ISIS high-value targets learn to hide from the airstrikes the effectiveness of the airstrikes will diminish.

Importance of Ground Controllers and Liaison Officers. Air power can be very effective under some circumstances. However, despite the glowing accolades of air power advocates, it has limitations and can quickly turn into an information operations mess. As good as our technology is a pilot in the sky is still a pilot in the sky moving at hundreds of miles an hour. In many instances it takes a Joint Terminal Air Controller (JTAC) on the ground to positively identify targets and well-trained liaison officers (LNOs) coordinating and de-conflicting air operations in ground force joint and tactical operations centers (JOCs or TOCs). JTACs and LNOs are invaluable in assuring proper utilization of scare resources, eliminating "friendly fire" incidents, and keeping civilian casualties (CIVCAS) at a minimum – which in the end helps in the information operations fight as well.

ISIS Will Adapt to Airstrikes. Certainly the airstrikes can continue to hit low-hanging fruit but at some point even these targets will adapt. ISIS will likely leave their bases that are easily identified through aerial ISR for smaller easily camouflaged locations and will re-locate in more populated areas where they are less detectable and where co-lateral damage (civilian casualties) will occur if bombed (presenting IO opportunities to ISIS). They will travel at night in smaller elements. High value targets (senior leadership) will modify their use of radio and cell phone communications to evade detection from SIGINT assets and vary their "bed-down" locations so a "pattern of life" cannot be established. Where the aircraft can continue to be effective is in instances when ISIS is attacking in strength and when an attack can be blunted as the enemy masses to attack targets. In early October 2014, coalition airstrikes were aiding in

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[56] See "Army Apache helos used in strikes against Islamic State", *Army Times,* October 5, 2014. www.armytimes.com/article/20141005/NEWS08/310050035

[57] See "Pentagon: As much as $1.1 billion spent on Iraq, Syria operations so far". *Stars and Stripes,* October 6, 2014. www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/pentagon-as-much-as-1-1-billion-spent-on-iraq-syria-operations-so-far-1.307024

the defense of Kobani, Syria – a Kurdish enclave on the Turkish border.[58] However, airstrikes alone will not defeat ISIS; it will have to be in conjunction with ground forces.[59]

U.S. Air Strikes against ISIS in Syria. A potential side-effect of hitting ISIS hard in Syria with airstrikes is that the Assad regime will be strengthened.[60] ISIS is the most dangerous foe of the Syrian regime. With ISIS weakened the Syrian regime could turn its military forces against the moderate anti-Assad armed groups such as the Free Syria Army (FSA). It is groups like the FSA that the United States hopes will topple the Assad regime. The number of sorties and cruise missile used against ISIS (and other) targets in Syria were significant when compared to the numbers against ISIS in Iraq.[61] Some of the airstrikes are against targets that are only indirectly supporting ISIS; as in the case of the bombing of oil refineries. The oil refineries, part of the civilian infrastructure, generate funds that ISIS uses and also provides fuel for the transport of ISIS troops and equipment. However, there are some legal and humanitarian issues associated with the bombing of these civilian targets that deserve consideration.[62]

Coalition Members Assisting in the Air Campaign. Thus far a number of coalition members have conducted airstrikes against ISIS to include the United Kingdom[63], France, UAE, Saudi Arabia and others. Still more coalition members are staging personnel and aircraft for the conduct of air operations to include Australia, the Netherlands[64], and others.

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[58] See "Syrian Kurds say air strikes against ISIS are not working", *The Guardian,* October 5, 2014. www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/05/air-strikes-isis-not-working-syrian-kurds

[59] See "U.S.-led Airstrikes Disrupt Islamic State, But Extremists Hold Territory", *The Wall Street Journal,* October 5, 2014. http://online.wsj.com/articles/u-s-led-airstrikes-disrupt-islamic-state-but-extremists-hold-territory-1412555718

[60] See "US, allies risk benefiting Syria's Assad by striking militants", *Stars and Stripes,* September 24, 2014. www.stripes.com/news/us/us-allies-risk-benefiting-syria-s-assad-by-striking-militants-1.304692

[61] See "A month of Bombs Dropped in two Days of Syria Strikes", Bloomberg Businessweek, September 24, 2014. www.businessweek.com/news/2014-09-24/u-dot-s-dot-drops-in-one-arabian-night-a-month-of-bombs-on-syria

[62] For more on bombing oil refineries see "Sustaining the War Effort: Targeting Islamic State Oil Facilities", *Just Security,* October 3, 2014. http://justsecurity.org/15890/sustaining-war-effort-targeting-islamic-state-oil-facilities/

[63] See "U.K. Carries Out First Airstrikes in Iraq", *The Wall Street Journal,* September 30, 2014. http://online.wsj.com/articles/u-k-ministry-of-defense-raf-carried-out-its-first-airstrikes-in-iraq-1412097556

[64] The Netherlands has authorized the use of force against ISIL to include eight F-16 fighters, 250 support personnel, and 130 trainers. See a U.S. White House press release dated October 3, 2014.

Coalition Activities and Operations

Providing Weapons, Supplies and Equipment. The coalition members made early promises to provide weapons and equipment to the Iraq military. Some equipment made its way there quite rapidly; but most equipment and supplies take time to procure, get ready for transport, and ship to the final destination.

Weapons and Equipment for the Kurds. During mid-summer 2014 the Obama administration was adamant that all equipment would be provided to the central Iraqi government and that the Iraqi government would distribute weapons and equipment to the Kurds. This changed due to two main reasons. First, the Iraqi Army folded and there was no confidence that it could be ready to conduct an effective counterattack in the near future. Second, the ISIS campaign against the Kurds enjoyed some initial success and threatened Erbil. Reality hit the Obama administration in the face and they realized they would have to supply the Kurds – as they were the only effective fighting force that could stop ISIS. It is unknown if any meaningful quantities of equipment have actually found its way to Kurdistan. Reports suggest that it is not arriving fast enough.[65]

Division Level Headquarters. In an effort to command and control the overall fight against ISIS the United States will be sending the 1st Infantry Division headquarters to Iraq.[66] This will be the first division headquarters in Iraq since U.S. forces withdrew at the end of 2011. The Soldiers will depart from Fort Riley, Kansas with 200 going to Iraq and about 300 to other locations in the Middle East. The division headquarters will provide command and control of the advise and assist mission for the Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga forces in Kurdistan. Within Iraq the headquarters will occupy locations in Baghdad and Erbil (capital of Kurdish region).

Cost of Anti-ISIS Campaign. The cost to fight the ISIS organization is immense. It is estimated that the cost to the United States is somewhere between $7 million and $10 million a day. The funds are coming out of the Pentagon's Overseas Contingency Operations account.

Support to Iraqi Army and Peshmerga Offensives. The anti-ISIS coalition will need to temper their expectations of the Iraqi Army, Peshmerga, and other entities (Shia militias) being able to retake lost territory from ISIS. This is especially true where ISIS controls territory with a significant or majority Sunni

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[65] For more on lack of equipment and weapons for the Kurds see "Kurdish fighters haven't received weapons, training from U.S., allies", *The Denver Post & Nation World.*
www.denverpost.com/nationworld/ci_26645900/kurdish-fighters-havent-received-weapons-training-from-u
[66] See "Army sending division HQ element to Iraq", *Stars and Stripes,* September 25, 2014.
www.stripes.com/news/us/army-sending-division-hq-element-to-iraq-1.304965

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population. Mosul is an excellent example. While the Kurds wish to capture Mosul (assisted by the Iraqi Army, probably ISOF elements), they will have a tough fight.[67]

Goals and Objectives of the United States. General John Allen articulated the endgame (in the U.S. view) for the effort in Iraq and Syria. For Iraq the endgame is a ". . . territorially intact and sovereign Iraq, governed by the government in Baghdad, that governs all Iraqis, not just one sect, not just one confession". For Syria he stated that "we're seeking to create the capacity within the Syrian opposition so that, first of all, they can defend themselves from the Assad regime and from the other al Qaeda oriented organizations in the battle space." This will provide the moderate opposition time and space to achieve a political solution.[68]

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[67] See "Iraqi Kurdish forces moving toward complex battle in Mosul", *Los Angeles Times,* October 5, 2014. www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-iraq-mosul-front-20141005-story.html
[68] See an interview with General John Allen where he states the U.S. endgame in the ISIS conflict. *Allen: 'Important moment' for anti-ISIS coalition",* CNN Politics, October 1, 2014. www.cnn.com/2014/10/01/politics/allen-syria-training/index.html

Issues and Challenges Facing the Coalition

There are a number of issues and challenges facing the anti-ISIS coalition and the United States. These include instability in the Middle East, the threats posed by foreign fighters, the establishment of a secure base of operations and sanctuary for terrorists to plan attacks against the United States, and the growing sectarian violence across the Middle East.

The United States has a long-term interest in the resolution of disputes from a strategic, security and humanitarian perspective. This explains its interest in resolving the dispute in Syria and Iraq. The fracturing of Iraq and Syria into smaller autonomous regions with the installation of extremist Islamic governments under Shari law is counter to United States interests. The instability that would result from the breakup of either Iraq or Syria into smaller nations is unknown; but many believe the end result would be worse than keeping these countries intact. In addition, the Middle East has seen nation-states struggling to control their internal conflicts. Many areas of these nation states are breaking away under the control of armed groups motivated by religious ideology or regional separatism.[69]

The situation in Syria presents numerous issues and problems. One complicated issue is providing training and equipment to "moderate" anti-Assad armed groups. There will be great difficulty in the vetting of these groups. Many moderate groups are (or may in the future) working with the Islamic Front and other extremist Islamic groups.[70]

The issue of the foreign fighters has been addressed earlier in this paper. The return of foreign fighters to the United States could pose a significant security threat to the homeland. The establishment of a sanctuary for terrorists in Syrian or Iraqi territory under ISIS is also a threat. Once their position is solidified ISIS could start to project terrorist operations abroad or align itself (and support) with other jihadist groups that wish to attack the United States.

A huge concern is the growing sectarian violence across the entire Middle East – pitting Shia against Sunni. The Sunni are supported by the nations from the Persian Gulf and other areas of the world while the Shia are supported by Iran and the Hezbollah. There is a fear that the volatile situation could get out of control and escalate placing the entire Middle East region in conflict with Sunni against Shia.

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[69] For more on break-away areas in the Middle East under the control of armed separatist groups see "Islamic State leading Mideast into warlord era as nations dissolve", *Stars and Stripes,* October 3, 2014. http://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/islamic-state-leading-mideast-into-warlord-era-as-nations-dissolve-1.306512
[70] See "Free Syrian Army continues to cooperate with Islamic Front", Threat Matrix, October 5, 2014.

Possible Coalition Strategies and Options

The press and television media are full of "think tank" analysts, retired military officers, war correspondents and others who are putting forth various options for a strategy against the Islamic State. Some of those "options" are summarized below.

Examine the Root Cause of Insurgency. To construct a plan to "Degrade, Defeat, and Destroy" ISIS one must examine the reasons for the groups existence and the support it has among the Sunni population. An examination of the "roots of the insurgency" is always one of the first steps in countering an insurgency – call it "Counterinsurgency 101". The resolution of the Sunni rebellion is not military but political. The anti-ISIS coalition should first focus on the root cause of the Sunni revolt – the power grab of the Shia-dominated Iraq government and persecution of Sunni people. Unfortunately, the United States has shown that it sometimes lacks the will to leverage the military and economic power it possesses to "manage" the political process of host nations fighting an insurgency.

Wedge between ISIS and the Sunni Tribes. The current alliance between ISIS and many of the Sunni tribes may have a terminal focus. While ISIS is spearheading the fight against the Shia-dominated Iraqi regime ISIS is useful to the Sunni tribes. While the Sunni tribal leaders are aiding ISIS in its fight against the Shia-dominated Iraqi regime the Sunni tribal leaders are useful. But . . . if the ISIS and Sunni tribes are successful in carving out an autonomous region of Iraq over the long haul then conflict between the two is likely to occur. ISIS will not tolerate a tribal structure competing for power and stature nor will the Sunni tribal leaders give up its status. The Sunni population will very well chafe under the restrictions that ISIS will impose on their society and rebel. There may well be an opportunity for the anti-ISIS coalition to drive a wedge between ISIS and the Sunni tribes; but political reform has to happen in Baghdad – and the Sunni tribes may very well demand more autonomy for the Sunni populated areas of Iraq.

"A New Regime". The dismissal of Maliki and replacement of Haidar al-Abadi is not the only thing that needs to take place to win the Sunni's back. Al-Abadi is essentially cut of the same cloth as Maliki. More house-cleaning has to happen to ensure that the Sunni politicians and tribes have a place within the government. The senior leadership of the Ministries of Defense and Interior and other security ministries will need to see Sunni and Kurdish representation.

Attack the Source of Funds. As part of the interagency fight against ISIS all elements of government power should be used – to include organizations with the ability to cut off funding for the Islamic State. Although ISIS receives funding from outside Syria and Iraq; most of its wealth is generated from within the borders of the territory that it controls – from substantial oil fields, taxes, and more. Other sources

of income include that generated from criminal or terrorist activities such as smuggling and kidnapping. It is reported that the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates have conducted airstrikes against twelve small oil refineries controlled by ISIS[71] – one method of depleting the coffers of ISIS and diminishing the revenue generated from its control of oil fields and refineries. Policies will need to be adopted by the Iraqi government (and Kurdistan) to diminish the revenue producing activities of ISIS.[72]

Information War. The anti-ISIS coalition has to defeat ISIS in the informational sphere. It has to de-legitimize the ISIS movement; which will affect money donations and recruits for its organization.

"No Boots on the Ground". A constant refrain from the Obama administration is that the ISIS campaign will require "No Boots on the Ground". This, of course, ignores the 1,600 military personnel already in Iraq and possible future troop deployments. It also ignores the presence of Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (SFODA) and other SOF forces currently operating in Iraq alongside Iraqi and Peshmerga forces.[73] Perhaps the refrain should say "No Troops Engaged in Combat" or "Only Sneakers Allowed". A large number of political leaders, observers, think tanks, and retired military officers have offered the opinion that ground troops will be needed to defeat ISIS; that airstrikes and the host nation forces (IA, Peshmerga, and moderate Syrian armed groups) will not defeat ISIS.

Proxy Army Providing the Ground Troops. The ground troops needed to fight ISIS could be from groups like the Free Syrian Army (not yet trained and equipped and overmatched by ISIS), Peshmerga formations (not as good as they once were and unlikely to attack beyond traditional Kurdish areas), and the Iraqi Army (which has failed miserably so far). The only bright light has been some of the Iraqi special operations forces which will quickly be burned out if overused and committed to non-SOF type missions.

Limit Engagement to Air Strikes, Combat Advisors, and Security Force Assistance. To avoid the "boots on the ground" dilemma some observers advocate a limited role for ground troops. This would primarily consist of advisors supported by medical, ISR, air support, logistical support, and quick-reaction forces. The U.S. Navy and Air Force would continue the airstrikes where appropriate, combat advisors (best suited would be U.S. Army Special Forces[74]), Security Force Assistance teams[75], intelligence assets, aerial ISR, a small SIGINT capability, and a command and control organization. An excellent analysis of what a

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[71] For more on airstrikes against oil refineries see "US and Arab allies hit ISIS oil refineries", *The Hill,* September 24, 2014. http://thehill.com/policy/defense/operations/218847-us-allies-hit-isis-oil-refineries

[72] See "Hitting ISIS Where It Hurts: Disrupt ISIS's Cash Flow in Iraq", RAND Corporation Commentary, August 13, 2014. www.rand.org/blog/2014/08/hitting-isis-where-it-hurts-disrupt-isiss-cash-flow.html

[73] Read "U.S. boots are already on the ground against the Islamic State", *The Washington Post,* September 16, 2014. www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-us-boots-are-already-on-the-ground-in-iraq-and-syria/2014/09/16/4fd35ace-3de5-11e4-b0ea-8141703bbf6f_story.html

[74] U.S. Army Special Forces receive unique training for a combat advisory role – learn more at www.specialforcestraining.info/

[75] The current mission in Afghanistan is now primarily Security Force Assistance or SFA. See www.afghanwarnews.info/sfa/afghanistansfa.htm

U.S. advisory mission in Iraq would look like is provided in a recent blog post at the website of the Council on Foreign Relations.[76]

Training the Syrian Opposition. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has taken a lead role (Title 50) in training cadre, leaders, and members of the Syrian resistance. Reportedly this training is taking place in Qatar and possibly in other locations as well.[77] There is the possibility that President Obama will authorize the training of the Syrian resistance (moderate members only!) by U.S. military personnel (Title 10). This may already be happening in a covert manner either under Title 10 or Title 50 authorities. The training program for the Syrian resistance could certainly be stepped up with U.S. Army Special Forces and other trainers and advisors involved – most certainly in countries adjacent or near Syria. For a Syrian opposition training plan to succeed it has to have its strategic objectives clearly defined, define the military objectives of the Syrian resistance (is it fighting Assad's regime or ISIS or both?), and the anti-ISIS coalition must come to an agreement on the strategic goals (Iran's goals and the U.S. goals certainly do not coincide).[78] Once the training areas are identified, host nations are providing the infrastructure support, the trainees are identified and vetted (Leahy amendment restrictions apply), and the trainers are selected and positioned – then training can begin. Open source reports indicate that the initial training will be provided to about 5,000 trainees. That is not a large number to train and insert back into Syria to fight ISIS. However, leadership, cadre, and specialty training[79] will certainly provide for a more capable and professional moderate Syrian resistance force.

The Moderate Syrian Opposition. There are many observers who question whether there is a "moderate opposition" left in Syria that can be effectively armed, trained, and supported.[80] Some say that the task is too difficult given the ethnic makeup and demographics of Syria.[81] Prior to providing equipment, money, supplies, and weapons (of course this is already under way under Title 50) to Syrian opposition groups and the training of members of Syrian opposition groups there needs to be a vetting process. The successful and effective vetting of Syrian opposition groups is problematic. The results of

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[76] See "Enough with 'Boots on the Ground:' What Will the U.S. Advisory Mission in Iraq Look Like"?, by Robert A. Newson, Council on Foreign Relations, September 23, 2014. http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/09/23/enough-with-boots-on-the-ground-what-should-the-u-s-advisory-mission-in-iraq-look-like/

[77] Mention of CIA training of Syrian opposition members in Qatar here – "Biden continues to apologize; first Turkey, now UAE", McClatchyDC.com, October 5, 2014. http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2014/10/05/242222_biden-continues-to-apologize-first.html

[78] Read more in "Training the Syrian Opposition: So, What's the Plan?", *War on the Rocks,* September 25, 2014. http://warontherocks.com/2014/09/training-the-syrian-opposition-so-whats-the-plan/

[79] Specialty training could include medics, mechanics, information operations (or PSYOP), intelligence analysis, civil affairs (for civil administration), and more.

[80] Read "We Don't Need and Won't Find Moderates to Defeat ISIL", *War on the Rocks,* September 30, 2014. http://warontherocks.com/2014/09/we-dont-need-and-wont-find-moderates-to-defeat-isil/

[81] A detailed description of the anti-Assad armed groups can be found in *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response,* Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report RL33487, September 17, 2014. http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/232511.pdf

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the vetting under proposed funding authorization (the McKeon Amendment) would require notification 15 days prior to transfer of equipment and reporting every 90 days.[82]

Reduced American Footprint. The U.S. military has to take into consideration the anti-U.S. sentiment of the Iraqi people. We are intervening in a civil war between the Sunni and Shia (ISIS aside) where the Sunni have genuine grievances that they are trying to address; so naturally, the Sunni will not be receptive to our presence in Iraq once again (1991, 2003-2011). The Shia people of Iraq, while immensely grateful that we liberated them from the oppressive rule of Saddam Hussein (and his Sunni-run government and military) does not have warm feelings toward the United States. During the Iraq War the U.S. military was attacked constantly by Shia militia groups. Probably the only area whole-heartedly receptive to an American presence is Kurdistan. For these reasons, the U.S. military should consider regional bases outside Iraq and "reach back" capabilities as much as possible. Air strikes launched from neighboring countries, aerial ISR from bases outside of Iraq, logistic nodes in Kuwait and Qatar, training facilities outside Iraq[83], and "reachback" to the United States for intelligence support[84] are highly recommended.

Targeting ISIS Leadership. The United States has great experience in targeting the leadership of terrorist and insurgent organizations. The CIA, JSOC, and other units have become very experienced and have refined their operational capabilities integrating precision air power (manned and unmanned), aerial ISR, SIGINT, intelligence fusion, and special operations forces to improve and enhance their abilities to strike at leadership targets. In many instances this has degraded many organizations; but in others it has merely prompted an organization to replace one leader with another. The targeting of the leadership of ISIS may not have the desired effect of "decapitating" the organization. A well-institutionalized insurgent organization such as ISIS is prepared to function despite leadership losses. Leadership targeting can certainly disrupt and degrade ISIS but will not destroy it.[85]

Conduct of Unconventional Warfare (UW). The world's attention is currently (October 2014) focused on airstrikes conducted by the United States and other members of the anti-ISIS coalition. It also is consumed with the arguments related to "Boots on the Ground". In addition, there is much talk and speculation on what form the advisory effort will eventually evolve into. Less talk is centered on the use of unconventional warfare (UW)[86] to achieve national objectives and goals. This is the work of the

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[82] See *Proposed Train and Equip Authorities for Syria: In Brief,* by Christopher Blanchard, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report RA43727, September 16, 2014. http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/232504.pdf

[83] See "Special Forces to Train Iraqi Army in Jordan", *Security Info Net Blog,* March 9, 2014. www.securityinfonet.blogspot.com/2014/03/special-forces-to-train-iraqi-army-in.html

[84] Read about how the U.S. Air Force is using the 102nd Intelligence Wing of the Massachusetts Air National Guard on Joint Base Cape Cod for intelligence products in "Air War in Iraq and Syria gets guidance from Cape Cod", *The Boston Globe,* September 26, 2014. www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2014/09/25/cape-cod-intelligence-unit-high-demand-drone-war-expands-iraq-and-syria/wXjwEdHJs9ifusnIjWj29K/story.html

[85] For a detailed analysis of targeting leadership in institutionalized organizations ready *The Foreign Policy Essay: The Islamic State's War Machine,* Lawfare Blog, September 28, 2014. http://www.lawfareblog.com/2014/09/the-foreign-policy-essay-the-islamic-states-war-machine/

[86] For more info on UW see www.securityinfonet.com/military/unconventional_warfare.htm.

Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. Army Special Forces, and other Special Operations Forces (SOF).[87] However, there are two options to consider in the Syrian context. Option one is to insert operatives (CIA or Special Forces) on the ground in the contested area to train, advise, and assist the UW forces or proxy or surrogate forces; in this case, the moderate armed resistance groups within Syria such as the Free Syrian Army. A second option is to train, advise, and assist from an adjacent nation (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc.). A recent example of Option One was the use of CIA and Special Forces teams who linked up with the Northern Alliance of Afghanistan in 2001 and, in conjunction with JTACs assigned to the teams and air power were able to defeat the Taliban. The teams, working alongside their surrogates, were able to influence the actions of the Northern Alliance (and other Afghan resistance groups). A recent example of Option Two was the use of airpower in Libya (but lacking a significant number of ground operatives). Libya quickly disintegrated into turmoil with a number of leaders and rebel groups competing for power. This is an important factor (being able to influence or direct the resistance forces) when evaluating how to use advisors and trainers in a UW situation.[88]

A Continued Struggle. The United States is unlikely to put ground troops on the ground to engage in fighting (other than SOF and support units). The long-term result of the United States involvement in the fight against ISIS is likely a stalemate where ISIS retains its geographical center of gravity in eastern Syria and western Iraq. The Syrian regime will not be able to defeat both ISIS and the moderate Syrian resistance. The Iraq Army will not be able to conduct a serious offensive into Anbar province and other Sunni populated areas and hold them. The Peshmerga are not likely to venture far out of the Kurdish regions (it is not in their interests). So the conflict will continue for some years. Air strikes will diminish the capability of ISIS to launch large-scale operations but ISIS will adapt and where necessary revert to an insurgency (guerrilla warfare) until such time as it can once again conduct conventional operations to seize terrain. So, for the long a haul, the United States will once again see itself fighting in a counterinsurgency[89] environment. This difference, this time – hopefully – is that the host nation forces and surrogate (proxy) forces will do the fighting on the ground with the United States (and other allies) assisting using Foreign Internal Defense (FID) or Security Force Assistance (SFA) teams.

Manage Expectations. As in all wars, this one will last longer than anticipated or desired. In fact, many would argue that this is just a continuation of the Global War in Terror (GWOT)[90] that started in 2001. We can certainly degrade the organization (air power alone will do this). We can possibly defeat ISIS if air power is used in conjunction with ground forces provided by the Iraq military, Peshmerga units, and an organized, trained, and properly led moderate Syrian resistance movement. However, it may very well be impossible to destroy ISIS.

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[87] See "Is Unconventional Warfare a Better Option for U.S. Goals", Security Info Net Blog, September 8, 2014. http://www.securityinfonet.blogspot.com/search/label/unconventional-warfare

[88] This point is articulated in *Unconventional warfare and strategic optionality,* The Strategist, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute Blog, October 2014. http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/unconventional-warfare-and-strategic-optionality/

[89] For more on counterinsurgency see www.securityinfonet.com/military/counterinsurgency-COIN.htm

[90] The term "Global War on Terror" has fallen into disuse for many reasons.

Opportunities to Provide Enabling Support

With the renewed commitment of the United States to ensure the stability and security of Iraq and Syria come unique opportunities for private sector involvement in helping to provide for a secure and stable future for both countries. This will principally come from contracts with the Department of Defense and other U.S. government agencies for logistical, maintenance, communications, transportation, intelligence, and other types of support and services. During both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars of the past decade there were significant numbers of contractors providing a wide variety of services in the two war zones and adjacent regions. Some potential opportunities are listed below.

Training of Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga. It is anticipated that the training program for the Iraqi security forces (military and police organizations) will take years.[91] When the U.S. first entered Iraq in 2003 they quickly established the Iraqi Civilian Defense Corps (ICDC). The ICDC was a twelve-battalion stop-gap measure to establish local host nation security forces until the New Iraqi Army (NIA) could be fielded in June 2004. The NIA training was conducted by Military Professional Resources, Inc. (MPRI). Similar programs could be established again. One to establish and train local defense forces (similar to the ICDC, the U.S. Army National Guard, or the Afghan Local Police); and a second to assist the Iraqi military in the training of the Iraqi Army (IA).

Training of Iraqi Ministries of Interior and Defense. Not only must the combat units of the Iraqi army be retrained (as well as advised and assisted) but the Ministries of Interior and Defense will need advisors in many areas to include intelligence, operations, budgeting, and logistics. Advisors at the ministry level can monitor the directives and policies – ensuring that sectarianism is diminished and vetting occurs for the assignment of professional military and governmental leaders. There is a strong likelihood of one or more contracts being awarded soon to accomplish this task.[92] The last decade saw a lot of advisors assigned to train members of the ministries of both Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the glaring failures in both theaters was the assignment of capable advisors to these ministries. There may be opportunities to provide contractors with the right experience to the task of ministerial advisor positions.

Refresher Training for Iraqi Army. It is conceivable that a similar program could be established under a DoD contract to provide refresher training to Iraq Army units – allowing the units to take a break from

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[91] For more on years to train the Iraq forces see "Pentagon says it will take years to retrain Iraqi forces. Why so long?", *The Christian Science Monitor,* September 25, 2014.
www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2014/0925/Pentagon-says-it-will-take-years-to-retrain-Iraqi-forces.-Why-so-long

[92] See "SAMA Contract for Advisors and Trainers in Iraq", *Security Info Net Blog,* September 14, 2014.
www.securityinfonet.blogspot.com/2014/09/sama-contract-for-advisors-and-trainers.html

the war, integrate new recruits into the units, retrain the units, re-equip the units, and then send them off to the battlefield.

Unit / Collective Training. The Iraq Army units would benefit from a collective training program similar to Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) or the Joint Multi-National Readiness Center (JMRC). This could be done using contractors under contract to the DoD.

Training of the Moderate Syrian Opposition Groups. A possible contract mechanism could be the training of members, staff, and leaders of the rebel Syrian groups opposing both the Assad regime and ISIS. This would most likely take place outside of Syria within the borders of one of the nations that is part of the anti-ISIS coalition (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.). For instance, the Republic of Georgia has volunteered to host training of this nature. There are probably a few countries that would welcome the opportunity to assist in a training program (and the U.S. dollars that go with it). This training could be conducted by contractors under contract to the DoD or State Department. The training would be in areas that would assist a resistance force in the conduct of military operations and in government administration in territories it occupies. Areas of training are numerous – small unit tactics, operations, staff procedures, intelligence fusion, HUMINT, information operations, civil administration, law enforcement, Rule of Law, and so on.

Iraqi Police Training Program. Programs similar to police training programs conducted during Operation Iraqi Freedom could be re-established. A project similar to the Police Development Program (PDP) that was in place in Iraq from 2011 to 2013 could also be established. In Afghanistan, two successful police training programs placed police trainers and advisors in positions to professionalize the Afghan National Police – "Embedded Police Mentors" (EPMs) and "Law Enforcement Professionals" (LEPs).

Contract "Iraq Hands Program". A successful program instituted by General McCrystal during the Afghan War was the "AfPak Hands Program". Comprised primarily of military members (there were some DoD civilians) from all four services, the "AfPak Hands" would receive cultural and language training and then deploy as advisors to serve in Afghanistan or Pakistan. The members would complete their first deployment and return to the states for additional language training (and after a year) return to Afghanistan or Pakistan a second time as an advisor. A similar program, but using contractors, could provide regional expertise, country (Iraq), language, and cultural expertise to the U.S. military.[93]

Human Terrain Teams (HTTs). The Army's Human Terrain Team program all but ended in September 2014 with a very small office still located at Fort Leavenworth. However the HTT program proved to be very valuable to the Afghan counterinsurgency effort. There were some detractors of the program – based on some early problems that were corrected; however, a similar program (with a different name?) could be valuable to the U.S. effort in Iraq – especially in the long-term.[94]

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[93] Read more about the Afghan Hands Program. www.afghanwarnews.info/afpakhands.htm
[94] Read more about Human Terrain Teams deployed to Afghanistan. www.afghanwarnews.info/units/HTT.htm

Conclusion

Long-Term Conflict. The conflict with the Islamic State will last for years. The nature of hybrid warfare allows for an organization like the Islamic State to conduct conventional warfare (massing of troops for offensive, defensive, and holding territory) as well as asymmetric warfare (insurgency, terrorism, and guerrilla operations). In geographical areas that it is defeated it can quickly move from conventional warfare to insurgent or terrorist operations. Even with the use of coalition air support it is doubtful that the Peshmerga or the Iraqi Security Forces will be able to dislodge ISIS from Anbar Province or some of the territory along the Tigris River Valley. Mosul will be a difficult target to take from ISIS as well as some of the other towns and cities west of Mosul going towards the Syrian border. If some of the territory currently held by ISIS is recaptured the insurgency will continue in that area for a very long time – with assassinations, car bombings, and other types of attacks.

Airstrikes by the coalition will continue to be useful but as mentioned earlier in this paper – its effectiveness will diminish over time. An introduction of U.S. combat troops to seize and hold territory and to combat ISIS would lead to a host of problems that may very well outweigh any advantage of U.S. ground combat troops. The exception to U.S. troops stationed in Iraq would be for liaison officers, intelligence fusion cells, personnel providing support in logistics, force protection, contractors providing training, advisors and trainers, and special operations forces. While left in good shape by the United States at the end of 2011 the Iraqi Security Forces suffered under the Maliki regime. It will take some years for it to regain the capability it had in 2011. There are a number of problems associated with training and equipping the anti-Assad forces. Identifying moderate forces, vetting of armed groups, time needed to train up a proxy force, and determining who the proxy forces will fight (ISIS or Assad regime) are just some of the problems.

However, one must always remember that almost all conflicts are` the result of political problems. This is true with the present situation in Iraq and Syria. The governments of Iraq and Syria have disenfranchised the Sunni populations within their countries. Without a resolution of the political problems there is a diminished prospect of a military solution.

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Glossary

Al Qaeda in Iraq. A jihadist group formed from Sunni Arabs from various Middle Eastern and North African countries. Members of the group were also from Europe and Central Asia.

Anbar Awakening. The revolt of the Sunni tribes in Anbar province against al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) that took place in 2007-2009. Coupled with the surge of 30,000 U.S. troops it established security in Iraq and a defeat of the Sunni insurgency.

Anbar General Military Council. A Sunni resistance group.

Ansar al-Islam. A militant Sunni opposition group.

Arms Export Control Act. This legislation requires that Congress be notified of large exports of small arms and light weapons and be given a chance to review them in advance. CENTCOM, if passing arms and ammunition on to moderate anti-Assad regime groups, would need to notify Congress.

Daesh. A reference to the Islamic State fighters used by Kurds.

English Village. A guarded housing community, named "English Village", is in the heart of Erbil, Kurdistan that is home to foreign companies and expats.

Free Syrian Army (FSA). This term is used by some to refer to a number of disparate armed groups who refer to themselves as members of the *Jaysh al Hurr* (the Free Army). Some of the FSA groups are secular and some are Sunni Islamist (but will work with secular groups). There is no overall command structure for the FSA; although an entity called the "Supreme Military Council" or SMC exists, it is not effective to date.

General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries (GMCIR). A Sunni opposition group that has cooperated with ISIS in its campaign to expel the Iraqi Security Forces from parts of Iraq. One of the more capable groups, it is Ba'athist aligned.

Khurasan Group. In late September 2014 U.S. airstrikes were conducted against a little-known group planning attacks against the United States. The Khurasan Group is just actually an affiliate group of al Qaeda. It is allied with the al-Nusra Front (al Qaeda in Syria). Sometimes called "Khorasan Group".

IA. Iraqi Army.

ISF. Iraqi Security Forces.

ISIL. Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. Term used by some referring to the Islamic State. President Obama and some government officials use ISIL for the term referring to the Islamic State.

ISIS. Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). A name for the Islamic State.

ISIS. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Most international observers, correspondents, and others use ISIS as the term to refer to the organization now called the Islamic State.

Islamic State. At the beginning of Ramadan (2014) the ISIS organization renamed itself the Islamic State and announced the establishment of the Caliphate.

Kurdistan. Refers to the geographical region of the Middle East where the Kurds live. Southwestern Turkey, Northwestern Iran, North and Northeastern Iraq, and Northeastern Syria.

Kurds. Refers to the people who live in Kurdistan (see above).

Levant. There are many interpretations of the term "Levant". However one of the more common meanings is the areas of Syria and parts of Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, southern Turkey and Israel.

Military Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries (MCTR). A Sunni resistance group.

"Network of Death". Phrase that President Obama used to describe the Islamic State.

OIF. Operation Iraqi Freedom. This was the military operation in Iraq from 2003 to 2011. OIF was phased out and the continuing presence of the United States military in Iraq was named Operation New Dawn.

OND. Operation New Dawn. OND followed OIF and ended in late 2011 once all U.S. military personnel were withdrawn.

Operation Desert Shield. This was the preparatory stage of the military campaign against Iraq and for the defense of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries from Iraqi attack. This was followed by Operation Desert Storm.

Operation Shader. The United Kingdom's airstrike campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has been named Operation Shader.

Peshmerga. The "mountain warriors" of the Kurdish people.

Popular Mobilization. Militias raised by the government of Iraqi to augment the Iraqi Army (IA) and other security organizations in the fight against ISIS and other rebellious Sunni organizations. The vast majority of the volunteers are Shia.

Provide Comfort. The U.S.-led international humanitarian relief effort to alleviate the suffering of Kurds trapped in desolate, remote mountain tops in winter conditions along the Iraq-Turkey border. Shortly after the 1991 Gulf War concluded the Kurds (encouraged by the Bush administration) revolted against

the Saddam regime. The revolt was crushed and Saddam began to massacre Kurds as his forces pushed north. Over 1.5 million Kurds spent up to three months in the camps.

QSIS. Al-Qaida Separatists in Iraq and Syria. The Grand Mufti of Egypt has advised his followers and the foreign media to refer to ISIS as QSIS; thus reducing the ability to claim Caliphate status.

Yazidis Sect. A small tribe residing in the area of Sinjar in northwestern Iraq along the Syrian border. They have a unique religion and are ethnically related to the Kurds. ISIS massacred thousands of Yazidis men, women and children in August 2014.

About the Author

John Friberg is a retired Command Chief Warrant Officer (CCWO) with 40 years of service in U.S. Army Special Forces. He served with 10th Special Forces Group during Operation Desert Storm (Iraq, 1991), Operation Provide Comfort (Iraq, 1991), and in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF - 2004). He also served as a Battalion Operations Warrant Officer with SOTF North (OIF, 2006-2007). His last duty position was as an operations Officer with the Village Stability National Coordination Center (VSNCC) of the Combined Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) in 2011. After his retirement from the Army in January 2012 he worked as a Counterinsurgency Advisor with the COMISAF Advisory and Assistance Team (CAAT) in Afghanistan from April 2012 to August 2014.