

Arab League: ISIS, Yemen, and the Middle East

Before this background guide begins, a special note: While we as delegates are preparing to better understand the world at large through this crisis simulation, we believe we should take a moment to appreciate how lucky we are to do so. Around the world, recent attacks have rocked major cities, from Beirut, to Baghdad, to Paris. With hundreds of dead, this committee will be happening in light of a series of attacks that are incomprehensible. Nevertheless, we will press on with this simulation, and hope to use it as a window into the real world, understanding the decision-making that representatives must make to respond to these types of situations. This committee will be fast-paced, engaging, and entertaining, but we hope to also impress upon you the importance of understanding the differences of opinion that have made this committee so relevant. We trust that you will keep this in the back of your mind as we enjoy BayMUN together.

Salaam Alaykum,

Welcome to the Arab League, a crisis committee where you will be tasked with the prospect of handling the enormous fighting happening in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and throughout the Middle East. As delegates from a strong and proud region, an area where many of the first civilizations rose and fell, you have the opportunity to choose how the future of your region will play out. Before you do this, you must be informed about the tasks you will be undertaking. Today, Syria and Iraq are in flames. Yemen is ablaze. Even Jordan has been burned, and there is the possibility that this fire will continue to spread. Among the many different actors, you will be

tasked with finding resolution to smother the flames. History is as important as the future, and you must keep that in mind as you push onwards for the future of the Middle East.

The Foundations of ISIS: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

The roots of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) go very, very deep. Known by name names (including Daesh, the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, etc.), ISIS has proclaimed the first “Caliphate” in the Arab world in centuries. Its mysterious leader, calling himself Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, is not yet fully understood. And its goals are uncertain.

The ideological foundations of ISIS reach back before the Arab Spring, before the Iraq War, and before the 9/11 attacks. Its roots go back to one of the former leaders of Al Qaeda, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Having arrived in Afghanistan along with others intending to join the *mujahideen* of Afghanistan that were fighting invading Soviet troops, Zarqawi became a reporter instead and befriended Osama bin Laden[1]. Zarqawi had been born Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah, and intended to join the ranks of Huthaifa Azzam, son of the legendary Jordanian-Palestinian *mujahideen* leader Sheikh Abdullah Azzam.

Much of Zarqawi’s early years are uncertain. It is known that he befriended Osama bin Laden in 1989, and founded *Jund al-Sham*. He renamed himself after his home town, Zarqa, in Jordan. He was reportedly a troublemaker in his early years, getting in brawls and dropping out of school. By 1992, for his work with the militant group *Jund al-Sham*, Zarqawi was sent to prison by Jordanian authorities[2]. He was released seven years later in a general amnesty by Jordan’s King Abdullah, and plotted to bomb a hotel in Amman. When the plot was discovered, he fled to Pakistan.

Zarqawi was forced out of Pakistan, and fled into neighboring Afghanistan. There, he set up a training camp with uncertain aims. Floating from area to area, he was in Iran when the United States decided to invade Afghanistan, in October 2001, along with a small coalition of close allies. He had already gained considerable notoriety when he joined the Taliban and Al Qaeda to fight the US invasion, which had come on the heels of the 9/11 attack that hit the World Trade Center and Pentagon. By 2004, he was Iraq's most wanted man[3].

Zarqawi was used as a pretext in 2003 for the US to invade Iraq, among the false claims of the weapons of mass destruction that allegedly existed and were being produced by Saddam Hussein. Zarqawi's group, *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, had already been placed on the list of foreign terror organizations, and was targeted by the United States as he attacked both Iraqis and foreigners alike[4].

On June 7, 2006, Zarqawi was killed by injuries sustained in a US airstrike. By this point, numerous massacres of civilians had been committed either by him or in his name, and Al Qaeda's number two (Ayman Al-Zawahiri) had chastised him for his attacks on civilians and Shi'as[5]. As leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Zarqawi had a significant amount of influence and independence, but Zawahiri's letter to Zarqawi (dated July 9, 2005) makes clear the tensions between them. Zawahiri detailed the Al Qaeda strategy for victory, and made clear that the position on how to handle Shi'a populations was complex[6]. Zawahiri makes clear that he believes Zarqawi has the right to defend himself "in particular against any aggression or threat of aggression", but asks "why were there attacks on ordinary Shi'a?". These statements provide part of the foundation for the later split that would go on to create ISIS. Zarqawi's belief that being more aggressive was necessary, and his support for the creation of an "Islamic state" (directly against the instructions of Al Qaeda's central leaders to wait) would play heavily into the ideology of the leader of ISIS today.

The Foundations of ISIS: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Initially, almost nothing was known about Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the shadowy leader of ISIS who made a shocking appearance in an address at a Mosul mosque in Iraq. Research has provided some insight into his life and beliefs, but much remains to be understood. Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri, his birth name, was born in Samarra. The ancient Iraqi city north of Baghdad gave no indications of his future as a child.

A pious teenager born into a line that claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Baghdadi and his father were very active in the religious community of the city[7]. He started a teacher, leading neighborhood children in chanting the Quran. Otherwise shy, his voice was firm and confident when reciting the Quran. His family nevertheless joined the Baath party, whose complicated history with religion did not stop it from dominating Iraqi politics. Much of his family fought in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, a war that would no doubt help shape Baghdadi's beliefs, as his brother was killed while serving in the Iraqi military.

He had been disqualified from military service due to his nearsightedness and young age, though he might have been forced into it had it continued any longer. Instead, he would go on to learn more about his family's religious beliefs. Baghdadi appears to have been born into a Salafi family, a puritanical form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia. It is believed that the very founder of Salafism in the Saudi version studied in Mosul in the 18th century; a symbolic event that would play into ISIS' later conquer of that city.

Abu Bakr was both a soccer star and a pious student, who attended Iraq's Saddam University for Islamic Studies, majoring in Quranic recitation. Having received a doctorate in Quranic studies, Baghdadi sought out mentors. He worked for a short time with Muhammad Hardan, a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood that had also fought the Soviets in

Afghanistan in the 1980s, before losing patience with the Brotherhood. By 2000, he was ready for a fight, believing that the Muslim Brotherhood was more concerned with words than actions.

Like Zarqawi, Baghdadi had also fought the United States after its invasion of Iraq. He founded Jaysh Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaah, but was arrested in February 2004 in Fallujah. While in custody for 10 months, he was quiet and absorbed by religious studies. He led prayers, preached Friday sermons, and gave off an air of importance. Other inmates would speak of his influence, recalling his charisma even today. He was a shrewd negotiator, often playing the role of mediator between the prisoners and guards in Bucca prison where he was housed. Many of the prisoners had been former military and intelligence members in Saddam's regime, and became radicalized while serving their time there. Many argued, including former inmates, that Bucca was the precursor to ISIS. If there had been no Bucca, some argue, there would be no ISIS today, such was the strength of its indoctrination.

Baghdadi was released by December 2004, and had saved the phone numbers and names of many of those he met in Bucca. As a result, it was easy for him to reconnect with them upon their release, and also get in contact with others who could help him implement his goals. He was convinced to go to Syria by a relative in Al Qaeda, and the group he worked under formally joined Al Qaeda in 2006. In October of that year, the "Islamic State" founded by Zarqawi was founded. Publicly claiming to be independent of Al Qaeda, but privately still pledging allegiance to it, Baghdadi became close to Zarqawi as the new "state's" religious affairs in Iraqi "provinces". Of course, the state had yet to take control of any serious territory, but the leadership role put Baghdadi in a strong position just before the death of Zarqawi.

Zarqawi's successor, Ayyub al-Masri, had carried out the declaration of the state. He served as the minister of war, though Abu Umar received the mostly symbolic (at the time) title of "emir". Baghdadi was a protégé of al-Masri, but earned the trust of Abu Umar, who still

commanded a heavy following and began to centralize control, leading to Baghdadi's appointment to a powerful selection committee for Iraqi commanders. But in 2010, Abu Umar and al-Masri were both killed, and a space opened for Baghdadi. Using the assistance of Hajji Bakr, who helped rig the voting, al-Baghdadi was elected the new "emir" of the organization, still technically part of Al Qaeda but increasingly choosing its own path.

Baghdadi saw his next opportunity in the Syrian protests that began with the onset of the Arab Spring. Almost immediately, he sent fighters to set up a secret branch of the new "Islamic State" (not yet publicly declared as such, still called the Islamic State in Iraq or ISI), which became the Nusra Front. Intending to sow chaos, the Nusra Front hoped to capture territory for the first time, and spread the influence of the Islamic State where Al Qaeda had failed. Zawahiri in Al Qaeda called on the Nusra Front to coordinate with other rebels against Assad's regime, but Baghdadi (still technically owing his allegiance to Zawahiri) disagreed. He saw cooperation with other Syrian rebels as thwarting any hopes of a true Islamic State being founded on its own territory, and ordered the Nusra Front to disregard Zawahiri. They refused, and in the spring of 2013 Baghdadi's fury led him to declare that the Nusra Front was part of the Islamic State, now renamed the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

In a snap of Baghdadi's fingers, ISIS was born.

Nusra remained loyal to Zawahiri, but Baghdadi had other plans. He ordered ISIS fighters into eastern Syria, to capture as much territory as possible. In February 2014, after ISIS pushed out even the Nusra Front, Zawahiri declared that ISIS was no longer part of Al Qaeda, though in truth it had not been for a long, long time. Baghdadi now held territory, with power centered in the Syrian city of Raqqa, and reimposed the *jizya*. Those who opposed him were labeled apostates, and he reimposed the use of corporal punishment for theft and capital punishment for adultery. His actions were unprecedented in large part because of the scope,

given ISIS' new reach into territorial gains, and ISIS continued to gain ground slowly. Then, a lightning assault led to the capture of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, at which point ISIS gained the attention of the world.

Where We Stand Today:

Since then, the war has raged on. ISIS has both gained and lost territory. Gains in Iraq and Syria have seesawed. In Syria, ISIS nearly captured Kobani before coalition airstrikes, Kurdish fighters, and other forces managed to push it back[8]. Baghdadi's reach was still growing in other areas, amplified by the capture of Ramadi[9] in Iraq and Palmyra[10] in Syria in quick succession. Recently, ISIS suffered a loss in the city of Sinjar[11] as well. Its territorial holdings change virtually daily, something to keep in mind as you attempt to handle this changing conflict.

Each country has its own different position on ISIS. These positions have changed over time: Jordan has been affected by the war on its borders, some countries have been flooded by refugees, and more. But ISIS has not yet been defeated. As attacks in Lebanon[12] and Paris[13] demonstrate, the reach of ISIS may yet turn more global. It has affiliates in numerous countries, including Libya[14], Afghanistan[15] (where it is also fighting the Taliban), and more[16] (map included). This threat is increasingly global, and as delegates from the Arab League's countries who are most affected, you must handle both the war with ISIS and the millions of refugees (more than 3 million in countries neighboring Syria alone[17]) that the war has caused. Maps showing the current control of ISIS in Iraq and Syria can be found via the following footnotes[18] [19], but be aware that this may yet change or may already be outdated due to the fast-changing nature of this war. But this is not all you are tasked with dealing with...

The Fight in Yemen: Origins

There is a raging war, somewhat disconnected from the fighting of ISIS though tangentially related, occurring at the same time in Yemen. This war, raging on and off since the Arab Spring, has morphed into an ongoing quagmire. While Arab states have participated in somewhat the war against ISIS, though not heavily, the Yemen war is an entirely different situation. How it arrived at this point has its roots in the Arab Spring regardless.

In June 2004, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi launched an uprising against the government of Yemen in the country's north. Al-Houthi, the leader of the Zaidi sect of Five Imam Shi'ism, fought primarily in northwestern Yemen, though some fighting spilled into neighboring Saudi Arabia. By September 2004, Al-Houthi was killed by Yemen's security forces[20], and one of his brothers has led the rebellion ever since[21]. Abdulmalek al-Houthi, in power even today, has been a strong leader of the Houthis since the death of his brother years before. The fighting has been quelled at certain points, but the Houthi leadership has insisted it still seeks the goals it set out with. While the Yemen government argues it seeks to overthrow the government, Houthi leaders claim they are defending themselves and fighting for a better-run country[22].

The roots of this sectarian conflict run deep, but have been exacerbated by the apparent influence of multiple actors. In the south of Yemen, an Al Qaeda insurgency has flourished amid the Arab Spring's instability, while the Houthis have grown more powerful. Saudi Arabia and many other states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have backed Yemen's Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who was replaced President Ali Abdullah Saleh following the growth of the Arab Spring's protests and the calls by the Houthis for him to step down. Hadi, meant to help the country transition into a democratic state, was opposed by the Houthis as well.

The fighting escalated in 2014, as the Houthis and Sunni tribes in the north fought. Violence began to spill over into other areas[23], exacerbated by the lack of basic resources such as water in the war-torn country[24]. In September of 2014, the Houthis captured the capital of Sana'a, forcing the Hadi government to sign a ceasefire in the hopes of ending the war with Houthi power being unprecedented[25]. By January 2015, the attempts to negotiate a more lasting solution had failed, and the Houthis seized the country's capital once more[26]. The conflict only worsened from there, as former President Ali Abdullah Saleh appeared to have joined the Houthis, leading to another crisis of leadership.

Yemen: Where We Stand

The Yemeni Civil War has continued since, unabated. Some have called it an extension of a larger dispute, one primarily consisting of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni GCC states on one side, and Iran on the other[27] [28]. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the difficulty of attributing responsibility. While Saudi Arabia and the United States claim that Iran has supplied the Houthi rebels[29], both the Houthis and Iran have denied these allegations[30]. It is thus unclear where the war will go from here, with both powers appearing to have vested or unclear interests in the winner of the conflict.

Compounding this problem are the choices of Al Qaeda and Saudi Arabia. In April of 2015, Saudi Arabia launched airstrikes and a subsequent ground invasion in Yemen, as part of a larger coalition meant to fight the Houthis[31]. While the GCC and other foreign forces (like those of Sudan, Morocco, and others) have participated and received the assistance of US/UK intelligence, weapons, and a blockade, the war has not ended. Some argue that the war

appears to be stalled, with Saudi Arabia spending time and money on a war it cannot win[32], while others argue that Saudi Arabia's goals have already been achieved[33].

Regardless, one thing is ultimately clear: The Yemeni civil war has not yet ended, and does not appear close to conclusion. As wars rage in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, there will be a significant need for all concerned parties to make decisions to further their own interests, and the interests of the people living through these fights. The humanitarian disasters continue to spiral out of control, with more than 200,000 dead in over 4 years of fighting in Syria[34] and at least 2,300 dead in Yemen in the past 6 months[35], along with at least 30,000 dead civilians in Iraq since the start of 2014[36]. Given the heavy nature of this fighting and its effects on the world, the Arab League is the first line of defense in ending these crises...or prolonging them, for their own gains in Syria, Iraq, or Yemen. How it responds will be crucial in shaping the future of the Middle East.

Characters in this Committee:

- 1) Saudi Arabia:
 - Representative: Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal
 - Policies: Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is primarily focused on co-operation with fellow oil-exporting Gulf states, the Unity of the Arab and Muslim world. In more recent events, Saudi Arabia has been taking strong stances on the Syrian conflict and the Yemeni uprisings. With the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been an ardent supporter of the Syrian opposition and has closed the Syrian embassy in Saudi Arabia in 2011. As for the situation in Yemen, Saudi Arabian politicians claim Yemen is more of an issue of national security than of foreign policy. In fact, Saudi Arabia considers the Houthis in Yemen to be a terrorist group and has acted militarily against their acquisition of power.
- 2) Qatar:
 - Representative: Dr. Khalid Bin Mohammed Al Attiyah
 - Policies: Qatar's policies are quite simply; Qatar seeks the protection of its own ruling dynasty while it projects its influence to neighboring countries and abroad. Qatar has been getting involved in international affairs and when the Syrian Civil War broke out, Qatar was very vocal about it. Qatar has supported the Syrian rebels by arming them and providing them with the funds they need to oust the Syrian government. Due to their immense support, Qatar has been known for being the biggest sponsor of Syrian opposition forces. As a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar's stance on issues pertaining to the Middle East are similar to those of Saudi Arabia, specifically on issues of Syria, Bahrain and Yemen.
- 3) Bahrain:
 - Representative: Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed Al Khalifa

- Policies: Bahrain is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League. Bahrain has maintained friendly relations with most of its neighboring countries. Bahrain pursues a policy of 'close consultation' with neighboring states and seeks to narrow areas of disagreement. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has fully supported the Bahraini government and provided military assistance during the Bahraini uprisings during the Arab Spring.

4) Yemen:

- Representative: Riyadh Yassin
- Policies: Recently, Yemen has been facing a civil war between Southern and Northern Yemeni forces. Yemen faced its biggest crisis when the government was overthrown by the Houthis rebels, a Shia movement group backed by Iran. As a result, Saudi Arabia led a coalition to launch an air campaign to reinstate Yemen's internationally recognized government. Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh has support from Yemen's loyalist groups that oppose the Houthis. Furthermore, Former President Saleh's political party, the General People's Congress, holds a majority in the Parliament.

5) Lebanon:

- Representative: Gebran Bassil
- Policies: Lebanon's foreign policy has been heavily influenced by the Syrian government up until 2005 when Syria withdrew its military from Lebanon. Its current government's policy has been leaning more West which conflicts with the political ideology of Hezbollah as they advocate their foreign policy more towards Iran and Syria. Currently, Lebanon does not have a President as the country has been facing internal divisions over the matter for over a year.

6) Syria*

- Representative: Walid Muallem
- Syria's foreign policy is primarily focused on ensuring national security. Due to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the Syrian government has been isolated from the international community and was suspended from the Arab League. For the sake of peace negotiations between the government and opposition forces, the Syrian government has been readmitted to the Arab League. Syria maintains good relations with the following countries in the Arab League: Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt (after July 2013), Algeria, and Oman.

7) Syrian National Coalition:

- Representative: Ahmad Asi Al-Jarba
- The Syrian National Coalition is a coalition of Syrian opposition groups that was founded in Doha, Qatar. The Syrian National Coalition was replaced by the Syrian government in the Arab League shortly after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. The Syrian National Coalition has support from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Libya and countries such as Iraq and Lebanon do not recognize the Syrian National Coalition to be the representative of Syria.

8) Kuwait:

- Representative: Sabal al-Khalid al-Sabah
- Policies: Kuwait has maintained strong international relations with its neighboring Arab countries. After the conclusion of the Gulf War, Kuwait has been making efforts to secure alliances with countries around the world. Kuwait's relationship with Syria, however, has been severed after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. Kuwait, like Qatar, supports the Syrian opposition and many Kuwaiti NGOs have been known for providing funds for the Syrian opposition. In regards to Yemen, Kuwait and Yemen have had a tainted relationship that goes as far back to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Yemen had abstained on a number of resolutions concerning the invasion of Kuwait and voted against the "use of force resolution"; as a response, Kuwait cancelled aid programs, diplomatic contact, and expelled thousands of Yemeni workers.

9) Jordan:

- Representative: Nasser Judeh

- Policies: Jordan's foreign policies were largely shaped by the pro-Western foreign policy model as Jordan had close relationships with the United States and the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, those relationships were damaged when Jordan proclaimed its neutrality during the Gulf War and maintained relations with Iraq. In recent years, Jordan has redeemed its image with the Western states by getting involved in Middle Eastern peace processes. Relations between Jordan and Syria have fluctuated widely between normal diplomatic relations and full armed confrontation. At times, each side has attempted to subvert the other, and has supported and provided refuge to the other's internal opposition groups.

10) Egypt:

- Representative: Sameh Shoukry
- Egypt's foreign policy is based on the non-aligned movement, Cairo's efforts at resuming ties with the Iranian regime have received positive signals from Tehran. The Iran News Daily website in a report published this week noted, "[Iranian] Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said here yesterday that Tehran and Cairo are strongly determined to resume bilateral ties. He reiterated that the two countries have announced their strong will to resume all-out cooperation....The two countries' officials are exchanging views and consulting on opening a new chapter in Tehran-Cairo bilateral relations. Turning to his upcoming visit to Indonesia to attend the NAM [Non-Aligned Movement] foreign ministerial meeting, the Iranian foreign minister announced that he is to meet his Egyptian counterpart on the sidelines of the event."

11) Iraq

- Representative: Ibrahim al-Jaafari
- Policies: After Sadaam Hussein's regime was toppled in 2003, the government tried to establish relations with various nations. Since the current Iraqi government is run by Shiites, Iraq has very close ties with Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. Recently, Iraq has been undergoing domestic problems with the rise of the Islamic States in Iraqi Kurdistan.

12) Tunisia:

- Representative: Taïeb Baccouche
- Policies: Former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has maintained Tunisia's long-time policy of seeking good relations with the West, while playing an active role in Arab and African regional bodies. President Habib Bourguiba took a nonaligned stance but emphasized close relations with Europe and the United States. Tunisia has long been a voice for moderation and realism in the Middle East.

13) Algeria:

- Representative: Ramtane Lamamra
- Policies: President Bouteflika has worked to extend Algeria's international influence, traveling extensively throughout the world. Algeria has friendly relations with its neighbors in the Maghreb, Tunisia and Libya.

14) United Arab Emirates:

- Representative: Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan
- Policies: The UAE believes that the Arab League needs to be restructured to become a viable institution, and would like to increase the strength and interoperability of the GCC defense forces. One of the main anchors of the UAE's foreign policy has been building cooperation-based relations with all countries of the world.. Most of the United Arab Emirates' foreign aid has been to Arab and Muslim countries.

15) Morocco:

- Representative: Salaheddine Mezouar
- Foreign relations have had a significant impact on economic and social development in Morocco. Morocco maintains close relations with Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states, which have provided Morocco with substantial amounts of financial assistance.

16) Libya

- Representative: Mohammad al-Dairi

- Policy: The foreign relations of Libya were largely reset at the end of the Libyan Civil War, with the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi and the foundation of the current Libyan State. On October 10, 2011, Libya became the first country to recognize the Syrian National Council.

17) Oman:

- representative: Yusuf bin Alawi
- policy: Oman maintains good relations with Iran, its northern neighbor, and the two countries regularly exchange delegations. Oman is an active member in international and regional organizations, notably the Arab League and the GCC, and its foreign policy is overseen by the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

* For the sake of this Crisis, we have readmitted Syria back into the Arab League!

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