

The Middle East Crisis, Rise of the Shia, Russian Growth, and the Loss of American Influence

Brigham Tyeson Doud
Conflict Management Resolution
University of North Carolina Wilmington
601 South College Road, Wilmington, NC 28403
btd4377@uncw.edu

Abstract

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011, since then the region has been a major source of violence and terrorism. This war has created a vacuum allowing for the growth of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or ISIS, to emerge as the new leader in global Jihadist terrorism. ISIS has now surpassed Al-Qaeda and currently operates a Khalifate or Islamic State based on Islamic principles. This Sunni terrorist group threatens the Shia governments of Iraq and Syria including the most influential Shia state Iran. This paper will examine the current military efforts that are being conducted by Iraq, Syria, Iran, and the Syrian and Iranian ally, Russia. It will look at the repercussions of a Russian and Iranian victory over ISIS in the absence of United States leadership and the implications it will carry into the future if the West and specifically the United States fails to act. In addition to the examination of a failure for the United States to involve itself, it will also examine the seriousness of failing to recognize the underling sectarian differences and history between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Key words: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Syria, Russia, Iran, United States, Sunni, Shia, Terrorism, Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah

Introduction

When the United States left Iraq in 2011, it essentially left the Middle East.¹ The United States' disengagement has led to a vacuum of leadership in the area.² Today, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) controls a vast amount of land in Iraq and Syria.³ The Sunni Islamic terrorist organization controls enough land to equal the size of England, spanning across Iraq and Syria with roughly eight to nine million people living within the area.⁴ This organization has

¹ Londono, Ernesto, Operation Iraqi Freedom ends as last combat soldiers leave Baghdad. *The Washington Post*. 2010, retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/18/AR2010081805644.html>

² Gray, David. Conflict Management and Resolution 547. *National and International Security*. University North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, N.C, September, 2015

³ Institute for the Study of War, These maps show the progression of ISIS control in Iraq and Syria. *Business Insider*. 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-maps-show-the-progression-of-isis-control-in-iraq-and-syria-2015-8>

⁴ Staff, ISIS controls an area the Size of Brittan: Syria expert, *Al Arabiya News*, 2014, retrieved from: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/11/28/ISIS-controls-an-area-the-size-of-Britain-Syria-expert.html>

influenced terrorism across the world prompting attacks and recruitment in the United States, France, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Kuwait and continues to spread.⁵

Since Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, leader of ISIS, proclaimed an Islamic Khalifate or a state ruled by Islamic law and principles in 2014, countries in the Middle East have been searching for support and military action to destroy ISIS.⁶ In their search for help, countries like Iraq and Syria have been looking for support from its neighbor Shia Iran, a staunch enemy of the United States, for help in defeating the ISIS threat.⁷

Not only is Iran contributing resources to help destroy ISIS; Russia, led by Vladimir Putin, is also contributing to the fight.⁸ Russia is filling the leadership vacuum once dominated by the United States. If this course is to continue with Russian and Iranian leadership growing in the region and along with their support of Shia governments, it will drastically raise religious tensions between the Sunni and Shia Muslims. These tensions could result in large sectarian violence that could lead to a larger regional war between Sunni and Shia Muslims. This fighting could also lead to an even larger migrant crisis that faces Europe and the United States today.⁹

In addition to these problems, this situation can cause American power and influence to decline resulting in loss of trade, airspace, economic, and military influence. With the United States' loss in these areas, Russia and Iran will only strengthen. To understand the ramifications of the United States not maintaining a presence; a look at past events leading to the rise of the current situation must be examined.

Background of Current Situation within the Middle East

On September 11, 2001, the United States faced a major terrorist attack on its commercial, financial, and military institutions.¹⁰ This prompted the United States to enter into the country of Afghanistan to destroy Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist forces.¹¹ This military campaign, Operation Enduring Freedom, was in operation for only nineteen months before the United States' War on Terror spread to Iraq.¹²

Operation Iraqi Freedom began in March, 2003.¹³ This military campaign was the United States second major military campaign in the post 9/11 world. The United States government pushed for the invasion of Iraq due to intelligence suggesting that Saddam Hussain's government

⁵ Hubbard, Ben, Terrorist Attacks in France, Tunisia and Kuwait kill dozens, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/world/middleeast/terror-attacks-france-tunisia-kuwait.html?_r=0

⁶ Sekulow, Jay. *Rise of ISIS: A Threat we Can't Ignore*. New York: Howard Books, 2014 p.25

⁷ Bazzi, Mohamad. Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/>

⁸ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015

⁹ British Broadcasting Corporation. Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in graphics, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>

¹⁰ Global Security, Operation Enduring Freedom, *Global Security*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom.htm>

¹¹ Global Security, Operation Enduring Freedom, *Global Security*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom.htm>

¹² Global Security, Operation Enduring Freedom, *Global Security*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom.htm>

¹³ Global Security, Operation Iraqi Freedom, *Global Security*, 2011, retrieved from: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraqi_freedom.htm

was developing chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons capabilities.¹⁴ In addition to the possible development of weapons of mass destruction, intelligence sources suggested that Iraq was harboring members of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network.¹⁵

Operation Iraqi Freedom's combat missions officially ended in August of 2010.¹⁶ This marked the end to a seven year ground war in the heart of the Middle East.¹⁷ By direction of the U.S. President Barak Obama, the United States forces were fully withdrawn from Iraq by the end of 2011.¹⁸ President Obama declared in October 2011, "I can report that, as promised, the rest of our troops in Iraq will come home by the end of the year...after nearly nine years, America's war in Iraq will be over."¹⁹

Though Operation Iraqi Freedom was coming to a close, the United States and Iraq continued to discuss the possibility of a United States Military troop presence to train and advise Iraqi forces.²⁰ Obama's military advisors suggested that a force of around 16,000 remain in order to promote stability in a post war state.²¹ Political advisors for the President suggested that a presence of around a third of the military's suggested numbers would be more reasonable and could still achieve the President's goal.²²

The failure of the Iraqi government and the United States to decide on residual troop numbers resulted in the non-extension of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the two countries.²³ A SOFA agreement, is an agreement between the United States and a host foreign country. This agreement addresses criminal and civil jurisdiction of Department of Defense employees, any license requirement, uniform regulations, taxes, weapons transports, or any other significant detail which needs to be addressed between the two countries.²⁴ This was a major requirement needed in order to ensure the safety of the United States' military members left in Iraq; unfortunately it could not be agreed upon. This led to the total withdraw of United States military forces; and the political disengagement from Iraq, by the United States and Obama Administration.²⁵ Iraq was now a "democratic success".²⁶

However, the people of Iraq were feeling differently. The Iraqi people, specifically the Sunni Iraqis, were feeling marginalized by the government of Iraq, even those in the high governmental positions.²⁷ In 2011, Saleh Al-Mutlaq, the deputy prime minister proclaimed

¹⁴ Air Force Historical Support Division, Operation Iraqi Freedom. *Air Force Historical Support Division*. 2014, retrieved from: <http://www.afhso.af.mil/topics/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=18635>

¹⁵ Air Force Historical Support Division, Operation Iraqi Freedom. *Air Force Historical Support Division*. 2014, retrieved from: <http://www.afhso.af.mil/topics/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=18635>

¹⁶ Cooper, Helene, Stolberg, Sheryl, Obama declares an end to combat mission in Iraq, *New York Times*, 2010, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/01/world/01military.html?_r=0

¹⁷ Cooper, Helene, Stolberg, Sheryl, Obama declares an end to combat mission in Iraq, *New York Times*, 2010, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/01/world/01military.html?_r=0

¹⁸ Associated Press, Barack Obama announces total withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, *The Guardian*, 2011, retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/21/obama-us-troops-withdrawal-iraq>

¹⁹ Associated Press, Barack Obama announces total withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, *The Guardian*, 2011, retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/21/obama-us-troops-withdrawal-iraq>

²⁰ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.94

²¹ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.94

²² Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.94

²³ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.94

²⁴ Mason, Chuck, Status of Force Agreement: What is it, and how has it been utilized? *Congressional Research Service*, 2012, p.3

²⁵ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.94

²⁶ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.96

²⁷ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.96

Iraq's leader, Nouri Al-Maliki, was leading the country to a dictatorship.²⁸ In addition to this claim, the Sunni Iraqis began to protest against the Iraqi Shia majority government.²⁹ The Sunni Iraqis gained confidence thanks to the Arab Spring that began a year earlier in 2010; their voices of protest were being supplemented by its neighbor Syria and fellow Arab state, Egypt.³⁰ This uprising in the Sunni community led to a struggle between them and the Shia majority of Iraq. This struggle between the two religious communities is far from new.

This fifteen hundred year-old disagreement goes back to the establishment of the first Khalifate.³¹ The divergence lies in the Muslim belief and decision as who should be the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, and lead the Khalifate at the time.³² The decision was between two individuals, Abu Bakr and Ali. Abu Bakr was one of Muhammad's closest friend as well as his father in law.³³ Ali was Muhammad's cousin and son in law.³⁴ Abu Bakr would be chosen as the second Khalif, or the Islamic leader of the Khalifate.³⁵ Though Ali would become the fourth Khalif, the choosing of Abu Bakr, would split Islam into two divisions, the Sunni and Shia.

The root of the word Shia derives from the Arabic words *Shia* 'at *Ali* in Arabic meaning the party or followers of Ali.³⁶ They believe that the true leaders of Islam should derive from the blood line of Muhammad.³⁷ The Sunni believe that Abu Bakr was the rightful leader by his selection being made by a *shura* or council, and cite this as a "perfect example of wisdom and consensus of a [Islamic] community".³⁸

Iraq is the largest Arab state that has a majority of its citizens as Shia Muslims.³⁹ This group represents about sixty percent of its population.⁴⁰ This large population is due to the religious significance the Shia Muslims have within Iraq's geography.⁴¹ The city of Najaf, Iraq is the site of Ali's burial site.⁴² In addition to Najaf, Karbla, Iraq is considered to be a holy city as it is the site of Ali's son, Hussain's assassination.⁴³ Finally, the Al-Askari Shrine, located in

²⁸ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.96

²⁹ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.96

³⁰ Kissinger, Henry. *World Order*. New York, Penguin Books. p.122,126

³¹ Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p.126

³² Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p.126

³³ Lewis, Bernard. *The Crisis of Islam*. New York: Random house Trade Paperback, 2004 p.7

³⁴ Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p.126

³⁵ Lewis, Bernard. *The Crisis of Islam*. New York: Random house Trade Paperback, 2004 p.7

³⁶ Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p.126

³⁷ Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p.126

³⁸ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday, 2009 p.61

³⁹The New York Times, Hitting ISIS in Raqqa after the Paris attacks, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?_r=1

⁴⁰ The New York Times, Hitting ISIS in Raqqa after the Paris attacks, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?_r=1

⁴¹The New York Times, Hitting ISIS in Raqqa after the Paris attacks, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?_r=1

⁴² Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday,

⁴³ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday,

Samara, Iraq, is where the Shia believes the Mahdi or “the restorer of good”⁴⁴ will emerge and bring justice to the world.⁴⁵

The deep connections the Shia have in Iraq, along with the religious and political disagreements between them and Sunni Muslims, has resulted in sectarian fighting erupting in Iraq.⁴⁶ Since the United States military withdraw, Sunni extremist members of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the fore runner to ISIS, began to raise sectarian violence by utilizing suicide bombings and attacking prisons; freeing suspected and convicted Sunni terrorists.⁴⁷

These attacks were constant between 2011 and 2012, with suicide bombings occurring between five and ten times a month.⁴⁸ By 2013, that number had increased to thirty times a month and at the end of the summer in 2013, seven hundred Iraqi citizens and security force members had died at the hands of terrorists.⁴⁹ Then in 2014, when ISIS attacked Fallujah, Iraq, they declared themselves as defenders of Sunni Iraqi’s from the tyrannical Shia president Al-Maliki.⁵⁰

ISIS was successful in their terrorist campaigns against the Iraqi government because of their ability to operate uninterrupted due to the Syrian government’s entanglement in civil war that began in 2011.⁵¹ The Syrian civil war occurred on the back of the Arab Spring and with it; foreign fighters, jihadist, and revolutionaries flooded the country.⁵² The goal of these fighters was to remove Bashir Al-Assad, the president of Syria.⁵³

Al-Assad is a Shia Alawite, an off shoot of the Shia followers. He rules over a country that is about seventy five percent Sunni Muslims.⁵⁴ His government is a close ally of Iran and Russia. His government is also a supporter of Hezbollah, the Shia terrorist group, operating on behalf of Iran.⁵⁵ In 2012, Syrian Shia militias began clearing Sunni neighborhoods and villages; executing the Sunni inhabitants.⁵⁶ These militias would rack up body counts of up to three hundred people at a time.⁵⁷ This action, along with Assad’s refusal to step aside, resulted in the Sunni Muslims rising up to fight Assad and turning to jihadist groups for support.⁵⁸

Tribal connections contributed to the flow of these fighters moving along the Syria and Iraq border.⁵⁹ This inundation of fighters resulted in the jihadist bring on board the secular revolutionaries which has contributed to continuous war within the region.⁶⁰ As a result of this

⁴⁴ Lewis, B. (1976). *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Ltd. p.125

⁴⁵ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday,

⁴⁶ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.98

⁴⁷ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.97

⁴⁸ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.97

⁴⁹ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.97

⁵⁰ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.98

⁵¹ Holliday, Joseph, The Assad Regime: From counterinsurgency to civil war, *The Institute for the Study of War*, March, 2013, p.10

⁵² O’Baggy, Elizabeth, Jihad in Syria, *The Institute for the Study of War*, September 2012 p. 19

⁵³ Holliday, Joseph, The Assad Regime: From counterinsurgency to civil war, *The Institute for the Study of War*, March, 2013, p.10

⁵⁴ Rossi, Melissa. *What Every American Should Know about the Middle East*, New York: Plume Books, 2008 p.391

⁵⁵ Rossi, Melissa. *What Every American Should Know about the Middle East*, New York: Plume Books, 2008 p.391

⁵⁶ Holliday, Joseph, The Assad Regime: From counterinsurgency to civil war, *The Institute for the Study of War*, March, 2013, p.22

⁵⁷ Holliday, Joseph, The Assad Regime: From counterinsurgency to civil war, *The Institute for the Study of War*, March, 2013, p.22

⁵⁸ O’Baggy, Elizabeth, Jihad in Syria, *The Institute for the Study of War*, September 2012 p.18

⁵⁹ O’Baggy, Elizabeth, Jihad in Syria, *The Institute for the Study of War*, September 2012 p. 21

⁶⁰ O’Baggy, Elizabeth, Jihad in Syria, *The Institute for the Study of War*, September 2012 p. 23

continued fighting, in 2014, ISIS established their Khalifate, a de facto state within the borders of Syria and Iraq with the city, Raqqa, as its capital.⁶¹

Since this establishment, ISIS has grown and taken land in both Syria and Iraq. With little support from the United States, Iraq has invited the Iranian government for help.⁶² Syria, a non-ally of the United States, has received military support from Iran and Russia. This conflagration has resulted in an unstable region and is causing drastic consequences for the rest of the world.

Current Issues

In 2015, ISIS made a significant impact on world politics with acts of terrorism and violence. A Jordanian fighter pilot was shot down over ISIS territory; resulting in a publicized graphic public execution with him being set on fire.⁶³ Twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians were publically beheaded by Libyan ISIS followers; ISIS's influence continued to expand.⁶⁴ Boko Haram, a Nigerian Islamist terrorist group pledging allegiance to ISIS, expanding the influence of ISIS further into Africa.⁶⁵ A year after the first declaration of the Khalifate, ISIS attacks permeated France where a company worker was beheaded, his head placed on a fence, and ISIS flags flown.⁶⁶ In addition to this, a Shiite mosque was bombed in Kuwait killing twenty-five; a tourist spot in Tunisia, Africa was attacked by a lone gunman who killed thirty-eight individuals.⁶⁷ These international events would occur in concert with ISIS terrorist reign over Syria and Iraq.

With continued unrest in the Middle East due to declining states and constant terrorism, civilians of the Middle East began to flee.⁶⁸ Most of these refugees are making their way to Turkey; where they look for passage into Europe.⁶⁹ For a cost of about \$1350, a refugee can pay

⁶¹ Hubbard, Ben, Life in a jihadist capital: Order with a darker side, *The New York Times*, 2014, retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/24/world/middleeast/islamic-state-controls-raqqa-syria.html>

⁶² Bazzi, Mohamad. Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/>

⁶³ Mullen, Jethro, Anger boils in Jordan over ISIS killing of pilot: What comes next?, *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/04/middleeast/isis-jordan-what-next/>

⁶⁴ Fleishman, Jeffrey, Islamic State and its increasingly sophisticated cinema of terror. *Los Angeles Times*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-ca-isis-video-horror-20150301-story.html#page=1>

⁶⁵ Fox News, ISIS accepts Boko Haram's allegiance pledge, *Fox News*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/03/13/isis-accepts-boko-haram-allegiance-pledge/>

⁶⁶ Sly, Liz, ISIS claims to be behind deadly Tunisia attack, *The Washington Post*, 2015, retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/attacks-hit-three-continents-amid-fears-of-escalating-islamist-violence/2015/06/26/c3a76c90-1c08-11e5-93b7-5eddc056ad8a_story.html

⁶⁷ Hubbard, Ben, Terrorist Attacks in France, Tunisia and Kuwait kill dozens, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/world/middleeast/terror-attacks-france-tunisia-kuwait.html?_r=0

⁶⁸ Nordland, Rod, A mass migration crisis, and it may yet get worse, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0

⁶⁹ Watson, Ivan. Nagel, Clayton and Bilginsoy, Zeynep, Facebook refugees chart escape from Syria on cell phone. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/10/europe/migrant-facebook-refugees/>

his or her way on to a boat in order to seek a safe haven.⁷⁰ These refugees are loaded onto large inflatable rafts packed with up to sixty other individuals for their chance to make it to Europe.⁷¹

These refugees often arrive in Greece where they begin their journey north towards central Europe.⁷² These refugees are arriving at close to ten thousand a day and an estimated one million have already arrived.⁷³ The former German Foreign Minister has said the following about Europe's growing migrant problem, "At the same time, this is only the beginning of the crisis, because the conditions inciting people to flee their homelands will only worsen. And the E.U., many of whose members have the world's largest and best-equipped welfare systems, appears to be overwhelmed by it — politically, morally and administratively".⁷⁴ The European migrant problem continues to grow and shows no sign of slowing down.

On November 13, 2015, ISIS conducted multiple attacks in Paris, France.⁷⁵ These attacks utilized suicide bombings and ambushes by gunfire.⁷⁶ These attacks focused on a national soccer game, restaurants, and the most devastating attack occurred at the Bataclan Theater where a crowd was attending a concert.⁷⁷ This combination of attacks resulted in the death of one hundred and thirty people.⁷⁸

This most recent attack resulted in France's Prime Minister Francois Hollande declaring war on ISIS.⁷⁹ France instituted a state of emergency for the first time since 1961.⁸⁰ In addition to this state of emergency, for the first time since 1944, a mandatory curfew was instituted.⁸¹ With this attack, France voiced its call for more help and intervention in the war in Syria to

⁷⁰ Watson, Ivan. Nagel, Clayton and Bilginsoy, Zeynep, Facebook refugees chart escape from Syria on cell phone. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/10/europe/migrant-facebook-refugees/>

⁷¹ Watson, Ivan. Nagel, Clayton and Bilginsoy, Zeynep, Facebook refugees chart escape from Syria on cell phone. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/10/europe/migrant-facebook-refugees/>

⁷² Nordland, Rod, A mass migration crisis, and it may yet get worse, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0

⁷³ Nordland, Rod, A mass migration crisis, and it may yet get worse, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0

⁷⁴ Nordland, Rod, A mass migration crisis, and it may yet get worse, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0 pgh. 29

⁷⁵ Almasly, Steve. Meilhan, Pierre and Bittermann, Jim, Paris massacre: At least 128 killed in gunfire and blast, French officials say. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/13/world/paris-shooting/>

⁷⁶ Almasly, Steve. Meilhan, Pierre and Bittermann, Jim, Paris massacre: At least 128 killed in gunfire and blast, French officials say. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/13/world/paris-shooting/>

⁷⁷ Almasly, Steve. Meilhan, Pierre and Bittermann, Jim, Paris massacre: At least 128 killed in gunfire and blast, French officials say. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/13/world/paris-shooting/>

⁷⁸ Associated Press, Paris attack death toll rises to 130, *The Huffington Post*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/paris-attack-death-toll_564f3f7ee4b0d4093a57517f

⁷⁹ Chrisafis, Angelique, France under first nationwide state of emergency since 1961. *The Guardian*. 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/16/france-nationwide-state-of-emergency>

⁸⁰ Chrisafis, Angelique, France under first nationwide state of emergency since 1961. *The Guardian*. 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/16/france-nationwide-state-of-emergency>

⁸¹ Reuters and The Huffington Post, France's Hollande orders borders closed, Paris under mandatory curfew since 1944, *The Huffington Post*, retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/hollande-attacks-borders-curfew_56467d29e4b045bf3def3699

destroy ISIS.⁸² As Western Europe is awakening to the ISIS threat, Russia has been taking great strides to combat this threat and spread Russian influence.

This call for destruction of ISIS plays directly into the Russian's hands.⁸³ Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Russia has remained loyal to its ally Al-Assad of Syria.⁸⁴ This alliance is vital to Russia's strategic capabilities in the Mediterranean and the Middle East region.⁸⁵ This alliance allows Russia to operate a large naval base in the port of Tartus.⁸⁶ In addition to their naval base, Russia views Syria as a legitimate safeguard to counter Islamic terrorism.⁸⁷

During this time and to maintain its interests, Russia, has claimed that groups, who are attempting to overthrow the legally elected Al-Assad, are radical Islamic terrorist.⁸⁸ Russia claims that these groups are conducting ethnic cleansing and are using terrorist tactics to further their expansion across Syria.⁸⁹

Russia has intensified its commitment of military support to the Syrian government in its civil war. In August of 2015, Russia unloaded a shipment of armored personnel carriers to supplement the Syrian's fight.⁹⁰ These personnel carriers were seen engaging alongside pro-government forces in the Latakia province in northern Syria.⁹¹ The Latakia region contains a high density of the Shia Alawite population, as well as a large population of Russian nationals.⁹² Protecting these groups is essential to Syrian and Russian leadership both politically and militarily.

By September of 2015, there was a massive increase in the Russian presence in Latakia province. Russia is building its military power up at a strategic point outside the city of Jableh, specifically the Bassel Al-Assad International Airport.⁹³ Here, the Russians have deployed five hundred ground troops, twenty-six armored personal carriers, tanks, two Mi-24 HIND attack helicopters, and two Mi-17 cargo helicopters.⁹⁴ In order to maintain and support Russia's

⁸² Associated Press, France seeks EU security aid, launches new airstrikes on IS, *CNBC*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/11/16/frances-hollande-calls-for-us-russia-to-join-war-on-islamic-state.html>

⁸³ Vysotsky, Alexander, Russia and the Arab spring, *The Quarterly Journal*, 14 (1) 2014 p.59

⁸⁴ Vysotsky, Alexander, Russia and the Arab spring, *The Quarterly Journal*, 14 (1) 2014 p.59

⁸⁵ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.2

⁸⁶ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.2

⁸⁷ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.2

⁸⁸ Vysotsky, Alexander, Russia and the Arab spring, *The Quarterly Journal*, 14 (1) 2014 p.59

⁸⁹ Vysotsky, Alexander, Russia and the Arab spring, *The Quarterly Journal*, 14 (1) 2014 p.59

⁹⁰ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.2

⁹¹ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.2

⁹² Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.1

⁹³ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.3

⁹⁴ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.3

forward operating base, the Russians have been observed averaging two cargo flights a day landing, bringing supplies and personnel to contribute to the fight.⁹⁵

Then, in October, 2015, a Russian passenger airliner crashed killing all two hundred and twenty-four passengers on board.⁹⁶ This was soon determined not to be an accident, but a deliberate terrorist attack orchestrated by ISIS in response to Russia's involvement in Syria.⁹⁷ This retaliation prompted increased Russian deployments; specifically with its air campaign.⁹⁸ After confirming the downing of the airliner was a terrorist attack, Russia launched air attacks on over two hundred ISIS targets.⁹⁹ Russian President Putin stated in reference to his military's mission, "our air force's military work in Syria must not simply be continued, it must be intensified in such a way that the criminals understand that retribution is inevitable."¹⁰⁰ These events undoubtedly showed Russia's commitment to the region and Syria.

Iran, along with Russia, has a vested interest in seeing the Syrian regime succeed in its civil war. Iran, the leader of The Axis of Resistance, as described by the Institute for the Study of War, is promoting any effort which could hinder Western or Israeli actions in the Middle East.¹⁰¹ This Axis of Resistance is comprised of Iran, Syria, and the terrorist group Hezbollah.¹⁰² Iran uses its alliance with Syria as its go between to supply its terrorist organization Hezbollah.¹⁰³ The Shia Islamic Republic of Iran has historically used these alliances to conduct proxy attacks on the state of Israel and the United States.¹⁰⁴

This use of alliances was the traditional method of operation for Iran until the Syrian civil war. The outbreak of the civil war has seriously compromised Iran's ability to arm their terrorist organization Hezbollah.¹⁰⁵ The possibility that Al-Assad may be removed from rule would likely cause the Iranians to lose their powerful influence in Syria.¹⁰⁶ The Iranians fear the loss of a Shia led government to a Sunni regime within the region. Iran has been supplying Syria and Hezbollah since the civil war began and will do as much as possible to support the Syrian government.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁵ Spaulding, Hugo, et al. Russian deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East game changer, *Institute for the Study of War*, September, 2015 p.3

⁹⁶ MacFarquhar, Neil and Thomas, Merna, Russian Airliner Crashes in Egypt, Killing 224, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/middleeast/russian-plane-crashes-in-egypt-sinai-peninsula.html>

⁹⁷ Hashem, Mostafa. Aboulenein, Ahmed and Boulton Ralph, Islamic State claims responsibility for crash in Egypt, *Reuters*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/31/us-egypt-crash-islamic-state-idUSKCN0SP0P520151031#hYVEXuaIrkfHmE42.97>

⁹⁸ Osborn, Andrew, Putin vows payback after confirmation of Egypt plane bomb, *Reuters*. 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/17/us-egypt-crash-russia-blast-idUSKCN0T60PS20151117#ts3SWmffrLXTv8I3.97>

⁹⁹ O'Neill, Kara and Dean, Jon, Russia bombs 206 Islamic State targets after Vladimir Putin Confirms terrorist blew up passenger plane. *Mirror*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/russia-bombs-206-islamic-state-6858978>

¹⁰⁰ Osborn, Andrew, Putin vows payback after confirmation of Egypt plane bomb, *Reuters*. 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/17/us-egypt-crash-russia-blast-idUSKCN0T60PS20151117#ts3SWmffrLXTv8I3.97> p.1

¹⁰¹ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.9

¹⁰² Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.9

¹⁰³ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.9

¹⁰⁴ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.9

¹⁰⁵ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.10

¹⁰⁶ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.10, 11

¹⁰⁷ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.10, 11

As early as 2011, Iran has been providing support and training to both Hezbollah and Syrian forces to combat Syrian rebels.¹⁰⁸ Initially, Iran supplied advisors from their elite Revolutionary Guard to supplement Syria's fight around the city of Homs.¹⁰⁹ In addition to helping Syria, Iran's elite force operated alongside Hezbollah as they conducted raids and offensive operations into Syria to defend the Shias living in the border region.¹¹⁰

At a meeting in 2013 between Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah; Ali Khamenei the Supreme leader of Iran; and Qassem Suleimani the leader of the Revolutionary Guard, the tides of war turned in favor of the Al-Assad forces.¹¹¹ The Revolutionary Guard set up headquarters within Damascus and led the Syrian and pro-Syrian militia forces to maximize combat power by redirecting their war strategy to focus on key terrain, instead of fighting on all fronts at once.¹¹² This strategy has paid off and as of 2015 Al-Assad has remained in power.¹¹³

Iraq, the Shia majority nation, is also receiving support from its former enemy Iran, in order to combat the growing threat of Sunni ISIS.¹¹⁴ In 2014, Mosul was raided and captured by ISIS forces.¹¹⁵ This prompted Iran to take the threat to its Shia neighbor serious.¹¹⁶ Like Syria, Iran has deployed its Revolutionary Guard Force to train and enhance the Shia militias and Iraqi military.¹¹⁷ In addition to this, Iran has conducted air strikes in eastern Iraq as ISIS threatened encroachment on its own borders.¹¹⁸ In boasting of their achievement, Iranian General Amir Ali Hajizadeh stated "were it not for Iran, the Islamic State would have taken over Iraqi Kurdistan".¹¹⁹

Iran is seriously invested in ensuring the survivability of Iraq. Iraq is the home of three major Shia religious sites as discussed earlier, Najaf, Karbala, and Al-Askari Shrine.¹²⁰ Iran has stated that if these sites are compromised by the Sunni ISIS group, they will elevate their intervention to a full scale conflict.¹²¹ To ensure this would not occur, General Qassem Suleimani has also been deployed to Iraq to meet with political and military leaders to ensure the Iraqis of their security.¹²²

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.12

¹⁰⁹ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p.12

¹¹⁰ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p. 11

¹¹¹ Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p. 12

¹¹² Sullivan, Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2014 p. 13

¹¹³ Kozak, Christopher. An army in all corners: Assad's campaign strategy in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2015. p. 5

¹¹⁴ Kozak, Christopher. An army in all corners: Assad's campaign strategy in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2015. p.17

¹¹⁵ Kozak, Christopher. An army in all corners: Assad's campaign strategy in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2015. p.17

¹¹⁶ Kozak, Christopher. An army in all corners: Assad's campaign strategy in Syria, *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2015. p.17

¹¹⁷ Bazzi, Mohamad. Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/>

¹¹⁸ Bazzi, Mohamad. Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/>

¹¹⁹ Bazzi, Mohamad. Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/> pg. 19

¹²⁰ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday,

¹²¹ Esfandiary, Dina and Tabatabai, Ariane, Iran's ISIS policy, *International Affairs*, 91(1) 2015, p.8

¹²² Bazzi, Mohamad. Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS. *CNN*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/>

Complementing Iran's participation, Russia is also continuing to develop capabilities in Iraq. According to the Pentagon, Russian aircraft, armor, and munitions have arrived in Iraq to support the fight against ISIS.¹²³ In addition to supplementing weapons, Russia is also deploying officers to Baghdad for additional support.¹²⁴ The Russian-Iraq cooperation has resulted in Iraq sharing intelligence information with Russia in order to facilitate operations against ISIS.¹²⁵ This new partnership is a strategic move by Russia to increase their political, military, and economic involvement in the Middle East.¹²⁶

With Iran and Russia increasing their political and military support within Syria and Iraq, along with the disengagement for the United States, there are serious implications for the United States and Western powers which may result in loss of influence and increased conflict.

Implications of Disengagement

There are serious military, economic, and political repercussions if the United States and Western powers maintain a standoff approach to ISIS and the Middle East. These serious and disastrous repercussions range from: increased sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims, an increase in the severity of the refugee crisis in Europe, loss of Western access to oil and loss of military and intelligence access.

The first serious implication would be the continuation and escalation of conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims within the Middle East. If Iran's intervention within Syria and Iraq escalates, Iran, in the spirit of revolutionary regimes, will attempt to spread its ideology.¹²⁷ This ideology is the expansion of an Islamic governing body based on the divine law of the Quran.¹²⁸ Iran wishes to establish a Khalifate that resembles the years of Muhamad and Ali's rule of the Islamic community throughout the region.¹²⁹ This Khalifate would be a Shia dominated one, which would result in a clash between the Shias and Sunnis in the region.

If Iran, Iraq, and Syria are able to defeat ISIS without cooperation and intervention with western powers, Iran will have no restraints placed on them and they may be able to use their influence to establish and grow its Shia Islamic government. If ISIS is defeated, the repercussions on Sunni Muslims could be very dire. Shia militias will be able to operate freely and persecute and murder the Sunnis like they have already done in Syria.¹³⁰

If this outcome occurs, Shia militias will quell Sunni resistance and with a buildup of Shia military forces in Iraq and Syria, the Middle East region could face serious sectarian problems. A build up along the southern Iraqi and Syrian border by Shia forces would threaten the Sunni Saudi Arabia and the other smaller Sunni states in the Middle East. This build up could create a Cold War within the Middle East similar to the situation Europe faced as the

¹²³Mullen, Jethro and Basil, Yousuf, Iraq agrees to share intelligence with Russia, Iran and Syria.

CNN, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/27/middleeast/iraq-russia-iran-syria-intelligence-deal/>

¹²⁴ Gordon, Michael, Russia Surprises U.S. with accord on battle with ISIS, *The New York Times*,

2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/28/world/middleeast/iraq-agrees-to-share-intelligence-on-isis-with-russia-syria-and-iran.html?_r=0

¹²⁵ Mullen, Jethro and Basil, Yousuf, Iraq agrees to share intelligence with Russia, Iran and Syria.

CNN, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/27/middleeast/iraq-russia-iran-syria-intelligence-deal/>

¹²⁶Mullen, Jethro and Basil, Yousuf, Iraq agrees to share intelligence with Russia, Iran and Syria.

CNN, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/27/middleeast/iraq-russia-iran-syria-intelligence-deal/>

¹²⁷ Katz, Mark. *Revolution: International Dimensions*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly 2001, p.2

¹²⁸ Kissinger, Henry, *World Order*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014, p.153

¹²⁹ Kissinger, Henry, *World Order*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014, p.153

¹³⁰ Holliday The Assad Regime p.22

Soviet Union and the free world faced off during a majority of the 20th century. However, this division in Sunni and Shia Muslims has a much deeper rooted divide that reaches through fifteen hundred years and it is more likely to result in war.

If this large scale sectarian hot war occurred, it would only increase the current refugee crisis that is currently faced in the Middle East and Europe. As discussed earlier, refugees are flooding into Europe on average about ten thousand refugees a day.¹³¹ If this continues, it will unquestionably be impossible for the countries of Europe to provide for these refugees and their current citizens.¹³²

Even now, this refugee crisis is causing the native Europeans to embrace far right nationalist parties.¹³³ For example, in Germany, nationalistic Neo-Nazis are gaining political strength as the German government is embracing and welcoming Middle Eastern refugees.¹³⁴ In France, the leader of the National Front, Marine Le Pen, has seen an estimated ten percent increase in support since the November 13th Paris terrorist attack conducted by Muslim terrorists.¹³⁵ These nationalists have conducted attacks on refugees who have been resettled into their country as nationalist grievances grow.¹³⁶

The result of this continued influx of refugees will continue to feed the rise of the far right and it will result in increased civil unrest within Europe. Clashes between Europeans and refugees will become more frequent and more violent. This will cause European countries to focus more energy and resources on combating issues in the homeland, which can lead to not only political instability, but economic instability as well.

Economic instability will not only result from Europe's refugee crises, but also from the West's inability to access oil from the Middle East. This will cause a third major implication of Western disengagement. If Iran and Russia are successful in supporting Iraq defeating ISIS, they may gain even more political influence. This influence could provide the Iranian government the influence it needs to push out Western nations like the United States; fulfilling their Axis of Resistance goal of disrupting Western influence in the region. This will allow Iran to control oil flow to the West, creating more problems for the West and its economies. This situation is highly possible as Iran currently has a significant influence over Iraq.¹³⁷

The fourth issue that will cause serious strategic implications is the loss of military and intelligence access to Iraq and the Middle East. If the United States continues the practice of

¹³¹ Nordland, Rod, A mass migration crisis, and it may yet get worse, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0

¹³² Nordland, Rod, A mass migration crisis, and it may yet get worse, *The New York Times*, 2015, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0

¹³³ White, Maya, Frances far-right party surges on immigration, terror fears, *The Washington Times*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/26/frances-far-right-party-surges-on-immigration-terr/>

¹³⁴ Connolly, Kate, German neo-Nazi protesters clash with police at new migrant shelter, *The Guardian*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/23/german-neo-nazi-protesters-clash-with-police-at-new-migrant-shelter>

¹³⁵ White, Maya, Frances far-right party surges on immigration, terror fears, *The Washington Times*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/26/frances-far-right-party-surges-on-immigration-terr/>

¹³⁶ Khan, Shehab, Dresden riots: Protesters in Germany attack refugee buses shouting 'foreigners out'. *Independent News*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/dresden-riots-protesters-in-germany-attack-refugee-buses-shouting-foreigners-out-10467287.html>

¹³⁷ Weiss, M., Hassan, H. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015. p.96

disengagement, it could lose its ability to move throughout Iraqi airspace, as well as gain intelligence on threats within the area. Iraq has already proven that it is willing to share information with Russia and Iran. With these additional powers in play for intelligence, there will be serious issues with the integrity of the information provided by the Iraqis to the United State.

These implications can cause serious damage to the United States and the West's global security. It is important for the United States and the West to recognize the seriousness of the situation and develop a plan to mitigate the issues currently underway in the Middle East today.

Recommendation

If the United States does not change its course of disengagement, and low kinetic operations against ISIS, the implications discussed will be real possibilities. In order for the United States to maintain its influence within the region, it must change its course of action and strategy in the battle to fight ISIS. The United States must heighten its political and military presence within the Middle East, in order to show its commitment to its regional allies. ISIS is gaining ground and influence within the region and around the world. By attacking many countries throughout the world, ISIS is a threat that is causing other nations to raise their involvement in the fight against them.

The Russians and the Iranians carry large influences within Syria due to its long standing alliances of the past. However, these two countries' presence is growing in Iraq, a state which the United States has held a presence in since the start of the Iraq war in 2003. This presence could threaten the United States influence in the region, and as discussed in the implications, it could be dire.

For the United States to maintain influence, destroy ISIS, and bring about stability within the region; it is clear that serious steps should be taken to build a coalition of Sunni Arab States, Russia, Western Europe, the United States, and Shia Muslims. This current firestorm is an excellent opportunity to build better relationships with all parties involved and bring stability to the region by destroying ISIS.

This coalition operation would require serious United States involvement in order for it to be successful. It is essential, that the United States and Russia, with a common enemy, cooperate in this fight. Each power, if operating together, would be able to provide a serious economy of force, along with additional Western powers. However, this coalition needs to occur in conjunction with Arab allies. It is vital, that Sunni Arabs participate in direct combat with ISIS due to the seriousness of the religious and cultural differences. This coalition of nations could prove to be a great success.

With a substantial United States military operation in support of Arab Allies, a campaign beginning from the Sunni dominated Al-Anbar province of Iraq moving north, through ISIS controlled areas of Iraq and into Syria could be done swiftly and on par with the 2003 invasion of Iraq.¹³⁸ The operation needs to begin there in order to avoid religious clashes with the southern Iraqi Shia dominated territory.¹³⁹ In conjunction with this campaign, a simultaneous push west towards the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa by the Kurds and a Russian push east in Syria would

¹³⁸ Marsh, Denali, Understanding the rise of ISIS, *The Global State*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://theglobalstate.com/popular/understanding-isis/>

¹³⁹ Marsh, Denali, Understanding the rise of ISIS, *The Global State*, 2015, retrieved from: <http://theglobalstate.com/popular/understanding-isis/>

require ISIS to fight simultaneously on all fronts. Though they have been able to operate very well so far, a large scale operation would be infeasible for ISIS to handle.

This campaign would have to be swift and without reservations. Upon defeating ISIS, it is highly recommended that Sunni Muslim militaries be the main forces left in the region to conduct counter insurgency operations. This power given to the Sunnis would be necessary so the United States and the anti-ISIS coalition do not appear to be occupying forces.¹⁴⁰ The second objective of this counter insurgency operation would be to reestablish the laws that formally governed the areas now controlled by ISIS.¹⁴¹ Without the Sunni partners, this campaign would be a failure before it even begins. These actions proposed would be necessary or otherwise ISIS support would increase and fighting will only escalate.

The United States must commit to serious involvement, in an effort to avoid the implications of disengagement that might otherwise occur. By increasing its involvement, the United States will be able to prove its relevance to its Middle Eastern partners, specifically Iraq, as a trustworthy partner in maintaining security within the region. In doing so, the United States would continue to maintain its economic ties allowing it access to the oil industry, the life blood of the American economy. In addition to economic advantages, the United State will be able to maintain its ability to utilize airspace for military operations, as well as gain access to intelligence. Finally, by destroying ISIS and bringing stability back to the region, the refugee crisis emanating from the Middle East could be slowed and properly handled.

In conclusion, the United States cannot be the sole actor. It must step in as the leadership and facilitator within the region to broker all nations with an interest in stabilizing the Middle East. The combat with ISIS will be a difficult fight, but without the United States' leadership, the Russian and Iranian strategic positioning will continue to grow. The implications of these losses of leadership to the United States could be irreversible. This outcome should be avoided at all cost. However, if the United States embraces cooperation with Russia and positions itself as the leader in the fight to destroy ISIS, it will be able to maintain its hegemonic positioning while also building stronger regional and global stability.

¹⁴⁰ Mockaitis, Thomas. *Resolving Insurgencies. U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. 2011, p.66,67

¹⁴¹ Mockaitis, Thomas. *Resolving Insurgencies. U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. 2011, p.68, 69

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