



HARVARD
MODEL UNITED NATIONS
CHINA 2020

Thursday, March 19 to Sunday, March 22



A Background Guide in Brief

for the

*Disarmament and International
Security Committee*

This Background Guide in Brief is an abbreviated version of your committee's Background Guide, and should provide you with a roadmap for important themes and topics as you begin preliminary research on the committee topic. This document is simply one resource available to you as you prepare for HMUN China, and all delegates are strongly urged to read and study the full Background Guide for their committees. Background Guides will be released on 1 November, 2019. Good luck with your preparation!

The First Committee is one of the main committees of the General Assembly and was established in 1945 when the United Nations was founded. This committee is also referred to as the Disarmament and International Security Committee and is mandated to “[deal] with disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace that affect the international community and [seek] out solutions to the challenges in the international security regime.” Hosting the 193 member states of the UN, and the non-member states Holy See and the State of Palestine, the First Committee provides a platform for multilateral discussions on international security matters that affect millions of people around the world. At HMUN China 2020, the First Committee will be discussing terrorism.

Although terrorism has been a major international security concern since the early 20th century, the rapidly evolving nature of terrorist groups has made it difficult to make a standard for counterterrorism. Moreover, the unpredictability of terrorism serves as an obstacle to defining what exactly counts as a terrorist organization. Indeed, transnational terrorist networks uniquely challenge global security. Groups with centralized models of organization, such as bureaucracies or terrorist militias, can usually be combatted with a targeted approach executed by a single nation. Transnational terrorist networks, on the other hand, must be addressed by multiple states working in tandem. Terrorist networks can also destabilize communities in nations where they are not physically present. Global terrorist recruitment, the co-optation of local groups, and the inspiration of lone wolf attackers are all

less commonly addressed aspects of the terrorist network threat. The General Assembly cannot only set a counterterrorism protocol against terrorist networks. In order to succeed where it has previously failed, the international community must first set parameters for what constitutes a transnational terrorist network.

Although many definitions of terrorism exist, the United Nations has not yet adopted a standard definition of terrorism. Many definitions of terrorism specify that terrorist groups use violence to achieve a particular political or religious purpose. Within the framework of this topic, the committee must also decide what constitutes a transnational terrorist network – i.e. what constitutes eligibility for the counter-network protocol that the committee will adopt.

Two important case studies of contemporary terrorist networks are Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Al-Qaeda began as the Maktab al Khidamat, an international network of recruiting and fundraising for the Afghan jihad. In 1988, toward the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, Osama Bin Laden aimed to utilize his network of 10,000 to 20,000 fighters for political gain. He renamed the network to Al-Qaeda (The Base) and aimed to overthrow pro-Western secular regimes, believing that they were occupying sacred Islamic land.



Figure 1: Al-Qaeda around the world

In the 1990's, Bin Laden distanced himself from his home country of Saudi Arabia, using Sudan as a training ground for Al-Qaeda militants. He grew the network to a coalition of radical Islamist

insurgents in over 70 countries. Between 1990 and 2001, Al-Qaeda carried out targeted attacks against the US and its allies, portraying them as the supporters of all secular regimes in the region. These activities culminated in the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US. Throughout this time, Al-Qaeda maintained branches worldwide. Al-Qaeda was one of the first, if not the first, insurgent organizations to independently capture territory. While it supports the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, it views that as a long-term goal. Holding territory is therefore not a central tenet of its operations but a practical strategy deployed at opportune times. Al-Qaeda has possessed land in the Middle East and North Africa as safe havens and training camps for its fighters. It has also sought to control Taliban soil for similar purposes. Despite land possession's minor role in Al-Qaeda's mission, Al-Qaeda's territory holdings in Syria paved the way for the rise of ISIS.

The recent emergence of ISIS represents a new model of insurgency in the 21st century. ISIS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State (IS), or al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham (DAESH), is a Salafi jihadi group operating primarily in Iraq and Syria. It aims to establish a caliphate, an Islamic state governed by a caliph and religious authorities, that supersedes all existing Muslim states. It claims to have authority over all Muslims. ISIS's predecessor, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), was formed in October 2006 as a subgroup of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. After relative failure, the ISI claimed Jabhat al-Nusra as its Syrian offshoot in April 2013. The group then became ISIS, despite al-Nusra's rejection of the claim. ISIS began its recent string of radical activities in early 2014, when Al-Qaeda disowned it for being representative of Al-Qaeda under Osama Bin Laden (rather than current chief Ayman al-Zarawi). In June 2014, it announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate, with Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph. Since then, it captured major cities and territories in Iraq and Syria, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul. ISIS enforces its own Islamic laws in its territory and is economically

self-sufficient. Recently, however, ISIS has lost the vast majority of its territorial holdings.



Figure 2: Aftermath of ISIS attacks in Mosul

Some possible elements of a solution to the problem of transnational terrorist networks include financial counterterrorism, counter-narrative strategy, counterinsurgency, intelligence sharing, and a strong definition of terrorism. When debating counterterrorism as a broad concept, there are no natural lines along which countries might divide into blocs. However, delegates may wish to consider their country's proximity to terrorist threats, ties to insurgent organizations, and economic status as influencers for developing country positions.

While I hope this background guide in brief has been informative, please remember that this should be the beginning of your research and not the end. Other research sources include the background guide and publications such as *Scientific American*, *Foreign Affairs*, and the *New Yorker*. You may also consider reading fact sheets and briefings from organizations like RAND Corporation, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Brookings Institution, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Thank you for reading and good luck in your continued preparation!