

# The U.S.'s Reliance On Local Forces: The Key In Defeating the Islamic State

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**Abstract:** *With the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS), the U.S. has been unable to achieve a complete victory for three main reasons. First, the Obama administration has made it clear that any form of intervention hinges on multilateral support. President Obama, also, was elected on ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which makes the involvement of the U.S. in the Syrian conflict unlikely. The second obstacle is the partisan divide in Congress. The partisan battle within Congress makes passing legislation difficult and nearly impossible for any legislation involving ISIS. Last, American war weariness currently exists and further hinders a complete victory. The American public grew very tired of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and therefore has fostered some hesitancy regarding intervention against ISIS. To overcome these hindrances, the U.S. should rely on and continue to provide support to local forces. Iraqi and Kurdish forces have demonstrated that they can be victorious. Though it may take time, this policy provides the best outcome.*

## Introduction

What is known today as the Islamic State has several names. The Islamic State (IS), the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) all refer to the same organization. The main goals of the group are to create a caliphate, kill all infidels, and institute worldwide Sharia law.<sup>1</sup> ISIS has conquered large swaths of land and valuable resources from the Iraqi and Syrian governments and is in fundamental opposition to U.S. interests in the region. However, the U.S., in its current political situation, cannot achieve a complete victory. Three obstacles stand in the U.S.'s way. First, President Obama relies on widespread international approval for military intervention and his limited options of drone strikes and airstrikes have restricted success and posed significant risk. Second, intense partisanship and inactivity plague congressional politics. Last, after two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, America is hampered by war weariness. To overcome these barriers, the U.S. should continue airstrikes and continue with U.S. advisors embedded with Iraqi forces. This policy outcome will not only advance U.S. interests in the region, but also overcome political barriers.

## Background

ISIS has its roots in the insurgency against the American occupation of Iraq. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was given permission by Osama bin Laden to start an Iraqi based branch of al-Qaeda. Al-Zarqawi then created the group's infamous reputation for its brutality. Videotaped beheadings did not start two years ago under Baghdadi, as that horrific practice began under Al-Zarqawi. Since then, the terrorist group has used a doomsday propaganda strategy to attract foreign recruits and legitimize its actions towards its aforementioned end goal.<sup>2</sup> ISIS's grand strategy is

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen M. Walt, "ISIS as Revolutionary State," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2015): 42.

<sup>2</sup>Hisham.Melhem, "Keeping Up With the Caliphate," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2015): 148.

to create a caliphate, a Muslim state governed by strict Sharia law. In some views, this objective has been accomplished. Whenever a city is conquered, the victors demonstrate some governance by reestablishing “municipal buildings and core infrastructure such as water and electricity.”<sup>3</sup> The end goal and tactics differ from other Islamic extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda. Audrey Cronin compares al-Qaeda’s end goal to ISIS’s:

Isis, in contrast, seeks to control territory and create a “pure” Sunni Islamist state governed by a brutal interpretation of sharia; to immediately obliterate the political borders of the Middle East that were created by Western powers in the twentieth century; and to position itself as the sole political, religious, and military authority over all of the world’s Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

For the most part, the group has refrained from terrorist attacks in the West that would imitate 9/11. The comparison to 9/11 is important because attacks on a large and lethal scale have rallied the American people. The Paris attack and smaller attacks have garnered sympathy from the American public, but such attacks have yet to garner support for a committed response.<sup>5</sup> ISIS’s high level of military sophistication has been instrumental in the feats the group has had.

ISIS has enjoyed great success by capitalizing on a weak, corrupt Iraqi central government and a stagnant civil war in Syria. For the last few years, the Syrian Civil War was at a standstill. There are many different factions within the Syrian Civil War that have different goals and have different foreign support.<sup>6</sup> Recently, Russia, under Vladimir Putin, has not only declared their support for the Assad regime but, instead of combatting the terrorist group, he has targeted Syrian rebels and various U.S. backed Syrian groups.<sup>7</sup> The insertion of Russian support is important because there are differing views within the U.S. government on how to counter Russian aggression. Until now, no side has gained the advantage. With Russian support, Assad has gained the upper hand in the conflict. However, ISIS too has had success, such as capturing long previously disputed cities such as the city of Raqqa and Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city.<sup>8</sup>

In current attempts to intervene against the Islamic State, ISIS has proved to be a competent opponent. The group is not a band of disorganized fighters. These militants have gained experience fighting both the U.S. and the Iraqi Security Forces since the coalition invasion in 2003.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, ISIS should not be underestimated as a loose band of militants when discussing how to combat the terrorist group militarily. ABC quotes a special operations official describing ISIS as “incredible fighters.” In addition, the limited intervention has allowed the group to adapt and evolve to these attempts, such as altering their routes to avoid airstrikes

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<sup>3</sup>A.S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate," *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (2014): 69-83.

<sup>4</sup>Audrey Kurth Cronin, "ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015): 87. ).

<sup>5</sup>Holly Yan, "ISIS Claims Responsibility for Texas Attack," CNN. May 5, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/05/us/garland-texas-prophet-mohammed-contest-shooting/> accessed May 11, 2015.

<sup>6</sup>Ted Galen Carpenter, "Tangled web: The Syrian civil war and its implications." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (December 1, 2013): 1-11.).

<sup>7</sup>Helene Cooper, Michael Gordon, and Neil Macfarquhar. "Russians Strike Targets in Syria, but Not ISIS Areas," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2015, accessed November 20, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/01/world/europe/russia-airstrikes-syria.html>.

<sup>8</sup>"Assad on the Back Foot," *The Economist*, April 4, 2015, accessed May 11, 2015.

<sup>9</sup>A.S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate," 2014. 72-3.

and drone strikes.<sup>10</sup> Hence, a military defeat of ISIS is already a challenge, but a complete victory would be even more difficult.

### **What Victory Looks Like**

“Complete victory against ISIS” is more than just a military victory. A defeat of ISIS decreases their stranglehold over their captured area, and decreases their membership and recruitment numbers. Eventually a complete defeat will allow for a peaceful democratic solution in Iraq, and the recognition of an independent Kurdistan. If the U.S. continues to rely on airstrikes, bombing the enemy into submission will not lead to a complete defeat. As Audrey Conin describes, ISIS’s “fighters and leaders cluster in urban areas, where they are well integrated into civilian populations and usually surrounded by buildings, making drone strikes and raids much harder to carry out.”<sup>11</sup> Those bombings and raids would lead to more collateral damage and with more collateral damage comes an increase in the number of potential combatants. In order to have a complete win, the U.S. first needs to win militarily against these “incredible fighters”.<sup>12</sup>

A complete victory over ISIS will also decrease the number of marginalized Muslims from across the world flocking to the supposed caliphate. A complete victory eliminates its claims as a legitimate state and decimates its influence worldwide. The successful intervention, therefore, establishes a stable region. The founding of a U.S. or coalition desired government would just reiterate the same mistakes that led to ISIS’s success. A.S. Hashim gives this idea credence and adds that the suppression of the Sunni population led to the foundation of the terrorist group.<sup>13</sup> As well as military factors, political reasons play the largest role in scoring a complete victory. For example, the deciding factor of the 2008 Presidential election has an influence on President Obama’s resolve in intervention.

### **The First Roadblock to Victory**

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had a profound impact on the 2008 presidential election. President George W. Bush was incredibly unpopular. The war in Iraq lost what support it initially had by 2008. Hence, both Sen. McCain and soon-to-be President Obama attempted to distance themselves from the president characterized as a war monger. Then-Senator Barack Obama campaigned on an end and withdrawal from both Iraq and Afghanistan, which set the tone of a peaceful and less internationally assertive administration. To show this point, President Obama wrote an op-ed piece in 2008, saying, “That is why, on my first day in office, I would give the military a new mission: ending this war [in Iraq].”<sup>14</sup> To further demonstrate the lack of support for the war in Iraq, 60% of respondents in a 2008 Gallup poll indicated that the U.S.

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<sup>10</sup>James Meek, "ISIS an 'Incredible' Fighting Force, US Special Ops Sources Say," ABC News, August 25, 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/isis-incredible-fighting-force-us-special-ops-sources/story?id=25116463>.

<sup>11</sup>Cronin, "ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group," 2015. 87.

<sup>12</sup>James Meek, "ISIS an 'Incredible' Fighting Force, US Special Ops Sources Say," ABC News, August 25, 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/isis-incredible-fighting-force-us-special-ops-sources/story?id=25116463>.

<sup>13</sup>A.S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate," 70.

<sup>14</sup>Barack Obama, "My Plan for Iraq," The New York Times, July 13, 2008, accessed April 13, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/opinion/14obama.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/opinion/14obama.html?_r=1&).

made a mistake in sending troops into Iraq. Then in 2011, 75% of respondents to a Gallup poll approved of President Obama's decision to withdraw almost all troops from Iraq.<sup>15</sup> These polls reflect the American public's desire for a peaceful president, rather than a belligerent one.

Ending the war in Iraq demonstrates a less war prone Obama administration. As a replacement, the Obama administration has approved a dramatic increase in drone strikes, serving as the administration's alternative to putting boots on the ground. President Obama championed an end to the war in Iraq to reflect the 60% of Gallup respondents who believed Iraq was a mistake.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in combating ISIS, the Obama administration is less likely to start an all-out ground war. President Obama demonstrates this trend in the 2015 "National Security Strategy" document. It says, "It [America's leadership role] serves as a compass for how this Administration, in partnership with the Congress, will lead the world through a shifting security landscape toward a more durable peace and a new prosperity."<sup>17</sup> Currently, the U.S. conducts airstrikes and drone strikes. However, President Obama has asked Congress to approve an Authorization of the Use of Military Force (AUMF). Airstrikes and drones strikes have limitations and vary in effectiveness. The AUMF does request military force, but it states that the resolution "does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces in enduring offensive ground combat operations."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Cronin writes that airstrikes help contain ISIS and cut off new supplies to ISIS<sup>19</sup>, but Meek quotes another official who states that ISIS made "tactical withdrawals" in response to Obama's airstrikes. These withdrawals, Meek describes, are attempts to dodge the airstrikes.<sup>20</sup> An effective campaign using ground troops takes time and just an air war does not seem to produce the best results. While the U.S. appears to try some military options, President Obama is hesitant to commit to an extensive effort to defeat ISIS.

President Obama relies on drone strikes and airstrikes to support regional allies to combat ISIS and to serve as an alternative to sending ground troops. To show this trend, Trevor McCrisken states President Obama has overseen 302 drone strikes in his counterterrorism strategy and with the U.S.'s intervention in Libya. The 302 strikes are a drastic increase from the 48 President Bush oversaw in the entirety of his presidency.<sup>21</sup> Other than utilizing drone strikes, the Obama administration depends on providing limited support local allies in combating ISIS. In the 2015 National Security Strategy document, President Obama offers, "Working with the Congress, we will train and equip local partners and provide operational support to gain ground against terrorist groups." Later, the National Security Strategy states that the U.S. "will continue to support Iraq as it seeks to free itself from sectarian conflict and the scourge of extremists."<sup>22</sup> In attempting to defeat ISIS, President Obama is unlikely to deploy ground troops for an extended period of time because of his reluctance to start another enduring war, such as happened in Iraq. A key aspect in defeating ISIS is the military aspect, which cannot solely be accomplished by

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<sup>15</sup>Andrew Dugan, "Fewer in U.S. Support Iraq Withdrawal Decision Now vs. 2011," Gallup, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/171923/fewer-support-iraq-withdrawal-decision-2011.aspx>.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>The White House, "National Security Strategy," The White House, February, 2015, accessed May 11, 2015.

<sup>18</sup>The White House, "To Authorize the Limited Use of the United States Armed Forces against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," The White House, February 11, 2015, accessed May 11, 2015, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/aumf\\_02112015.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/aumf_02112015.pdf).

<sup>19</sup>Cronin, "ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group," 87.

<sup>20</sup>James Meek, "ISIS an 'Incredible' Fighting Force, US Special Ops Sources Say," *ABC News*, August 25, 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/isis-incredible-fighting-force-us-special-ops-sources/story?id=25116463>.

<sup>21</sup>Trevor McCrisken, "Obama's Drone War," *Survival* 55, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): 97-122.

<sup>22</sup>The White House, "National Security Strategy," *The White House*, February, 2015, accessed May 11, 2015, 9-10.

airstrikes. Ground troops as a method of defeating ISIS are also doubtful because of the current administration's reliance on multilateralism.

Unlike President George W. Bush, President Obama has advocated for a multilateral approach for intervention. The February 2015 National Security Strategy outlines just that when it claims, "Our closest partners and allies will remain the cornerstone of our international engagement. Yet, we will continuously expand the scope of cooperation to encompass other state partners."<sup>23</sup> From this document, President Obama exemplifies his administration's threshold for any intervention. Donnette Murray, author of "Military action but not as we know it," writes that multilateralism is an essential piece of what she calls the Obama Doctrine. The Obama Doctrine states that the U.S. will only intervene in internationally-accepted cases, such as in Libya.<sup>24</sup> In this specific case, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 and granted the U.S. and the international community to intervene in Libya.<sup>25</sup> Only then did the U.S. commit. Multilateral intervention in Syria, on the other hand, was vetoed by Russia and China and therefore did not lead to U.S. intervention as in Libya.<sup>26</sup> The intervention in Libya and not in Syria demonstrates the Obama administration's reliance on international legitimacy. This dependence illustrates the difference between President Obama and President George W. Bush. To further analyze this aspect, Peter Hays Gries would attribute the multilateral threshold to the partisan divide between liberals and conservatives.

Liberals, as Gries concludes, tend to favor multilateralism, whereas conservatives generally favor unilateralism. According to Gries, U.S. intervention led by a liberal against ISIS hinges on multilateral support.<sup>27</sup> Hence, in combatting ISIS, a multilateral approach is time consuming and is not guaranteed to happen. In the wake of U.S.-Russian tension over Ukraine, it is unlikely that Russia will change its veto against combatting ISIS, which makes complicates any U.S. response. Additionally, Russia supports the Assad Regime in Syria. Roy Allison goes as far as saying "Russia is the power which has most prominently provided a diplomatic shield for the Syrian state and bolstered it with arms supplies."<sup>28</sup>

President Obama has one year left in the oval office. Therefore, applying Gries' explanation of the liberal/conservative divide is applicable. If a liberal wins the 2016 presidential election, most of the above explanations still apply. If a conservative wins the Presidential election, Gries is not applicable, but the limitations of airstrikes and drone strikes do not change. Additionally, a conservative president will still have to battle with a very partisan Congress in order to combat the Islamic State.

### **Congress: Inactivity, Re-Election, and Partisanship**

Today's Congress is characterized by a deep divide between Democrats and Republicans. Partisanship in Congress has increased to such a climax that, when the House of Representatives

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<sup>23</sup> The White House, "National Security Strategy," *The White House*, February, 2015, accessed May 11, 2015, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Donette Murray, "Military action but not as we know it: Libya, Syria and the making of an Obama Doctrine," *Contemporary Politics* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 146-166.

<sup>25</sup> UN Security Council, "United Nations Official Document Security Council Resolution 1973," UN News Center. March 17, 2011, accessed May 11, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Donette Murray, "Military action but not as we know it: Libya, Syria and the making of an Obama Doctrine," *Contemporary Politics* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 146-166.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Hays Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Roy Allison., "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 795-823.

attempted to repeal the Affordable Care Act 40 times, neither the president nor either house of Congress was willing to negotiate. The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress was the least productive congress in the totality of congressional history.<sup>29</sup> The 114<sup>th</sup> Congress is likely to replicate the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. Paul Waldman, of the *Washington Post*, writes that in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, since the Republicans have gained more seats in the House and have taken control of the Senate, the Obama administration and Congress are less likely to legislate.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it is unlikely that the Democratic President will sign any bill involving ISIS passed by the Republican controlled Congress into law. Furthermore, Gries helps explain the reasoning behind this partisan divide.

Gries writes that conservatives and liberals hold completely opposite views on foreign policy. Liberals support “international engagement, multilateralism, and diplomacy, while conservatives are more likely to support isolationism, unilateralism, and the use of military force.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, liberals and conservatives are dichotomous opposites in regards to foreign policy, which would cause a tremendous level of difficulty in passing any foreign policy bill through a partisan Congress. Bills may pass through the House, but Republicans do not have enough votes to end a filibuster in the event that Democrats choose to start one in the Senate. Therefore, the deep partisan divides over foreign policy make combating ISIS a challenge. The intense partisanship leads to instances where Congress attempts to limit the President’s powers.

In response to President Johnson’s and President Nixon’s wide authority in the unpopular Vietnam War, Congress passed the War Powers Resolution.<sup>32</sup> The War Powers Resolution states that the President can deploy troops for 60 days and then must withdraw the troops if Congress has not declared war or authorized an extension of the troop deployment.<sup>33</sup> Congressional attempts to exert the War Powers Act are political maneuvers to limit executive powers in using military force. The debate around the War Powers Resolution jeopardizes the success of military intervention. Eric Jensen states that, in regard to Syria, President Obama considered military intervention but was stonewalled when he was told Congress would consider invoking the War Powers Resolution.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the War Powers Resolution, congressional efforts to curb the ISIS are also hindered by ISIS’s tactics.

Whenever American soil is attacked, it is the modus operandi for both parties to put aside partisan politics. George C. Herring states that after 9/11, the Bush administration wished to invade not only Afghanistan, but also Iraq. Though Iraq did not attack the U.S., a partisan Congress offered “scattered opposition” to an unclear invasion.<sup>35</sup> The example of Congressional support is further exemplified with the support for authorization of force against those responsible for 9/11. In the House, the vote for House Joint Resolution 64, which authorized the

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<sup>29</sup>Robert Kramer, "The 113th Congress and the Dangers of Doing Nothing," *Financial Executive* 29, no. 8 (2013): 3-4.

<sup>30</sup>Paul Waldman, "Is It Too Early to Call the New GOP Congress a Failure?" *Washington Post*. February 4, 2015, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2015/02/04/is-it-too-early-to-call-the-new-gop-congress-a-failure/>.

<sup>31</sup>Peter Hays Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>32</sup>John R Crook, "The War Powers Resolution—A Dim and Fading Legacy," *Case Western Reserve Journal Of International Law* 45, no. 12 (2012): 157.

<sup>33</sup>Eileen, Bungin, "War Over Words: Reinterpreting Hostilities and the War Powers Resolution," *BYU Journal Of Public Law* 29, no. 1 (2014): 99-148.

<sup>34</sup>Eric Talbot Jensen, "Future War and the War Powers Resolution," *Emory International Law Review* 29 (2015): 499.

<sup>35</sup>George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776. The Oxford History of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 948.

use of force against those deemed responsible for 9/11, was cast as follows: 420 Congressmen voted “Yeas” and one Congresswoman voted “Nay.”<sup>36</sup> Hence, Congress offers little opposition if the continental U.S. is attacked, but if the U.S. is not directly attacked, then Congress has a hard time approving authorization for military force. ISIS operates around this concept. There has not been a large scale attack in the U.S. In addition, the group has executed Americans, but in their conquered territory, not Kansas or Delaware. Even after the horrific attack in Paris, there has not been much of a change in anti-ISIS strategy. If there was an attack planned on U.S. soil, then the result may be different. Sympathizers are not the same actual members. For instance, in one of the most recent sympathizer attacks, the connection between ISIS and the sympathizers is not completely clear.<sup>37</sup> As of now, Congressional authority for the use of force is difficult to obtain because of the terrorist group’s tactics and because of the lack of a central and agreed upon U.S. grand strategy.

The partisan politics within Congress hinder the creation of a cohesive and consistent U.S. grand strategy, which also hinders any attempt to combat the ISIS. Does the U.S. want to focus on aiding the spread of democracy in the Middle East, or, does the U.S. want to negate the spread of Iranian influence? Grand strategy is determined by national interests, which are ideologically driven.<sup>38</sup> When Republicans and Democrats are dichotomously opposed in foreign affairs, establishing a consistent and cohesive grand strategy is nearly impossible. To make matters worse, Iranian aid to Iraqi security forces complicates the formation of a U.S. grand strategy. Gries explains that conservatives’ strong feelings towards Israel causes conservatives to want a tougher stance towards Iran. Liberals prefer a more lenient foreign policy when it involves Iran.<sup>39</sup> The battle between these two parties over Iran complicates U.S. grand strategy in intervention and hinders aid to Iraqi forces.

The last and one of the most influential factors in congressional anti-ISIS efforts is reelection politics. The primary concern of Congress is to win reelection. Reelection, additionally, is partly the cause of the increase in Congressional partisanship. Senators and Congressmen do not want to risk not winning reelection by voting for sending ground troops. Gallup poll reveals that 60% of Americans favor military action against ISIS. However, only 40% of Americans approve of ground troops being used in attempts to defeat the group.<sup>40</sup> Congress has little electoral benefits to gain by authorizing ground troops. If sending ground troops has poor results, then the members of Congress have to face electoral consequences for an already unpopular idea. Furthermore, Jeffery Grynavski identifies that, when Americans vote, they are more likely to vote by party than by individual candidate.<sup>41</sup> Hence, parties will primarily remain cohesive in voting so that the party not associated with the unpopular war will win reelection. This point can be shown with the 2006 midterm elections. Before the 2006 elections,

<sup>36</sup>Library of Congress, "Final Vote Results for Roll Call 342." The Library of Congress, September 14, 2001, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2001/roll342.xml>.

<sup>37</sup>Holly Yan, "ISIS Claims Responsibility for Texas Attack," *CNN*. May 5, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/05/us/garland-texas-prophet-mohammed-contest-shooting/> accessed May 11, 2015.

<sup>38</sup>Freeman, Chas W., et al. "Symposium: U.S. Grand Strategy in the Middle East: Is There One?" *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 1-29. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 11, 2015).

<sup>39</sup>Peter Hays Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2014): 202.

<sup>40</sup>Jeffery Jones and Frank Newport, "Slightly Fewer Back ISIS Military Action vs. Past Actions," Gallup , September 23, 2014, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/177263/slightly-fewer-back-isis-military-action-past-actions.aspx>.

<sup>41</sup>Jeffrey D. Grynavski, *Partisan Bonds: Political Reputations and Legislative Accountability*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Republicans controlled the White House and Congress. The 2006 midterm elections demonstrated the disapproval for the war in Iraq and attached that disapproval to the republicans up for reelection.<sup>42</sup> Congressmen are aware of this trend and would be less likely to approve the use of ground troops because of the electoral risk that would entail.

### **The Last Obstacle to Jump**

Over the last decade and a half, the U.S. has been engaged in numerous conflicts. Those conflicts have not been seen as outstanding successes. The War in Iraq and the War in Afghanistan are the two largest conflicts within that decade and a half. Combined, both wars produced 6,760 soldiers killed in action and 52, 018 soldiers wounded in action.<sup>43</sup> The costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan played a crucial part in the 2008 Presidential election. In 2008, 60% of respondents said that invading Iraq was a mistake.<sup>44</sup> 51% of respondents in August 2008 said the war in Iraq was going moderately poor to extremely poor.<sup>45</sup> In Afghanistan, 61% of Gallup poll respondents believed that the war in Afghanistan was going “Total Badly.”<sup>46</sup> These polls demonstrate the fact the Americans saw the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as failures, and that the American public is tired of war. This belief carried into the elections when the voters elected Barack Obama who campaigned on peace and steady withdrawals from both Iraq and Afghanistan. Sen. McCain voted for the authorization of force in Iraq and appeared to have endorsed extending the occupation. To explain why President Obama won, Jungyun Gill and James DeFronzo conclude that “the state level of Iraq War military fatalities had a significant positive effect on the vote for the antiwar candidate.”<sup>47</sup> Simply put, casualties cost votes. When American war weariness impacts policy, politicians create bad wartime policies.

Public opinion has a direct effect on policy making. In wartime, U.S. public opinion drives the strategy, the war’s successes, and the eventual withdrawal in every conflict. Over time in any military intervention, the American public grows tired of casualties and will eventually vote in favor of anti-war candidates. American war weariness would politicize any intervention the U.S. would take against ISIS.

War weariness is not a new concept. The result of any rushed military intervention against ISIS is foretold by two previous instances. First, take the Vietnam War as an example. In 1969, 58% of people polled said that sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, President Nixon began his “Vietnamization” process. President Nixon knew that South Vietnamese Armed Forces had a lackluster performance record under Vietnamization, but Nixon still continued with the withdrawal process to appease the American public.<sup>49</sup> The withdrawal from Iraq is a second example of public opinion driving poor political decisions. Rick Brennan

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<sup>42</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, "Referendum: The 2006 Midterm Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly* 122, no. 1 (2007): 1-24.

<sup>43</sup>Department of Defense, "Casualty." Department of Defense, May 11, 2015, accessed May 12, 2015. <http://www.defense.gov/news/casualty.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup>"Fewer in U.S. Support Iraq Withdrawal Decision Now vs. 2011." Gallup.

<sup>45</sup>"Iraq." Gallup. Accessed May 12, 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1633/iraq.aspx>.

<sup>46</sup>"Afghanistan." Gallup. Accessed May 12, 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116233/afghanistan.aspx>.

<sup>47</sup>Jungyun Gill, and James DeFronzo, "Military Tradition, the Human Costs of War and the 2008 Election," *Armed Forces & Society* 40, no. 4 (2014): 724-741.

<sup>48</sup>"The Iraq-Vietnam Comparison." Gallup. Accessed May 12, 2015.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/11998/iraqvietnam-comparison.aspx>.

<sup>49</sup>Geoffrey Warner, "Leaving Vietnam: Nixon, Kissinger and Ford, 1969-1975. Part one: January 1969-January 1972," *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2011): 1485-1506.

writes that, after years of U.S. forces training Iraqi forces, the Iraqis were not prepared to handle the secretarial violence. Specifically, "all this evidence led U.S. military planners in Iraq to one clear conclusion: if U.S. forces completely withdrew by the end of 2011, it would be very difficult for the Iraqis to maintain the fragile gains made since 2007."<sup>50</sup> The U.S. did completely withdraw at the end of 2011. These repeated incidents indicate that when public opinion is not overwhelmingly for military force, then public policy leads to rushed and most likely failed interventions.

### How To Jump These Hurdles

The U.S. could effectively defeat ISIS. Airstrikes by the U.S. and other countries against ISIS have already begun to decrease enemy numbers and constrain the caliphate's area of operations.<sup>51</sup> Coalition airstrikes, led by the U.S., have put a huge dent into the Islamic State's oil revenue.<sup>52</sup> The airstrikes have even killed the infamous Jihadi John. Therefore, the current administration's reliance on airstrikes is a two-fold benefit. First, they produce some results. Disrupting the oil chain that ISIS depends on for financing its caliphate is a nice accomplishment and certainly puts a strain on the state's budget. Second, airstrikes help circumvent American war weariness. The option that produces the best results is to accompany the airstrikes with well-supplied and firmly backed local forces.

ISIS was quick to gain so much land. The Iraqi forces were also quick to be overrun. Today's situation is quite different. Iraqi forces, with the help of U.S. military advisors, recaptured Ramadi.<sup>53</sup> With the capture of Ramadi and advances into previously controlled parts of the Islamic State, Iraqi forces have shown that they are up to the task. High ranking Iraqi generals have been quoted in saying that all that is needed is continuing airstrikes and some Western troops to advise the Iraqi and Peshmerga forces in their fight against the Islamic State. Furthermore, these generals have said that the presence of a lot of Western troops would hurt the fight.<sup>54</sup> To further exasperate why no large U.S. deployment is needed, Dexter Filkins and David Kil details the inadequacy of U.S. occupations.

The U.S. counterinsurgency policy cannot work. David Kilcullen writes that for an effective counterinsurgency policy, higher casualties are a necessary, because troops have to be willing to be vulnerable and welcoming to the local populace.<sup>55</sup> But, the American war weariness prevents that from working. Another aspect is that to prevent American casualties, American commanders tend to overuse extreme firepower. Dexter Filkins details this point in his book *The Forever War*. Colonel Sassaman was an American commander in charge of a 300 square mile territory around the Tigris River. While the book describes his leadership as effective, his counterinsurgency tactics were drastic and often at times caused more problems than the one he was attempting to fix. For example, one day after returning to his command post, insurgents sent

<sup>50</sup>Rick Brennan, "Withdrawal Symptoms," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (2014): 25.

<sup>51</sup>W. Andrew Terrill, "Understanding the Strengths and Vulnerabilities of ISIS," *Parameters: U.S. Army War College* 44, no. 3 (2014): 13.

<sup>52</sup>Holly Ellyatt, "ISIS Oil Revenue," CNBC, November 19, 2015, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/11/19/isis-oil-revenue-damaged-by-airstrikes-low-price.html>.

<sup>53</sup>Tim Lister, "Expelling ISIS from Ramadi: Why It Matters," CNN Wire, December 28, 2015, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/28/world/expelling-isis-from-ramadi/>.

<sup>54</sup>John Simpson, "Don't believe the hype: the Iraqi army can win," *New Statesman* 144, no. 5264 (May 29, 2015): 15.

<sup>55</sup>David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

a mortar round into the site. In response, Sassaman ordered several large airstrikes to take out the insurgents.<sup>56</sup> Even if the Obama administration and the partisan Congress can overcome their differences and American war weariness withers away, a U.S. military occupation should not be the answer. Continued airstrikes, military advisors, and an increase in U.S. support for Iraqi and Peshmerga forces could make the liberation of Ramadi the beginning of an end to the Islamic State.

The U.S. government is currently in multiple stalemates. The first is a battle between the Obama administration and a Republican-led Congress, which leads to President Obama aggressively using limited executive action and the second being a partisan battle members of Congress that causes little to no law making. The reliance on the Iraqi military and the Peshmerga forces sidesteps both of those political barriers, but also the war weariness that resides in the American public today. Additionally, continuing airstrikes and sending advisors, accompanied with support for the Peshmerga and Iraqi military is the optimum route to heed.

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<sup>56</sup>Dexter Filkins, , *The Forever War*(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

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