

The ISIS Threat: Teaching about the Complex War Raging in Iraq and Syria

by the New York Times¹

ISIS, a shorthand name for the [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria](#), has made news in the past few months for its dramatic military conquest of Iraqi territory, its ruthless treatment of Iraqi minorities such as the Yazidis, and a string of videotaped beheadings of Western hostages, including two United States journalists covering the civil war in Syria.

The situation in Iraq and Syria is complex, to say the least. It presents a continuing humanitarian crisis, with [millions of people fleeing](#) for their lives, and [hundreds of thousands](#) being killed. It presents a threat to Middle East stability, with ISIS promising to create an [Islamic caliphate](#), or state, erasing modern borders and imposing its own version of fundamentalist law. Furthermore, ISIS presents an [unknown threat](#) to the larger world, including the United States, with the militant group beheading international hostages and recruiting jihadists from [across the globe](#).

In this lesson, students will analyze videos, maps, graphs and images related to ISIS, and then discuss how the United States and the world should respond to ISIS' rise in Iraq and Syria. We also offer additional background information and links to Times resources for further research.

Read the article above, watch the [Short Video on ISIS](#), and explore the interactive site, [How ISIS works](#). You may also use the [Articles on ISIS from NY Times](#) to answer the following questions.

What does ISIS stand for?

Who leads ISIS and how is it organized?

What is an Islamic caliphate?

¹ "The ISIS Threat: Teaching About the Complex War Raging ..." 2014. 1 Oct. 2015
<<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/17/the-isis-threat-teaching-about-the-complex-war-raging-in-iraq-and-syria/>>

In which countries does ISIS maintain large areas of control?

Who are the jihadists and where do they come from?

Why are people fleeing Syria? Where are the refugees going?

How is ISIS treating religious minorities, opponents, and westerners?

How does ISIS pose a threat to the Middle East stability?

Write your thoughts about US policy toward ISIS? Which of the following do you support and which of the options below do you oppose? Be prepared to discuss with classmates.

- Stay away from getting involved in the Middle East or fighting ISIS
- Build a coalition of partners in Europe and the Middle East to fight ISIS
- Use US planes to Bomb ISIS
- Seek a diplomatic solution to war in Syria
- Send US ground troops to fight and defeat ISIS
- Work with the Russians to defeat ISIS
- Fight ISIS first and then work on getting President Bashar Assad out of power
- Fight both ISIS and Syrian President Bashar Assad at the same time
