

UGAMUNC XXI

Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Background Guide



Hello delegates!

On behalf of the finest University, I'd like to welcome you all to UGAMUNC XXIII and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation! My name is Jailen Gary and I will be your chair for the duration of the conference. I am a second year here at the University of Georgia and I hail from Grovetown, Georgia. I am currently majoring in International Affairs and considering adding a Communications major onto that. This is my first year chairing a committee at UGAMUNC and this is also my first year being on the team

My Wonderful co-Chair for this committee is Miss Mariah Elliot, a second year just like me. Mariah is from Buford, Georgia and she is currently double majoring in International Affairs and Romance languages with a minor in Arabic. This is Mariah's first year on the team, but in addition to Model UN, Mariah also works as the Vice President of Finance for CFAC and is a cast member at the Disney Store. She also thinks that it's important for you guys to know that she especially enjoys traveling, sleeping and pie. In that order.

As excited as Mariah and I are to see you all in February, the topics that we will cover in this committee are topics that are sensitive and serious. While I do want us to have fun together, in committee, we will be covering real world issues, and I expect nothing but maturity and professionalism when discussing these topics. I encourage you to be as much in character as you see fit, but please stay within the bounds of reason (i.e. no racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia or any other type of discriminatory behavior). With that being said, I have full confidence that our experiences together in this committee will be fun, informative, challenging and engaging. Mariah and I picked our topics with the idea of them being outside of the box, so that you can see Islam in a light that is different from what is portrayed. If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to let me know via email (provided below). I can't wait to see what we do as a committee!

See you in February,

Jailen Gary
Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation: UGAMUNC XXIII
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Background: International Organization of Islamic Cooperation

In 1969, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was established in light of the criminal arson of Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam. Following the incident, twenty three Muslim heads of state met at the Rabat summit in Morocco to lay the groundwork for the OIC. The established goals for the organization included “the safeguarding and protection of the holy sites of Islam; support for the just cause of the Palestinian people, deprived of its legitimate rights; support for peoples and populations that are victims of oppression and racial discrimination.”¹

Since its creation, the OIC has expanded to include 57 states spread over 4 continents. As the second largest inter-governmental organization comprised of a diverse population of nearly 1.5 billion, Islam stands as the only uniting entity.² Thus, the entire existence of the OIC rests on serving to protect Muslim interests worldwide. In 2005 and 2008, the OIC modified its mission to address issues such as “terrorism, Islamophobia, poor governance, economic disparities, poverty, illiteracy, and epidemics.”²

In effort to work efficiency, three layers compose the structure of the OIC: the Conference of Kings and Heads of State and Government (Islamic Summit), the Conference of Foreign Ministers, and the General Secretariat. In the triennial Islamic Summit, the overarching authority of the organization, kings and head of state convene to discuss policy and provide guidance on issues of concern. The Conference of Foreign Ministers, meeting once annually, deliberates implementation of policies and reviews progress of previous policy. The General Secretariat implements the policies through the creation of committees such as the Al-Quds Committee and the Islamic Peace Committee, and the Standing Committee for Economic and Trade Cooperation (COMCEC) which are chaired by Heads of State.³

Despite the new direction and efficient organizational structure, the “shoestring budget” and remaining disagreements in the organization’s role in international affairs loom the OIC. Also, given its relatively young age, “the OIC’s credibility and potency remain limited.”⁴

¹ "Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)." Dictionary of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. "Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)." *Encyclopedia.com*. HighBeam Research. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/politics/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/organization-islamic-conference-oic>

² Johnson, Toni. "The Organization of the Islamic Conference." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 29 June 2010. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/religion/organization-islamic-conference/p22563>

³ "About OIC." *OIC*. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <http://www.oic-oci.org/ex-summit/english/about.htm>

⁴ "Civic Freedom Monitor: Organization of Islamic Cooperation." *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*. 19 Mar. 2016. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/oic.html>

I. Female Genital Mutilation

Introduction – What is Female Genital Mutilation?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (also referred to as female genital cutting or female circumcision) is a practice in which either involves the partial or total removal of the external area of the female genitalia, or any other injury to the female genital organs for cultural, religious, or non-medical reasons.⁵ According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), there are about 200 million women and girls who are currently alive who have been affected by FGM.⁶ It has also been estimated that up to 3 million girls every year in Africa alone are thought to be forced to go through FGM.⁷ FGM is a practice that, according to mainstream knowledge, is thought to be most prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and very few Arab and Middle Eastern states.⁸ While it remains unclear exactly when and where FGM originated, it is very clear that there is an assortment of reasons as to why some communities within Muslim countries worldwide choose to take part in FGM.

Why Is FGM Taking Place?

In regions where FGM is heavily practiced, one common response as to why it is practiced is because it is seen as the proper way to bring up a girl in their culture.⁹ It is also believed by some that social stigmas also play a role in whether or not a girl undergoes the process. In some cultures, if a girl is not “cut” she may undergo heavy scrutiny because she can possibly be perceived as impure or not marriageable, which can lead to her and her family being excommunicated or ostracized due to them not adhering to social standards.¹⁰

Another justification where FGM is used is because cultures wish to control the sexuality of a woman so that they serve a “proper” role in society.¹¹ Some cultures see the outside portion of the female genitalia as useless in terms of a female’s role in society. For example, some feel that a woman’s sexuality and desire for pleasure is capable of getting out of control if parts of the genitalia are not removed, which is what leads to FGM.¹² People in some cultures (namely men) have a desire to guarantee virginity before marriage, ensure fidelity during marriage, and increase male pleasure, which leads to FGM taking place.¹³

Perhaps one of the most hotly debated reasons why FGM takes place is because of religious reasons. While it is obvious that many states that have high rates of FGM are, in fact, Muslim majority states, many people point to Islam not being an issue. They say this because

⁵ “Female genital mutilation (FGM) frequently asked questions.” *United Nations Population Fund*. Dec. 2015. Web. 20 Oct. 2016 <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions>

⁶ “ “

⁷ “How Did Female Genital Mutilation Begin?” *Seeker*. 10 Dec. 2012. Web. Oct. 2016 <http://www.seeker.com/how-did-female-genital-mutilation-begin-1766105357.html>

⁸ Sanders, Katie. “Fact-checking Reza Aslan on Bill Maher's 'not very sophisticated' rant on Islam.” *Politifact*. 2 Oct. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016 <http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/oct/02/reza-aslan/fact-checking-reza-aslans-retort-bill-maher/>

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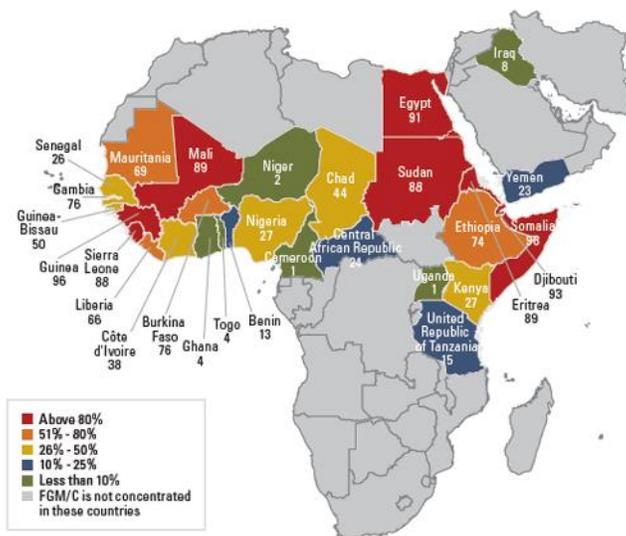
¹³ “ “

states such as Saudi Arabia, the “center of the Islamic world” condemns the practice.¹⁴ Despite this frequent denial on the part of many Muslims, many people who participate in for fall victim to FGM cite religious mandates as a reason for FGM taking place.¹⁵ It can also be cited that some scholars believe that parts from the hadith (a commentary about the Koran that discusses the traditions of Mohammed himself) can be used to justify the act of cutting, even though the hadith itself stresses that cutting is not mandatory.¹⁶ While it can be argued whether or not religion plays an integral role in the practice of FGM, what cannot be argued is that FGM is still something that happens within the member states of the OIC, and the body must take steps to combat it no matter the reasons why FGM occurs.

Where is FGM taking place?

While it is widely understood and accepted that FGM is a common in Sub-Saharan African member states of the OIC, it should also be noted that not only are they not the only member states with a problem, but that the responsibility to find a solution to this breach of human rights does not solely belong to the OIC, but to the whole international community.

Below: Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have undergone FGM, by country.¹⁷



That being said, it is still important to identify everywhere within the OIC’s jurisdiction where FGM is occurring at alarming rates. As stated and shown in the graphic above, the

¹⁴ Uwer, Thomas. “Is Female Genital Mutilation an Islamic Problem?” *Middle East Forum*. 2007. Web. 20 Oct. 2016
<http://www.meforum.org/1629/is-female-genital-mutilation-an-islamic-problem>

¹⁵ “ “

¹⁶ “ “

¹⁷ “Female Genital Mutilation.” *World Health Organization*. 2013. Web. Oct. 20 2016
<http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/fgm/prevalence/en/>

percentage of girls and women who have suffered FGM in many of our African member states is astonishingly high. As recently as December of last year, though, it has come to light that several of our member states outside of the African continent have instances of FGM occurring, effectively no longer making Iraq and Yemen outliers. These member states (Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Palestine¹⁸), more than ever, ought to have an even stronger drive to eliminate FGM and spare their female citizens from experiencing this degradation of their human rights.

Along with the above information, it is imperative that as a committee, you recognize the fact that the practice of the FGM has the potential to spread to other countries due to immigration from places where it is common practice. In the United States, FGM has reportedly been on the rise due to immigration from member states such as Nigeria and Egypt¹⁹ which threatens to make FGM a truly global issue.

With relation to the issue of FGM spreading, it should also be noted that Egypt, the country with the highest rate of FGM with 97% of girls may be affected,²⁰ shares more in common culturally and historically with its fellow Arab member states in the Middle East and Northern Africa than it does with sub-Saharan Africa. This raises one very important question: With the recent discovery of FGM taking place throughout the Middle East, do other member states such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc. have cases that are not being reported? It should be noted that in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the act of FGM has been carried on for generations and has had light coverage when compared to the occurrences in sub-Saharan Africa.²¹ This disparity of coverage between UAE and the rest of the world is just gives light to the ever present stigma that FGM is an exclusively African Problem. This one example of newly discovered instances of FGM is just one of the many potential examples of it taking place in regions outside of Africa, and is a possibility that the committee should look into.

Health Risks Associated with FGM

What all member states should keep in mind while determining their actions on the matter of FGM are the results and health risks that come with it. One of the immediate effects of FGM is severe pain.²² This severe pain is a result of the fact that those who undergo the procedure are rarely afforded access to proper anesthesia.²³ In Addition to this, there are many other potential immediate effects to FGM such as shock, infection, an increased chance of contracting HIV and even death.²⁴

18 " "

19 Westcott, Lucy. "Female Genital Mutilation On the Rise in the Us." *Newsweek*. 6 Feb. 2015. Web. 20 Oct. 2016. <http://www.newsweek.com/fgm-rates-have-doubled-us-2004-304773>

20 " "

21 Al Marzouqi, Wafa. "Fatal traditions: Female circumcision in the UAE." 23 Jul. 2011. Web. 20 Oct. 2016. <http://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/fatal-traditions-female-circumcision-in-the-uae>

22 "Health Risks of Female Genital Mutilation." *World Health Organization*. 2016. Web. 20. Oct 2016.

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Along with those short term effects, there are a plethora of long term effects of FGM that happen throughout a woman's life. This includes painful menstrual cycles due to the obstruction of the vaginal opening, higher instances of delivering still born babies or infants having to be resuscitated upon birth and the formation of excessive scar tissue at the site of cutting.²⁵ Aside from the physical effects, there are also psychological consequences that are little talked about. Studies have shown that those who fall victim to FGM have signs of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders and depression on top of all the physical trauma that they must endure.²⁶

Past OIC Action

This decade alone, The OIC has made tremendous moves to condemn and act against FGM. In February of 2013, the OIC general secretariat released a statement during the 57th session of the commission on the status of women in which they condemned the act of FGM by quoting their secretary general who said "We can no longer allow ignorance surrounding women's rights, and FGM to be perpetuated by traditions and rituals disguised as religious teachings. This inhumane practice has survived for over centuries, and must be stopped."²⁷ In addition to that statement, the OIC secretariat also informed the body that many states of the OIC have also signed the statute of the Women's development organization (WDO) which not only allows member states to more readily discuss women's issues, but FGM itself.²⁸ In addition to that, the OIC has also adopted multiple UN General assembly resolutions which help further the fight against FGM itself.²⁹

Consequences of action/inaction

If the OIC were to suddenly stop its work with the fight against FGM, not only would past efforts on behalf the OIC be curbed, but the world would lose a very integral and influential force in the fight against FGM. With the information that has been provided though, it is evident that there is much more that can be accomplished. If the members in the OIC were to attempt to overstep unseen boundaries with their own member states, toes could be stepped on and progress could be hampered. Keep that in mind.

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27 "Statement on Behalf of The OIC General Secretariat." *United Nations*. 11 Mar. 2013. Web. 23 Oct. 2016.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/generaldiscussion/observers/OIC.pdf>

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Hints/Questions to Consider

- I. Does your country have a high rate of FGM? If so, what has your country done to lessen the amount of FGM happening
- II. Has your country had a high rate of FGM in the past but no longer does? If so, what did your country do
- III. Does your country have a particular sensitivity to the topic of FGM?
- IV. Hint: The information provided above is not even close to all of the facts about FGM. It is expected that you come prepared and ready to discuss FGM inside and out. The only thing you should be learning while at the conference are how other countries stand on the issue.
- V. Hint: If your country has a high number of FGM incidents, think of solutions on how to help fix that.
- VI. Hint: Don't fret if your country does not have any problem of FGM, you are still capable of being a force of change within the committee.

Suggested Readings

- I. <http://www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm> The Cairo declaration of human rights in Islam (CDHRI) is a great document to reference when it comes to this topic
- II. <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions> The UNFPA provides a great overview of FGM
- III. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/generaldiscussion/observers/OIC.pdf> This statement by the OIC's secretariat gives great insight on the relative progressiveness of the OIC itself.

II. The Ongoing Threat of Boko Haram

Introduction – Who are Boko Haram?

The Nigeria-based radical Islamist group, Boko Haram, has been a cause of mayhem and violence in Western Africa for more than a decade. Beginning in 2002 under the leadership and guidance of Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram took shape and established their mission to “fight corruption by institutionalizing Islamic government.”³⁰ They initially sought to achieve this through withdrawal and the creation a new community based on Sharia law, however, the group now strives to overthrow the Nigerian government and impose an Islamic state. While the colloquial name Boko Haram, meaning “western education is forbidden,” has grown in popularity, they are also known as “Jama’atu Ahl as-Sunnah il-Da’awati wal Jihad” (translated as “people committed to the propagation of the prophet’s teachings”) and, more recently, ISWAP.³¹ As the names suggest, the group rejects the western social, cultural, and religious influence in Nigeria and wishes to propagate Islam through the creation of an Islamic state.

Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region³²



Source: Congressional Research Service

³⁰ "Spiraling Violence." *Human Rights Watch*. 11 Oct. 2015. Web. 23 Oct. 2016.

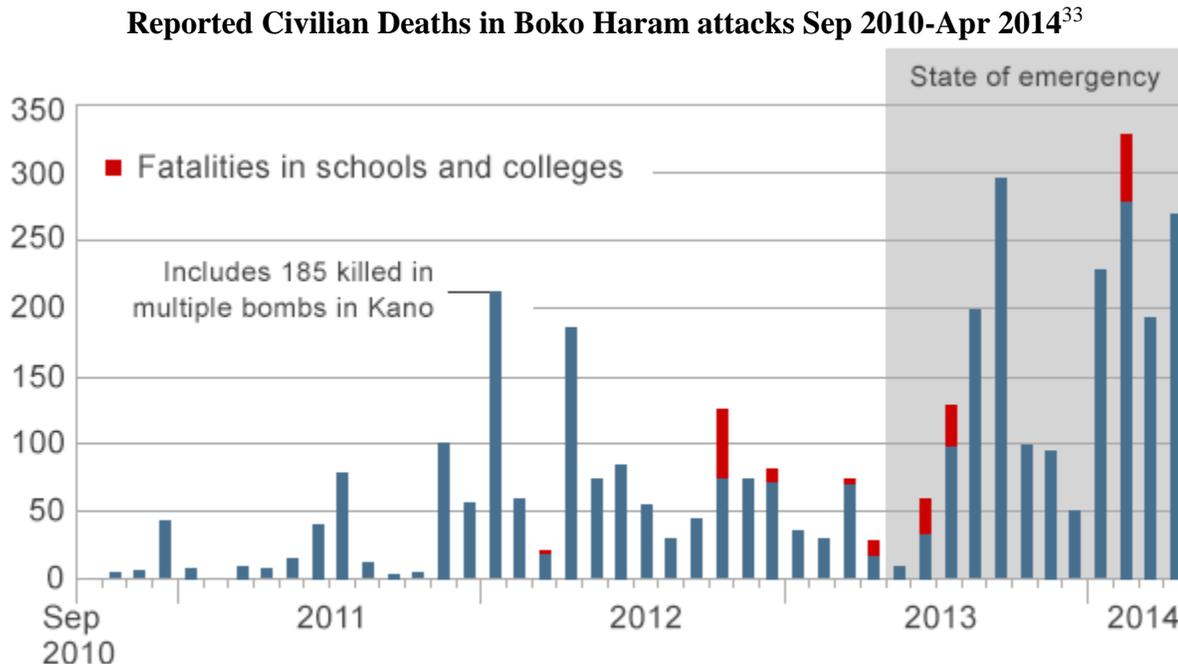
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/11/spiraling-violence/boko-haram-attacks-and-security-force-abuses-nigeria>

³¹ Bavier, Joe. "Nigeria: Boko Haram 101." *Pulitzer Center*. 08 Jan. 2015. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.

<http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/nigeria-boko-haram-terrorist-group-islam-christian-church-targets-youth-military>

³² Blanchard, Lauren Ploch. "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions." (n.d.): n. pag. *FAS*. 29 Mar. 2016. Web. 22 Oct. 2016. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43558.pdf>

History – Insurgency of Violence



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, created by Prof. Clionadh Raleigh, University of Sussex

The use of violence was not as prevalent prior to 2009. In its early years, the founder and leader of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, focused on the development of its structure and connections. However, an uprising organized by Yusuf in July 2009 changed Boko Haram's direction entirely. The violence sparked by the uprising and the government response resulted in the death of nearly 1,000 civilians, members, and Yusuf himself. During the transitional period that followed, Boko Haram drew from the support and success of other jihadist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS, and began to take a more violent turn.³² By 2011, Boko Haram reorganized under the command of Abubakar Shekau who led the change in operational direction of the group. The outburst of violence following Shekau's assumption of power, marked the deadliest phase in Boko Haram's insurgency as, "between 2011 and 2013, Boko Haram killed thousands through suicide bombings and massacres against civilian and state targets."³⁴

The abduction of 276 schoolgirls in April 2014 cultivated the heaviest international condemnation. Abubakar Shekau, "who had threatened to sell the girls as slaves or brides in a previous video, announced that the girls, most of whom were Christian, had been converted to Islam and suggested that they would be released if Boko Haram fighters held by the government were freed."³⁵ Despite the international uproar following this event, the group has only begun to

³³ News, BBC. "Nigerian Village Vigilantes 'repel Boko Haram Attack'" *BBC News*. N.p., 14 May 2014. Web. 21 Oct. 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27412057>

³⁴ Wall, Christopher. "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria." *Ntrepid*. Web. 19 Oct. 2016. <http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/>

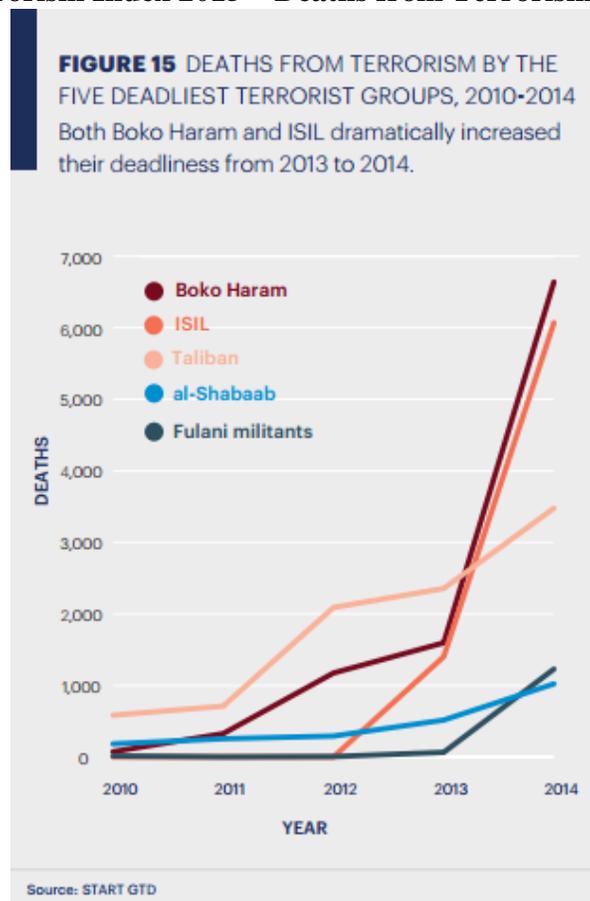
³⁵ Blanchard, Lauren Ploch. "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions." (n.d.): n. pag. *FAS*. 29 Mar. 2016. Web. 22 Oct. 2016. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43558.pdf>

release the girls as of October of 2016.³⁶ The whereabouts of the remaining girls remains unknown.

In 2015, the violent streak continued as Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS, who appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the son of Mohammed Yusuf, as the new leader.³⁵ This alliance would extend its reach of ISIS from Africa to as far as Afghanistan. The shared anti-western driving force of both organizations poses a greater threat to safety and to the economic development of Western Africa.

Regional Impact of Boko Haram

Global Terrorism Index 2015 – Deaths from Terrorism 2010-2015³⁸



Boko Haram's attacks, "driven by their wish to restrict the religious freedom of minorities in Western Africa", have jeopardized thousands of lives and neighborhoods in Western Africa.³⁷ According to the GTI, "whilst previously the use of suicide attacks by Boko Haram was rare, in

³⁶ "Boko Haram Releases 21 Chibok Girls to Nigerian Government." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 13 Oct. 2016. Web. 20 Oct. 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/13/africa/nigeria-chibok-girls-released/>

³⁷ Babalakin, Aisha. "African Governments Must Raise Awareness for Religious Freedom." *RSS*. 30 June 2016. Web. 02 Nov. 2016. <http://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/cornerstone/2016/6/30/african-governments-must-raise-awareness-for-religious-freedom>

2014 they were responsible for 31 suicide attacks with an average of nearly 15 deaths per attack".³⁸ These bomb attacks targeted "markets, transport hubs, bars, restaurants, and place of worship across the northeast," and they primarily used women and children as suicide bombers in these incidents.³⁹ The Baga Massacres, which occurred in a local marketplace, have been one of their deadliest attacks to date.

Aside from the human rights violations at the hands of Boko Haram, countless people live under the violent rule of Boko Haram. Over the years of Boko Haram's presence in the region, an estimated 2.2 million citizens from Nigeria alone have been forced to flee their homes.³⁹ According to the UN, "an additional 4.4 million are experiencing food insecurity related to the insurgency."⁴⁰ Thousands are living in camps or host communities, and depend on humanitarian assistance. The expansion of Boko Haram into Cameroon, Chad, and Niger has broadened the implications of their actions, caused further destabilization in the region, and, consequently, threatened the global community.³⁸

International Response

Boko Haram's violence has drawn international condemnation and remains a regional and global threat. The US State Department designated Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization in November 2013, and it has been listed similarly by other international organizations such as the EU and UN.³⁵ In addition to the involvement of the governments of both Cameroon and Chad, which have taken the lead in combating the terrorist organization, "the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) has passed an agreement to contribute financial resources and pledge military assistance to deal with the threat."⁴¹ Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, has begun to turn the tides against Boko Haram through the development of a new counterinsurgency campaign, but aid and cooperation remains necessary to build on the momentum.⁴²

³⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace. "Global Terrorism Index 2015." pag. 2015. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>

³⁹ Amnesty International. "Nigeria 2015/2016." *Amnesty International*. Web. 04 Nov. 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/nigeria/report-nigeria/#endnote-1>

⁴⁰ USAID. "Lake Chad Basin - Complex Emergency." 22 Dec. 2015. Web. 04 Nov. 2016. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/12.22.15%20-%20Lake%20Chad%20Basin%20Fact%20Sheet%20%233.pdf>

⁴¹ African Business. "Regional Collaboration Yields Results in Fight against Boko Haram: The Recent Surge against Boko Haram and Other Terrorist Cells in Nigeria and Central Africa Is Showing Signs of Success." Apr. 2015. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-411013588/regional-collaboration-yields-results-in-fight-against?utm_source=blog&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=content

⁴² Fielding, By Alex, By Christian De Vos, By Clement Sefa-Nyarko, By John L. Hirsch, By Eric Rosand and Madeline Rose, By Jon Abbink, and By Alex Thurston. "How Nigeria's Buhari Is Turning the Tide Against Boko Haram." *IPI Global Observatory*. Web. 04 Nov. 2016. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/10/nigeria-boko-haram-cameroon-chad-niger/>

Past OIC Response

The OIC has avidly condemned the Boko Haram attacks and human rights violations, and has sent condolences for the loss of innocent lives and the displacement of more than 2 million people.⁴³ It has made efforts to support the affected communities in Nigeria through diplomatic demarches and consultations on mobilizing humanitarian and economic support.⁴³ Although the violations of Boko Haram fall under the jurisdiction of the OIC, it has not taken any strong actions regarding the matter.

Suggested Readings

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43558.pdf> More in depth information on Boko Haram
<http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>
 For more Boko Haram terrorism information
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/553?highlight=boko%2Bharam#note1> Additional background information
<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/12.22.15%20-%20Lake%20Chad%20Basin%20Fact%20Sheet%20%233.pdf> For more information on human rights and humanitarian aid

Questions to consider

- I. How are Nigeria, its allies, and the other members of the OIC impacted by the actions of Boko Haram?
- II. How can the expansion of Boko Haram threaten the global community?
- III. What can be done to help those affected or displaced by the actions of Boko Haram?
- IV. Do you agree with the past actions of the OIC? What could have been done differently?
- V. Should the OIC take direct action against Boko Haram? How should this be approached?

⁴³ "OIC Delegation to Nigeria to Consult on Mobilizing Economic and Humanitarian Support." *Organisation of Islamic Cooperation*. 17 July 2016. Web. 18 Oct. 2016.
http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv3/topic/?t_id=11372&ref=4466&lan=en

III. Iran Vs Saudi Arabia

Before Iran and Saudi Arabia

The nearly 4-decade long standoff between Iran and Saudi Arabia almost perfectly represents the more than 1,000-year-old dispute between the Sunnis and Shia within Islam. This split between these factions of Islam can be traced back to the prophet Muhammad's death in the year 632.⁴⁴ In the aftermath of Muhammad's death, there is disagreement as to who should succeed him as Caliph. Many believed that Abu Bakr, Muhammad's eventual successor should be the new Caliph because they felt that the Muslim community ought to have a say as to who the new Caliph should be, and most people wanted Bakr.⁴⁵ These people would eventually become known as the Sunnis. A minority of Muhammed's followers felt that someone who is a direct descendant of him should be the new Caliph, which resulted in them wanting Ali to become the new Caliph. These Muslims are who became the modern day Shia.

In 656, after a string of violent incidents and the assassinations of the second and third Caliphs, Ali, the son of Muhammad becomes the fourth Caliph.⁴⁶ After only five years as Caliph though, Ali is assassinated amidst the violence that his Caliphate inspired.⁴⁷ 19 years later, the violence persisted and Ali's son, Hussein, rejected the rule of the Caliphate at the time.⁴⁸ Determined to fight against the Caliph, Hussein, along with 72 friends and companions stood up to the Caliph and his vastly superior army and were eventually slaughtered.⁴⁹ Hussein's decapitated head was carried around Damascus (Syria) as a tribute to the Caliph.⁵⁰

As result of these actions, the split between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims widened, serving as a catalyst for centuries of on and off conflict between the sects.⁵¹ The Symbolism behind Hussein's death has a large amount of spiritual significance for contemporary Shiite Muslims. Seen as a martyr-like figure, Hussein's death is seen by Shiites as unjust and still has a major impact on how the Shia conduct themselves in Islam.⁵²

Over the course of a few centuries, Persia (modern day Iran) became the Shiite stronghold, trapped in between the Sunni Ottoman Empire (the modern Arab world and Turkey) to the west and the Sunni Mughal Empire (modern day Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) to the east).⁵³ This Sunni-Shia geography is one that has persisted to this day. With the Iranians representing the Shia and The Saudis representing the Sunni's, both states have both endured their fair share of ups and downs due to their sectarian differences.

⁴⁴ Shuster, Mike. "Chronology: A History of the Shiite-Sunni Split." *NPR*. 12 Feb. 2007. Web 24 Oct. 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2007/02/12/7280905/chronology-a-history-of-the-shia-sunni-split>

⁴⁵ Shuster, Mike "The Origins Of The Shiite-Sunni Split." *NPR*. 12 Feb. 2007. Web 24 Oct. 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2007/02/12/7332087/the-origins-of-the-shiite-sunni-split>

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The History Behind the Conflict

The decades long rift between Iran and Saudi Arabia can easily be traced back to the 1979 Iranian revolution where the pro-western Iranian leadership was overthrown by Shia Religious authorities⁵⁴. After the revolution, the newly robust Iranian government began funding Shia militia groups and political parties in countries outside of its own, which prompted the Saudis to strengthen ties with its fellow Sunni neighbors.⁵⁵

Relationships soured between the two Middle Eastern powerhouses once Iran became embroiled in an 8 year war with Iraq and Saudi Arabia chose to support Iran's enemy.⁵⁶ Less than 20 years later though, Iran seemed to have gotten the last laugh in the matter when the Sunni Saddam Hussein regime toppled and a Shiite leader was put into power.⁵⁷ This sudden power switch suddenly gave Iran a friend and Saudi Arabia a new adversary, setting the stage for the current state of relations between the two states.

Execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr

In January of 2016, a prominent Saudi Shiite Sheik, Nimr al-Nimr was executed by the Saudi Arabian government after being imprisoned for two years under charges of disobeying the Saudi Royal Family and terrorism.⁵⁸ Many believed that his trial was unfair, and was so for purely political reasons. In reaction to this, a top Iranian cleric called the Saudi royal criminal and said that he believed that the execution of al-Nimr could lead to Saudi Arabia's own demise.⁵⁹ Following the execution of al-Nimr, there were a series of protests, the most notable one being at the Saudi embassy in Tehran.⁶⁰ Quickly after, Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties, ending decades of half-hearted attempts at reconciliation.⁶¹ This execution came amidst the proxy wars that are being fought between both Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen and Syria, and shows Saudi Arabia's brazenness to try and show the Iranian regime and its allies to show a clear difference between the two states.⁶²

⁵⁴ Pool, Thom. "Iran and Saudi Arabia's great rivalry explained" *BBC*. 4 Jan. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35221569>

⁵⁵ " "

⁵⁶ " "

⁵⁷ " "

⁵⁸ "Who Was The Shiite Sheikh Executed By Saudi Arabia?" *NPR*. 4 Jan. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/04/461912757/who-was-the-shiite-sheikh-executed-by-saudi-arabia>

⁵⁹ "Saudi Arabia Executes 47, Including Prominent Cleric" *NPR*. 2 Jan. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <http://www.npr.org/2016/01/02/461754062/saudi-arabia-executes-47-including-prominent-cleric>

⁶⁰ Riedel, Bruce. "What the Iran Deal has meant for Saudi Arabia and regional tension." *Brookings*. 13 Jul. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/13/what-the-iran-deal-has-meant-for-saudi-arabia-and-regional-tensions/>

⁶¹ " "

⁶² " "

The Iran Nuclear Deal

Being one of the most monumental and game changing moments of the decade in terms of foreign relations, the Iran Nuclear deal quickly and suddenly put Saudi Arabia on its toes and made it more insecure than it had been in years. Those who negotiated the deal with Iran likely did not have any intention of scaring Saudi Arabia, but that was the unintended effect.⁶³ To the Saudis, this deal did not properly deal with Iran's supposed use of terrorism in achieving their regional goals, which keeps them on edge.⁶⁴ Ever since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Saudis have enjoyed favoritism by the west, having a monopoly on the oil exports and influence in the region, and this deal poses a threat to its status as a regional hegemon.⁶⁵ With the sanctions being lifted off of it, Iran has the potential to be able to step back into the international spotlight and reassert itself as an even stronger regional power, which worries Saudi Arabia.

The Yemenis Civil War

The Yemenis Civil War is a war that harkens back to the mid 20th century, when the cold war at its height. Two powers vying for control but neither willing to head to head. The War is between the Shiite Houthis of tribal origins who are thought to be backed by Iran, and the current Sunni government of Yemen, which is backed heavily by Saudi Arabia.⁶⁶ While it is not clear whether or not the Houthis are being backed by Iran, it should be noted that the Houthis have said they admired the Shia fueled Iranian revolution of 1979, obviously wanting to replicate the results.⁶⁷ What Iran's stake in this war is that they intend to further their influence in the region.⁶⁸ By supposedly helping out the Houthi rebels into controlling the Yemenis government, they could potentially gain an ally in the region, taking away from Saudi Arabia's influence. Saudi Arabia has a lot to fight for as well. After losing an ally in Iraq when the Shiite's took over the government, the Saudis are very aware of what may happen if they lose another ally and become surrounded by Shia governments on all ends.

⁶³ “ “

⁶⁴ Black, Ian. As Iran Hails a Historic deal, Saudi Arabia looks On With anxiety and irritation.” *The Guardian*. 18 Jan. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/as-iran-hails-a-historic-deal-saudi-arabia-looks-on-with-anxiety-and-irritation>

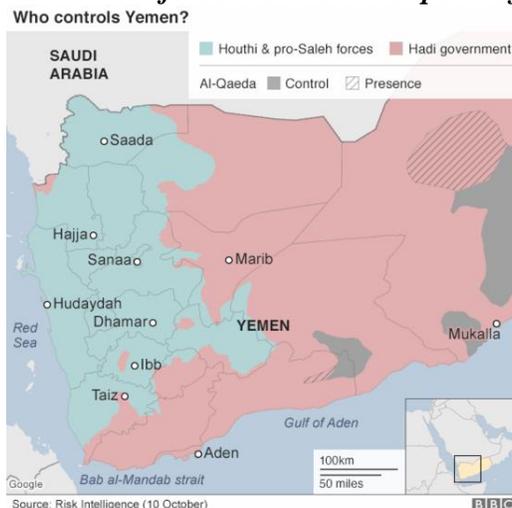
⁶⁵ “ “

⁶⁶ Malsin, Jared. “Yemen Is the Latest Victim of the Increase in Iran-Saudi Arabia Tension.” *Time*. 11 Jan. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <http://time.com/4174837/yemen-analysis/>

⁶⁷ “ “

⁶⁸ “ “

Infographic on what forces control what parts of Yemen⁶⁹



Recent OIC Involvement

Typically, the OIC has attempted to remain neutral in squabbles between member states, but in January of this year, the organization made moves to support Saudi Arabia with its accusations of Iran supporting terrorism.⁷⁰ As of recently, Saudi Arabia has shown to have a tight grip on the functions of the OIC, but with Iran potentially staging a comeback amidst all of the other squabbles that it is in with Saudi Arabia, the body may want to carefully consider its actions.

Consequences of action/inaction

If the OIC were to not act on the Saudi-Iran rivalry, both states may keep playing this game of chicken with the region, throwing more states into the mix and making the states that they are currently involved in even worse. However, if the committee were to act too harshly, it could risk alienating either country and forces them to act adversely.

Hints/Questions to consider

- I. Is your country on a side? How do they act when it comes to spats between Iran and Saudi Arabia?
- II. If your country doesn't have a side, is there a way that they could be an arbiter of peace?
- III. Hint: This is a topic where it is very important to know your allies.

⁶⁹ "Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?" *BBC*. 14 Oct. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>

⁷⁰ Ilishiev, Ildus. "The Iran-Saudi Arabia Conflict and its Impact on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation" *Wilson Center*. 30 Jun. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-iran-saudi-arabia-conflict-and-its-impact-the-organization-islamic-cooperation>

- IV. Hint: If you're going to try and break away from your roll, do it cleverly and of course, within reason.
- V. Hint: Be aware of the Sunni Shia demographics of your country.
- VI. Hint: The Syrian civil, although a bit overdone, will give you additional insight into the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia

Recommended Readings:

- I. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/20/2015-hajj-stampede-deadliest-ever-as-foreign-governments-put-toll-at-1849> This reading is about the death of over 500 Iranian people in Saudi Arabia during the holy pilgrimage (Hajj). It helps give further insight into the break down of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia
- II. <http://www.vox.com/2016/1/4/10708682/sunni-shia-iran-saudi-arabia-war> This Vox article gives insight on the effects of Saudi Arabia and Iran's "cold war" on the rest of the region
- III. <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/02/05/saudi-arabia-vs-iran-predominance-in-the-middle-east/> This reading lets you know more about the motives behind the actions of Saudi Arabia and Iran