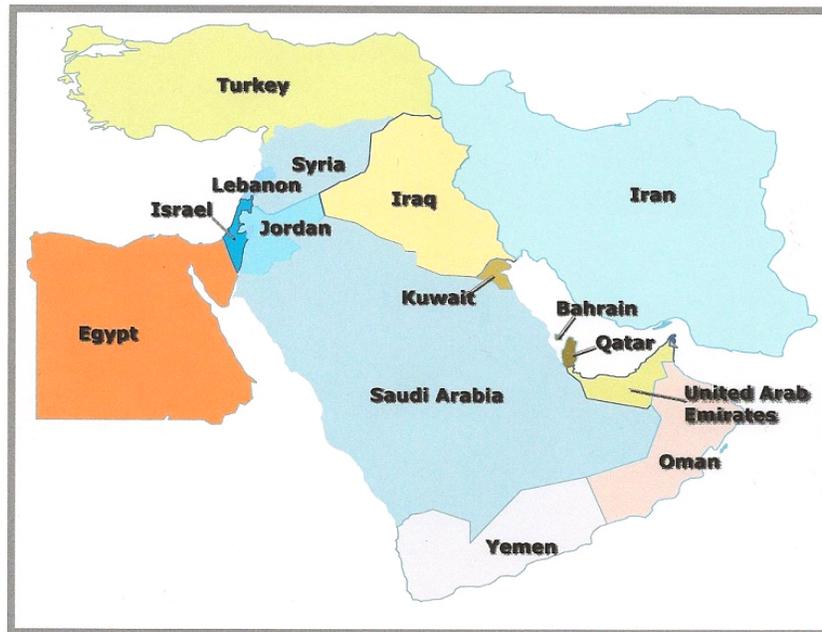


Here We Go Again The Drumbeats of Armed Conflict

An Islamist group operating in Iraq and Syria has demonstrated its brute force tactics before the world by beheading people, robbing banks, stealing oil, and seizing sovereign territories. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIL or ISIS, wishes to establish a Caliphate across the Middle East. Some people think this group poses an imminent threat to the United States, its allies and friends, while others are saying, “Here We Go Again,” translated as using the military to solve some other nations’ problems. Whether the threat is real, imminent, or in the distant future, the American people should demand clarity from their elected representatives before more blood, lives, and tax dollars are expended.

Past events and etymology are important in understanding some reasons why the Middle East presents complex challenges to itself and the international community. Conflicts and disagreements over the successor to the Prophet Muhammad have been ongoing since his death in 632 CE. The Arabic word for successor is caliph. Caliphate refers to a political-religious state that makes up a Muslim community. Schisms between Sunni and Shiite Muslims are prevalent throughout the Middle East. Levant is a French word that means “to rise.” It widely refers to areas in the eastern Mediterranean, such as present-day Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. Hegemonic desires to be the dominant influencer over diverse societies and nations have been the cause of economic strife, civil wars, and lack of political empowerment. Humanitarian assistance and armed interventions are dicey propositions for the international community because picking sides almost always result in unintended consequences.



“The enemy of my enemy is my friend” does not necessarily apply when many of the Middle Eastern countries have several, often conflicting agendas. Secular or non-religious public policy issues often conflict with the dictates of religious leaders. Iran and Iraq share cultural and religious values. Both countries conduct extensive trade with each other. Turkey is member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a predominately Sunni Muslim country. Relations between Turkey and Iraq are frosty because of the Kurds who live in northern Iraq. Syria’s President, Bashar al-Assad is known to support terrorist organizations. The on-going civil war in his country has caused thousands of Syrians to flee into Turkey and Jordan. Conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran exist because of conflicting

religious philosophies – Sunni and Shiite differences. Several media reports indicate that some wealthy donors from oil-rich countries help fund ISIL. The U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet has operated from Bahrain for more than 50 years. Some Arab countries do not want Westerners on any parts of their soil. Normally, when tensions flare up in the Middle East, the Israel-Palestine conflict comes to the forefront. More often than not, the forms of governance, i.e., autocratic rule and the disregard of tolerance for other political view points do not garner respect for human rights and civil liberties. These are complexities and challenges to Arab countries. Therefore, attempts to export democratic principles to Arab countries are just as challenging and complex for the international community.

Neither President Bush nor President Obama was successful in reaching a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the Iraqi government. A SOFA ensures that military personnel remain under the direct control and responsibility of the United States, which allows the military to operate with immunity from Iraqi law. In December 2011, the military departed Iraq. Shiite Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki appointed loyalists to key leadership positions. His degrading treatment of non-Shiite citizens created schisms between religious sects. Mosul, the second largest Iraqi city, was seized by ISIL in June 2014. Iraqi security and police forces fled and left behind weapons and equipment. As ISIL advanced towards Baghdad, the Iraqi government sought U.S. assistance to disrupt their advances. The military responded with airstrikes. Retired Army General David Petraeus cautioned the use of additional airstrikes by stating: “This cannot be the United States being the air force for [Shiite] militias or a [Shiite] on Sunni Arab fight.” He is well aware of unintended consequences, having served as the Commander of U.S. Central Command, with areas of responsibility that include most Middle Eastern countries.

Drumbeats about threats to U.S. national security and armed conflict to destroy ISIL grew louder, in hopes that America would once again use its blood and treasure to solve other nations’ problems. The Administration’s response to ISIL’s threats was summed up in a White House Press Release: “Our goal is clear: to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy so that it’s no longer a threat to Iraq, the region, the United States, and our partners.” The word [sustained] implies a prolonged period that may last for years. Citizens who want clarity from Congress can do so by contacting the committees responsible for the armed services and foreign affairs.

<p>Senate Committee on Armed Services</p> <p>SC-Emerging Threats and Capabilities SC-Readiness and Management Support SC-Strategic Forces SC-Airland SC-Personnel SC-Seapower</p> <p style="text-align: right;">SC-Subcommittee</p>	<p>House Committee on Armed Services</p> <p>SC-Intelligence, Emerging Threats and Capabilities SC-Readiness SC-Strategic Forces SC-Tactical Air and Land Forces SC-Military Personnel SC-Seapower & Projection Forces SC-Oversight & Investigations</p>
<p>Senate Committee on Foreign Relations</p> <p>SC-international Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women’s Issues SC-Western Hemisphere and Global Narcotics Affairs SC-Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs SC-East Asian and Pacific Affairs SC-African Affairs SC-European Affairs SC-International Development and Foreign Assistance, Economic Affairs, International Environmental Protection, and Peace Corps</p>	
<p>House Committee on Foreign Affairs</p> <p>SC-Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade SC-The Middle East and North Africa SC-Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations SC-Asia and the Pacific SC-Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats SC-Western Hemisphere</p> <p style="text-align: right;">SC-Subcommittee</p>	

In mid September 2014, Congress approved the President's plan to arm and train Syrian rebels to ensure that they will be better prepared to take the fight to ISIL. Shortly thereafter, the United States along with five Arab nations – Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates launched airstrikes into Syria. Turkey and the United Kingdom did not participate in the attacks, but are expected to do so in the future as kinetic operations continue. It did not take long for supporters and opponents to voice their concerns about the strategy and tactics. Supporters are convinced that ISIL presents a threat to U.S. national security. Opponents are convinced that ISIL is an Arab problem, and that the United States could be caught up in another quagmire. Each side presents valid arguments and they do agree that Congressional debate and authorization are necessary to ensure that the voices of the citizens are heard.

References

Murphy, Dan. Briefing: What is the Islamic State In Iraq and the Levant (ISIS)? (2014, Jun 23). The Christian Science Monitor.

The Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Press Release Regarding the Raid on our Consulate General in Mosul (2014, Jun 11). No. 196.

The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. FACT SHEET: Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (2014, Sep 10).

U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response (2014, Jun 27). RL33487.

U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Iraq Crisis and U.S. Policy (2014, Jul 3). R43612.

Bresnahan, T. and French, L. House backs Obama's Syria plan (2014, Sep 17). POLITICO.