

## 2. The rise of ISIS

### Acronyms and abbreviations

**CENTCOM**—U.S. Central Command that covers the Middle East and Central Asia

**ISIS**—Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham

**UNESCO**—United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNHCR**—United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

### Glossary

**Abu Ayyub al-Masri:** Successor to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as head of al-Qaeda in Iraq (2004–2006). Founder and minister of war for Islamic state (2006–2010) He was killed in 2010 by U.S. forces.

**Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri):** Leader of ISIS and of its predecessor organization, al-Qaeda in Iraq. In June 2014, Baghdadi announced the establishment of a caliphate in an area situated between Iraq and Syria.

**Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani:** Leader of the al-Nusra Front in Syria. Little is known about him besides the time he spent in detention at Camp Bucca. He has pledged the Front's allegiance to al-Qaeda and has fought against ISIS forces in Syria.

**Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Ahmad Fadil al-Khalayleh; al-Gharib, or the Stranger):** A Jordanian militant Islamist and the spiritual founder of ISIS. His group Tawhid wa-l-jihad merged with al-Qaeda to form al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2003. Following Zarqawi's death by U.S. airstrike in 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq eventually developed into ISIS.

**Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (Hamid al-Zawi):** Successor to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as leader of the Islamic State Consultative Chamber, a Sunni Islamist umbrella organization that included al-Qaeda in Iraq. He was killed in 2010 by U.S. forces.

**Al-Qaeda:** A militant Islamic organization founded by Osama bin Laden during the final years of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), and headquartered in Afghanistan. The international terrorist network orchestrated the 9/11 attacks. Since Osama bin Laden's assassination by U.S. forces in 2011, it has been led by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

**Al-Qaeda in Iraq:** A militant Sunni network formed in 2004 by the merger of Tawhid wa-l-jihad and al-Qaeda. The group eventually spawned ISIS, which emerged as a separate organization in 2013.

**Al-wala' wa-l-bara:** The Islamic concept of "loyalty and disavowal," which requires love for that which Allah loves and hate for that which Allah hates.

**Amir al-mu'minin:** "Commander of the Faithful" in Arabic. Title referring to the caliph, or absolute leader, of an Islamic state.

**Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis:** Also known as Sinai Province, it is a terrorist organization based out of Egypt aligned with ISIS. It pledged their allegiance to ISIS in November 2014 and has adopted much of its tactics.

**Arch of Triumph:** A 1,800-year-old cultural treasure located in Palmyra, Syria. ISIS destroyed the arch as well as other antiquities in the town's UNESCO World Heritage site in October 2015.

**Ataturk:** “Father of the Turks” the name was given to Mustafa Kemal in 1923 when he founded the Republic of Turkey, after having abolished the Ottoman Caliphate. A military officer during World War I, he later led the Turkish National Movement during the Turkish War of Independence.

**Arab Spring (Arab Awakening; Arab Uprisings):** A series of pro-democracy uprisings in the Arab world that began in 2010 with protests in Tunisia. These movements led to the ousting of leaders in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen. Uprisings also erupted in Bahrain and Syria, as well as in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan without resulting in regime change thus far.

**Ayman al-Zawahiri:** Osama bin Laden’s successor as the head of al-Qaeda after May 2011. He expelled the Islamic state from al-Qaeda in February 2014, leading to confrontations between ISIS and the Nusra Front.

**Baath Party:** Iraq’s dominant party during Saddam Hussein’s rule (1968–2003). Under Saddam, one could not reach senior positions in the government or being admitted to university without becoming a party member. The party blends Arab-nationalism and Socialism ideals.

**Boko Haram:** A militant Islamic group located in northeast Nigeria. They are fighting against the Nigerian government and aim at establishing sharia law in the country. In 2015, the group pledged allegiance to ISIS.

**Caliphate:** An Islamic state, led by a caliph, or absolute leader, who is believed to be a direct successor to the Prophet Muhammad. The first caliphate was established after the death of the Prophet in 632 C.E. and Ataturk abolished the last one in 1923.

**Camp Bucca:** A detention center used by the U.S. Military during the Iraq war. It served as a breeding ground for jihadists, with many inmates radicalizing under the tutelage of Baghdadi.

**Dabiq:** A town in northern Syria, near Aleppo. Dabiq is an important location in Islamic eschatology and its capture by ISIS plays into the group’s apocalyptic ideology. It is believed that the Day of Judgment will arrive after Muslims defeat the armies of the West in this site.

**Gen. Lloyd Austin:** A United States Army General who is currently the commanding officer of CENTCOM.

**Imam Ali Mosque, Najaf:** One of the holiest sites in Shi’a Islam. Millions visit the mosque every year, making it a vulnerable target for terrorist attacks such as the 2003 car bombing claimed by Tawhid wa-l-jihad, which killed nearly 100 people.

**Islamic State Consultative Chamber:** Also known as the Mujahideen Shura Council. It was an umbrella organization that brought together Sunni Islamic insurgent groups within Iraq, uniting them against the U.S. coalition forces.

**Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS):** Also known as Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Daesh. ISIS is a transnational jihadist-Salafi insurgent group based in Iraq and Syria, and led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It has been designated a terrorist group by dozens of individual countries, as well as by the UN and the European Union.

**Jabhat Al-Nusra Front:** Also known as the Nusra Front, it is a Syrian jihadist group with ties to al-Qaeda. Their objective is to overthrow the Syrian government led by Bashar al-Assad and establish an Islamist state. They are also engaged in conflict with ISIS in Syria.

**James Foley:** An American journalist captured by ISIS while in Syria on November 22, 2012, while covering the civil war. As part of their “message to the American people” video, ISIS executed him in August 2014.

**Jihad:** Meaning “struggle,” or “to strive.” Jihad denotes a Muslim’s duty toward religious practice amid struggle. The term can refer to both spiritual and external struggle: the inner struggle of a Muslim to practice Islam or the physical struggle against religious enemies and to build a society in accordance with Islam. One who engages in jihad is a mujahid (pl: mujahideen, meaning “strugglers”).

**Jihadist-Salafism:** A fundamentalist branch of militant Sunni Islamism, with a focus on violent struggle against non-Muslims and returning to an earlier and purer form of Islam.

**Jund al-Sham:** An Islamist militant group founded in Jordan and led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1989–1992).

In 1999, Zarqawi began a training camp for an expanded organization with funding from Osama bin Laden. *Jund al-Sham* came to encompass multiple militant groups from across the region.

**Kayla Mueller:** An American human rights activist captured by ISIS while working for Doctors Without Borders in Syria in August 2013. She was killed in 2015 after allegedly being repeatedly raped by Baghdadi himself.

**King Abdullah II:** King of Jordan since February 7, 1999. He has promoted military, social and economic modernization in his country, and supported U.S. counterterrorism efforts following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. He joined the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS after the group burned to death Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh.

**Kurds:** An ethnic group in the Middle East, mostly found in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. They speak the Kurdish language and number about 30 million. Several Kurdish nationalist groups have been fighting against both the Syrian government and ISIS looking to establish an independent Kurdish state or Kurdistan.

**Mahdi:** Messiah prophesized in sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. The Mahdi will supposedly establish a global Islamic order in preparation for the end of the world.

**Muath al-Kasasbeh:** A Jordanian pilot captured by ISIS after his plane went down in Syria. He was burned to death by ISIS on January 3, 2015.

**Muhammad al-Maqdisi (Abu Muhammad Aasim al-Maqdisi; Aasim Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi):** A Jihadist-Salafi Islamic scholar. He mentored the future head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, while serving time in a Jordanian prison in the 1990s.

**Mullah Omar (Muhammad Omar):** Former leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan (1996–2001). He was wanted by the U.S. for harboring al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. He died in 2013.

**Osama bin Laden:** Founder of al-Qaeda and architect of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. He was killed by U.S. forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan in 2011.

**Peter Kassig (Abdul-Rahman):** A former U.S. ranger, he was captured by ISIS while providing medical aid to Syrian refugees. The group killed him in November 2014.

**Rashidun:** The “Rightly Guided” in Arabic, refers to the first four caliphs who ruled after the death of Muhammad. They are seen as model Muslim leaders, with an exemplary system of governance based upon Islamic righteousness.

**Saddam Hussein:** President of Iraq (1979–2003). His dictatorship was known for its extreme repressiveness and brutality. In 2003, the U.S. and Britain predicated their invasion of Iraq on accusations that Saddam maintained ties to al-Qaeda and possessed weapons of mass destruction. He was captured by U.S. forces in 2003, and executed by the Iraqi interim government in 2006.

**Salafism:** Derived from *salaf*, meaning predecessors, the Salafis are an ultraconservative branch of Sunni Islam aimed at returning to the ancient “orthodox” teachings of Islam. Although the term *salaf* has appeared in Islamic religious scholarship for centuries, Salafism started as a reform-oriented movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and was particularly Egypt-centric.

**Sérgio Vieira de Mello:** The top UN envoy in Iraq following the U.S. invasion. He was killed along with 21 others in the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad by Tawhid wa-l-jihad on August 19, 2003.

**Shi’a:** The second largest denomination of Islam, constituting 15–20% of the world’s Muslim population and 40% of the Middle East’s entire population. Divided with Sunnis over the proper successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Today, there is still great tension between the two denominations.

**Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89):** The Soviets invaded Afghanistan on behalf of the Communist government in Kabul, which came to power through a coup in 1978. Fighting continued for a decade between the Soviet-backed government and foreign-backed mujahideen groups. The Soviets finally withdrew in 1989.

**Steven Sotloff:** An American-Israeli journalist captured by ISIS in August 2013 while in Aleppo, Syria. ISIS killed him on September 2, 2014.

**Sunni:** The largest single religious denomination in the world. In the schism from Shi'aism, Sunnis argued that the leaders of the Muslim community didn't have to come from the Prophet Muhammad's lineage. Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph after Muhammad.

**Syrian Civil War:** An ongoing civil war, which began in 2011 after President Bashar-al Assad met anti-government protests with force. Factional fighting, including jihadist elements, has since complicated the picture. The conflict has resulted in nearly a quarter of a million casualties to date, and has set off a global refugee crisis.

**Takfir:** A proclamation of excommunication of one Muslim by another.

**Tawhid wa-l-jihad:** A Jihadist militant group founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi after his release from prison in 1999. In 2004, the group merged with al-Qaeda to form al-Qaeda in Iraq.

**U.S. Troop Surge:** In 2007, the George W. Bush administration deployed 30,000 additional troops to Iraq by in an effort to stabilize the country and reduce sectarian violence.

**Yazidis:** A Kurdish ethno-religious community whose ancient religion Yazidism is linked to Zoroastrianism and ancient Mesopotamian religions. They traditionally have lived in isolated communities in northwest Iraq, southeast Turkey and northwest Syria. Yazidis have historically faced persecution, and are targeted by ISIS as unbelievers. The group has massacred thousands and abducted Yazidi women, who are forced into a system of institutionalized sexual slavery.