
ISIS

THE STATE
OF TERROR

JESSICA STERN
AND J.M. BERGER

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An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

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GLOSSARY

Abu Sayyaf Group: A jihadist organization in the Philippines founded with funds from al Qaeda. It has pledged loyalty to ISIS.

Ahrar al Sham: The second most significant anti-Assad jihadist group behind Jabhat al Nusra; a member of the Syrian Islamic Front coalition.

al Qaeda, al Qaeda Central (AQ, AQC): A global Salafi Sunni militant jihadi organization founded by Osama bin Laden and others in Afghanistan. It is now run by Ayman al Zawahiri.

al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP): An al Qaeda affiliate based in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI): A jihadi group in Iraq founded by Abu Musab al Zarqawi, which would later become the **Islamic State of Iraq** and later still, the **Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham**, or **ISIS**. It refers to itself now simply as **the Islamic State**.

al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): An al Qaeda affiliate that operates in the Sahara and Sahel region of North Africa.

al Shabab: An al Qaeda affiliate in Somalia.

Ansar Bayt al Maqdis (ABM): A jihadist group that arose following the Arab Spring in the Sinai region of Egypt. It has declared its territory in the Sinai to be a province of ISIS.

Ansar al-Islam: A Kurdish separatist and jihadi organization active in Iraq in 2003.

Ansar al-Sharia (AST): A jihadist organization in Tunisia.

Awakening, or Awakening Movement: Former Sunni Arab insurgents who joined the fight against jihadi groups in Iraq. Also known as the **Sons of Iraq**.

Ba'ath Party: A political party founded in Syria that merged socialism with anti-imperialism, Arab nationalism, and pan-Arabism. Saddam Hussein and Bashar al Assad were affiliated with the Ba'athist parties in Iraq and Syria, respectively.

Ba'athists: Members of the Ba'ath party.

bayah: A religiously binding oath of loyalty.

Bilad al Sham: Refers to historical Greater Syria that extended into regions of Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq; also called **the Levant**.

Boko Haram: A fundamentalist jihadi group in Nigeria.

caliph: Ruler of the Muslim community; a political successor of Muhammad.

caliphate: A political-religious state led by a caliph.

Daesh or **Daash:** A derogatory term for ISIS based on its acronym in Arabic.

Dawla: The Arabic word for “state,” often used as a name for ISIS by its supporters.

Eid al-Fitr: The last day of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting and religious reflection.

emir: Arabic for commander; literally “prince.”

fitna: An Arabic word referring to a period of internal dissent and infighting in Islamic history, also used to refer to similar conflicts in a modern context.

Free Syrian Army (FSA): Originally consisting of Syrian military defectors, the FSA is now an umbrella organization for secular, nationalist anti-Assad fighters.

hadith (plural, ahadith): Stories about Muhammad, his sayings, and historical figures within Islam which are understood to have varying degrees of authenticity. Many Islamic end times traditions and prophecies are derived from *ahadith*.

Hezb-e-Islami: An Afghan militant group.

hijra: Migration, emigration.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): NATO’s international security force in Afghanistan. Its role is to support the Afghan National Security Forces as they increase capacity.

Islamic Army of Iraq: A former Iraqi Sunni Arab insurgency group that formed following the 2003 invasion. Following the 2011 withdrawal of American troops it demilitarized and formed a political opposition group.

Islamic Front: A coalition of Islamist rebel groups in Syria, not including the al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra.

Islamic State (IS): Name of ISIS after its declaration of a caliphate in June 2014.

Islamic State of Iraq (ISI): The name of the al Qaeda–affiliated insurgent group in Iraq (and its allies) from the death of Zarqawi in 2006 until 2012.

Islamic State of (or “in”) Iraq and Syria (ISIS): Also called Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham. The successor group to the **Islamic State of Iraq**, following its expansion from Iraq into neighboring Syria. The acronym **ISIS** is still widely used, despite the fact that the group officially changed its name to the **Islamic State** in June 2014.

Jabhat al Nusra (Nusra): The al Qaeda affiliate in Syria; also known as the Nusra Front.

Jamaat Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamaah: The Army of the Sunni People. A Sunni insurgent group that formed following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. ISIS emir Abu Bakr al Baghdadi was reportedly a cofounder of this group.

Jemaah Islamiyah: A now-defunct Indonesian jihadi organization that had strong ties to al Qaeda.

jihad: Arabic word meaning “struggle.” It has been used to describe a broad range of actions from spiritual struggles to armed conflict.

jihadi Salafism: A branch of Salafism that believes that any government that does not rule through **Shariah** is an illegitimate infidel regime. Jihadi Salafism embraces the use of violence to overthrow these regimes.

Jund al Khalifa: A splinter group of **AQIM** in Algeria that has become part of **ISIS**. It is responsible for the beheading of a French tourist in response to ISIS’s call for such actions from supporters.

Khorasan Group: A cell of senior al Qaeda Central operatives dispatched to Syria to plan and coordinate attacks on the West.

kuffar: Infidels; unbelievers.

Kurds: An ethnic group centered in the Middle East, whose ancestral homeland crosses several modern-day borders.

Mahdi: An Islamic end-times figure believed to appear around the time of the Day of Judgment. Sometimes referred to as the Rightly Guided One, or the Hidden Imam.

Mujahid (plural, mujahideen): A Muslim fighter waging military jihad.

Muhajir (plural, muhajireen or muhajiroun): Emigrant. Often used to refer to foreign fighters taking part in military jihad. The plural form differs depending on the grammar of a sentence in Arabic.

al Muhajiroun: A radical Islamic organization in Britain led by Anjem Choudary. The organization has been disbanded, but successor social networks remain active.

mujtahidun: Literally “the industrious ones,” a term used to refer to very active ISIS supporters on social media.

nasheed (plural, anasheed): An Islamic religious chant.

niqab: A black cloth veil worn by some Muslim women that covers part of the face and the entire body.

nusayri: A derogatory term for people who practice a variant of Shia Islam common among members of the Syrian regime.

peshmerga: Highly trained Kurdish fighters in Iraq; the standing army for the semiautonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region.

political Salafism: A branch of Salafism that pursues the purification of Islam through involvement in politics.

quietist Salafism: A branch of Salafism whose central goal is to purify Islam. They do not identify as political actors nor do they participate in politics.

rafidah: A derogatory term for Shia Muslims.

Salafi: A fundamentalist Sunni Islamic movement that believes in strict adherence to Islam as the way it was practiced by Muhammad.

Shariah: The Islamic moral code and religious law. There are considerable disagreements among Muslims about how Shariah figures into modern life. **ISIS** and **AQ**-affiliated groups embrace a harsh interpretation, but even they differ over the details.

Shia Islam: A branch of Islam that recognizes Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, and only his descendants as the rightful leaders of the Muslim community.

shaykh or **sheikh:** An honorific denoting respect for an individual as a leader or influencer within a tribe, clan, country, or Islamic religious group.

shahid: A martyr.

Sons of Iraq: Former Sunni Arab insurgents who joined the fight against jihadi groups in Iraq. More commonly known as the **Awakening Movement**.

sunnah: The recorded traditions of Muhammad.

Sunni Islam: The largest branch of Islam. Frequently referred to as "mainstream" or "orthodox" Islam.

Tablighi Jamaat: An Islamic revivalist movement founded in response to a perceived corruption of moral values. The movement aims to bring Muslims across all social and economic spectra into the understanding of religion by encouraging community service, contemplation, and proselytizing.

takfir: The pronouncement of a Muslim as an apostate. Usually understood by jihadists as a religious authorization to kill the subject.

Taliban: An Islamic fundamentalist organization founded in Pakistan, which later spread to Afghanistan, where it controlled the government from 1996 to 2001. It continues to be a significant insurgent movement.

Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP): A Pakistani insurgent group linked to al Qaeda, which has splintered in recent years due to a number of internal divisions, including but by no means limited to support for ISIS among some members.

ummah: The worldwide Muslim community.

wilayat: Province. A governing substructure used by ISIS.

Yazidis: A Kurdish-speaking religious and ethnic minority in Iraq; ISIS believes the Yazidis to be devil worshippers who may be killed or enslaved with impunity.

TIMELINE

- March 20, 2003* President George W. Bush announces the start of war against Iraq.
- April 9, 2003* U.S.-led invasion topples Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq.
- May 2003* Zarqawi-led group called the Organization of Monotheism and Jihad begins operations in Iraq.
- August 2003* Zarqawi's group bombs United Nations headquarters in Baghdad.
- April 2004* Hundreds are reported killed in fighting during the monthlong U.S. military siege of the Sunni Muslim city of Fallujah.
- April 2004* Photographic evidence emerges of abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. troops in Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad.
- May 2004* Zarqawi begins videotaped beheadings in Baghdad.
- June 2004* United States hands sovereignty to Iraq's interim government headed by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.
- October 2004* Zarqawi swears loyalty to Osama bin Laden and founds al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).
- January 2005* AQI starts a campaign of public beheadings on the streets of Iraqi cities.
- April 2005* AQI becomes a foreign fighter magnet and targets Shi'a, much to the concern of bin Laden's al Qaeda.
- May 2005* Surge in car bombings, bomb explosions, and shooting in Iraq.
- October 2005* Voters approve a new constitution, which aims to create an Islamic federal democracy in Iraq.
- December 2005* Iraqis vote for the first, full-term government and parliament.
- February 2006* Bombing of the Shi'a al Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq; full sectarian conflict ensues.
- April 22, 2006* Newly reelected president Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, asks Shi'a compromise candidate Nouri al Maliki to form a new government in Iraq, ending months of deadlock.

<i>June 2006</i>	Zarqawi killed in U.S. military air strike.
<i>October 2006</i>	Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) is formed; Abu Omar al Baghdadi named new leader.
<i>December 2006</i>	Saddam Hussein is executed by the Iraqis in Camp Justice, a joint Iraq-American base in a suburb of Baghdad, for crimes against humanity.
<i>January 2007</i>	U.S. military surge and Sunni Awakening begin to greatly diminish ISI.
<i>January 2008</i>	The Iraqi parliament passes legislation allowing former officials from Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party to return to public life.
<i>March 2008</i>	Prime Minister Maliki orders crackdown on militia in Basra, sparking pitched battles with Moqtada al Sadr's Mehdi Army, a Shi'a militia group.
<i>May 2008</i>	Relentless pressure on ISI and other groups by the U.S. military and government of Iraq results in lowest levels of violence since 2005.
<i>September 2008</i>	U.S. forces hand control of Anbar province, once an insurgent and al Qaeda stronghold, to the Iraqi government. This is the first Sunni province to be returned to the Shi'a-led government.
<i>January 2009</i>	Prime Minister Maliki targets Sunni leaders and Awakening groups, increasing sectarian tensions and latent support for ISI in Sunni tribal areas. This lessens the pressure on ISIS, allowing it to stave off disaster.
<i>August 2009</i>	ISI bombs Iraqi ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, killing hundreds.
<i>Fall 2009</i>	Abu Bakr al Baghdadi released from United States' Camp Bucca in Iraq in 2009 when the camp is officially closed.
<i>April 2010</i>	ISI leaders Abu Omar al Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al Masri (aka Abu Hamza al Muhajir) are killed in U.S.-led air strike.
<i>May 2010</i>	Abu Bakr al Baghdadi named leader of ISI.
<i>March 6, 2011</i>	In the city of Daraa, Syria, near the Jordan border, nearly a dozen boys under the age of fifteen are arrested for anti-regime graffiti. Protests break out in Syria beginning in Daraa, but quickly spreading to neighboring villages.
<i>April 21, 2011</i>	President Assad issues a decree to end Syria's nearly fifty-year-old state of emergency in hopes of quelling the rising protests.
<i>May 2, 2011</i>	Al Qaeda Central leader Osama bin Laden is killed by U.S. special forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan.
<i>May 28, 2011</i>	Hamza al Khatib, a thirteen-year-old boy who was detained during protests in Syria, is delivered to his family as a mutilated corpse, exposing the brutality of the regime.
<i>June 3, 2011</i>	In response to the release of Hamza's body, thousands flood the streets for the "Friday of the Children" protest. The regime responds by blocking

access to the Internet from within Syria.

- June 14, 2011* The Arab League condemns the Syrian crackdown for the first time.
- August 2011* Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain recall their ambassadors to Syria. Leaders from the United States, France, Britain, and Germany call on Assad to resign.
- December 2011* The United States concludes its operations in Iraq. The unity government immediately faces disarray, and Maliki issues an arrest warrant for Vice President Tariq Hashimi, a leading Sunni politician. The Sunni bloc boycotts parliament and the cabinet.
- January 6, 2012* General Mustafa Ahmad al Sheikh, the highest-ranking person in the Syrian military to defect, joins the Free Syrian Army. He reveals that at least twenty thousand soldiers have already defected.
- February 12, 2012* Ayman al Zawahiri calls on all Muslims to help overthrow Assad.
- June 16, 2012* The United Nations suspends its monitoring mission in Syria because it is too dangerous to continue operations.
- June 2012* ISI releases the first installment in its popular video series, *The Clanging of the Swords*.
- July 2012* ISI announces the initiation of “Breaking Down the Walls” campaign, to “refuel” the group by freeing members from Iraqi prisons and by regaining lost ground.
- August 2012* President Obama declares, amid rumors of chemical weapons use in Syria, that chemical weapons are a “red line” for action.
- September 16, 2012* Iran confirms units of its Revolutionary Guard are helping Assad.
- December 2012* Sunni Muslims in Iraq stage mass rallies across the country over several months, protesting perceived marginalization by the Shi’a government.
- February 28, 2013* United States promises “nonlethal assistance” to Syrian rebels.
- March 2013* Jabhat al Nusra becomes dominant in rebel areas.
- March 10, 2013* Islamist groups set up Eastern Council, consolidating control of eastern Syria.
- April 2013* The ISI announces that Jabhat al Nusra is its official Syrian offshoot and henceforth the merged group shall be known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Sham (ISIS). Al Nusra immediately rejects the statement and appeals to al Qaeda Central for judgment.
- April 18, 2013* Britain and France claim chemical weapons have been used in Syria.
- April 2013* Iraqi troops storm an antigovernment protest camp in Hawija, near Kirkuk, leaving more than fifty dead. This sparks Sunni outrage and the insurgency intensifies. By summer the country has entered full-blown sectarian war.

May 19, 2013	Jabhat al Nusra takes over oil fields and begins selling crude oil.
May 27, 2013	European Union ends arms embargo on Syrian rebels.
June 4, 2013	France and Britain confirm finding evidence of the use of sarin gas in Syria. Within a week the United States also independently confirms that sarin has been used.
July 2013	ISIS announces the initiation of “A Soldier’s Harvest” campaign, designed to intimidate/liquidate/assassinate Iraqi security forces, and to establish control over territory. At least five hundred prisoners, mainly al Qaeda members, are freed from Taji and Abu Ghraib prisons.
July 24, 2013	The Israeli director of military intelligence warns that Syria is becoming “center of global jihad.”
August 2013	ISIS begins sustained attacks on Syrian rebel groups such as Liwa al Tawhid and Ahrar al Sham, and then al Nusra in Raqqa and Aleppo. This completely changes the nature of the rebellion in Syria.
August 14, 2013	ISIS pushes Syrian rebels out of Raqqa.
August 31, 2013	President Obama states that the United States has a moral responsibility to act in Syria, but that Congress must approve the use of military force.
September 25, 2013	Rebel groups form the Islamic Front from eleven Western-backed opposition groups.
October 2013	ISIS creates its first official Twitter account.
December 2013	Fighting widens between Syrian rebels and ISIS.
January 2014	After serious fighting, ISIS claims complete control over Raqqa, and names it the capital of the ISIS emirate, a highly significant and symbolic move.
January 2014	Islamist fighters infiltrate Fallujah and Ramadi in Iraq. Iraqi forces recapture Ramadi, but ISIS forces are entrenched in Fallujah.
February 2014	Al Qaeda Central, led by Ayman al Zawahiri, publicly severs ties with ISIS. ISIS responds by saying they represent the spirit of AQ founder Osama bin Laden and not AQ as led by his successor, Zawahiri.
March 2014	ISIS supporters arrested in Switzerland for recruiting fighters and planning a terrorist attack.
April 2014	ISIS launches a Twitter app capable of sending tens of thousands of tweets per day.
May 2014	ISIS releases <i>The Clanging of the Swords Part 4</i> , possibly the most popular jihadist propaganda video of all time. The graphic video shows the execution of dozens of unarmed Iraqi soldiers.
May 24, 2014	Returned ISIS fighter Mehdi Nemmouche shoots and kills four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Belgium.

June 2014	ISIS takes control of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and border area between Iraq and Syria, and claims the borders dating from the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1906 are void.
June 2014	ISIS spams World Cup hashtags on Twitter with graphic images of executions. Twitter subsequently terminates the ISIS app, reducing the group's ability to broadcast its message.
June 30, 2014	ISIS announces the reestablishment of the caliphate and renames itself "the Islamic State."
July 2014	Abu Bakr al Baghdadi leads prayer at a mosque in Mosul, his first public appearance. He emphasizes the existence of the caliphate and renames himself Caliph Ibrahim.
July 2014	ISIS releases the first issue of <i>Dabiq</i> , an English-language magazine.
August 8, 2014	United States begins air strikes against the Islamic State outside the Kurdish city of Irbil in Iraq.
August 2014	Despite U.S. air strikes and Iraqi, Kurdish, and Iranian forces, the Islamic State maintains control over large areas of Iraq and solidifies its position in Syria.
August 2014	Twitter bans all official ISIS accounts.
August 25, 2014	The Islamic State releases a video showing the beheading of American journalist James Foley, who had been kidnapped by extremists in Syria in 2012.
September 2, 2014	The Islamic State releases a video showing the beheading of a second American journalist, Steven Sotloff. Obama announces that the United States will take action to "degrade and destroy" ISIS.
September 14, 2014	The Islamic State releases a video showing the beheading of British air worker David Haines.
September 17, 2014	Australian police break up alleged ISIS plot to behead random people on the streets.
September 2014	Twitter suspends the accounts of hundreds of ISIS supporters.
September 21, 2014	ISIS spokesman Abu Mohammad al Adnani calls on "lone wolves" to attack in the West using whatever tools are at hand, whether a gun, a knife, or even driving cars into pedestrians.
September 23, 2014	United States and coalition forces begin air strikes in Syria.
September 23, 2014	Australian ISIS supporter stabs two police officers.
October 2014	The Islamic State solidifies its hold in Mosul and in areas of Syria and advances on the vital wheat fields of Kobani, Syria, near the Turkish border.
October 3, 2014	The Islamic State releases the beheading video of Alan Henning, a British

cabdriver turned aid worker. His execution causes a widespread campaign of Muslims condemning ISIS.

- October 20, 2014* Accused ISIS supporter in province of Quebec hits Canadian soldiers with car, killing one.
- October 22, 2014* ISIS supporter shoots and kills a Canadian soldier, then attacks the Parliament Building in Ottawa, where he is killed by police.
- November 13, 2014* ISIS announces it is establishing outposts in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Libya, and Algeria.
- November 16, 2014* ISIS releases a video confirming the beheading of Abdul-Rahman Kassig, an American aid worker.
- November 22, 2014* ISIS supporter shoots a Danish national working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

A NOTE ON SOURCING

Most information described as being derived from jihadist online sources and social media was collected and archived from the primary source at the time of posting, using a variety of tools. The most frequently used tool is a proprietary software package designed by J. M. Berger and coded by Dan Sturtevant and Jonathan Morgan. The software was inspired by the 2012 paper “Who Matters Online,” by J. M. Berger and Bill Strathearn, commissioned by Google Ideas.

Data collected using this software is described in endnotes as being “collected by J. M. Berger,” or simply as “data collected from Twitter.” This description may also be applied to a variety of third party commercial and open-source tools used from time to time to supplement the software (for instance, to monitor accounts or read tweets). In instances where a third party supplied proprietary metrics, it is cited by name.

Many of these sources are ephemeral, with reference to social media accounts that have already been, or are in constant danger of being, deleted by Internet service providers. Further, the purpose of this book is surely not to facilitate ISIS’s efforts to spread propaganda. In most instances, citations of social media accounts will point to secondary sources (when available) for ease of reference and permanence of record.

INTRODUCTION

An American is dressed in an orange jumpsuit, apparently intended to echo the garb of al Qaeda insurgents captured and imprisoned by the United States. He kneels next to a man dressed all in black, his face masked, a knife in his hand.

For many, this has become an enduring image of the terrorist and insurgent group known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS, or simply the Islamic State, as it now calls itself.

In a video posted to the Internet on August 19, 2014, and widely distributed over social media, the American recites a speech, advising President Obama to cease air strikes against the Islamic State. His tormentor speaks, flaunting the British accent that is so central to his performance, warning President Barack Obama that attacks on ISIS would result in the spilling of American blood.

He puts the knife to the American's neck and the camera cuts away to show the victim's severed head, displayed on the back of his lifeless body. Only the beginning of the grisly act is shown. But it is the fear in the American's eyes that is hard to forget.

The dead American was photojournalist James Foley. He was known as a “brave and tireless journalist” who was determined to describe the impact of war on ordinary people's lives.¹ Before he became a journalist, Foley had been a teacher and an aid worker. He had been abducted in November 2012, and had been beaten, starved, and waterboarded for nearly two years before he was finally beheaded.² Now the story of this good man had come to a terrible end.

For many people around the world, the methodical, sadistic cruelty of the video was shocking and unbearable, provoking an entirely human desire to avenge Foley's death using any means necessary.

In the Western world, in the twenty-first century, the idea of a beheading was something unreal, archaic, a vaguely understood and little-contemplated relic of a distant past. While there are important exceptions, we have grown used to a less barbaric world, so that when the media bring pictures of terrorists' deliberate savagery to our attention, we recoil.

Other jihadists had used beheadings for this purpose before. Chechen insurgents were known for brutally beheading prisoners. In Bosnia, jihadist fighters once videotaped themselves playing soccer with a decapitated head (Serbs and Palestinians reportedly did the same at different times). But al Qaeda in Iraq—the predecessor to ISIS—made the practice its trademark.

The campaign of horror began with the 2004 beheading of American businessman Nicholas Berg, who had been captured by al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). It was performed on camera by the group's leader, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, and attracted international attention. Unlike the Foley video, Zarqawi was depicted carrying out the entire beheading with a knife; the camera did not cut away. The act was not swift; it took unbearably long seconds to complete.

The video's impact ensured that more videos would follow, many of which were even more brutal and graphic. The victims included Americans and other foreigners, including British, Russian

IT IS DIFFICULT to properly convey the magnitude of the sadistic violence shown in these videos. Some featured multiple beheadings, men and women together, with the later victims forced to watch the first die. In one video, the insurgents drove out into the streets of Iraq cities, piled out of a vehicle and beheaded a prisoner in full view of pedestrians, capturing the whole thing on video and then driving off scot-free.

The videos were distributed physically on DVDs in Iraq, but they became an Internet phenomenon. Unlabeled online file repositories were linked to by members of jihadist message boards, and the videos were passed around the Web, violence porn with a mission to intimidate and enrage. They succeeded.

It was the birth of a media model that has been transformed, expanded, and refined to a science over the course of years by the group that would eventually spring from the ashes of the American occupation—ISIS, a jihadist army so brutal and out of control that it was officially disavowed by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

ISIS has made its name on the marketing of savagery, evolving its message to sell a strange but potent new blend of utopianism and appalling carnage to a worldwide audience, documenting and carefully manipulating a version of its military campaigns, including its bloody 2014 rampage across much of Iraq and Syria. ISIS is using beheadings as a form of marketing, manipulation, and recruitment, determined to bring the public display of savagery into our lives, trying to instill in us a state of terror.

Although some observers followed the rise of ISIS with alarm from late 2013, the Obama administration gave the problem short shrift. In an interview with the *New Yorker* in January 2014, the president himself dismissed concerns about the group and other jihadists fighting in neighboring Syria:

The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant. I think there is a distinction between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian.

The administration continued to downplay the upstart jihadists for months. In June 2014, when ISIS seized control of a substantial chunk of Iraq, in an efficient military campaign marked by the retreat of apparently terrified, U.S.-trained Iraqi soldiers, most within the administration were caught off guard, asking themselves why they hadn't seen the "jayvee team" coming.

Despite the military drama, which sent tremors through regional and Western security services, most Americans and other Westerners were disillusioned and exhausted by more than ten years of costly War on Terror.

Those who bothered to notice agreed ISIS was a problem. But maybe not our problem, they said. When President Obama authorized air strikes on ISIS positions, depriving them of a fraction of the stolen territory, he quickly moved on to discussions of the economy.

But ISIS would not be ignored. It began by courting American anger specifically, at first with taunting tweets launched over social media, using established marketing and spam tactics to ensure that its invitation to war played not just in Washington, but all over the globe.

For months, ISIS had flooded the Internet with images of hundreds of unnamed Iraqis and Kurds being executed by gun and knife and crucifixion, their heads mounted and displayed on pikes. All of them seemed so far away to those few who even heard about the atrocities, which the media covered sporadically at best.

Then ISIS upped the ante—deliberately re-creating the Nicholas Berg video for a new generation with a new cast of characters, beginning with the murder of James Foley.

It was perhaps the ending of the video that sealed the incident's place in history. After graphic evidence of the murderous deed had been displayed, there was one final scene: the British jihadist yanked another American up on his knees, by the scruff of his orange jumpsuit—Steven Sotloff, another kidnapped journalist.

“The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision,” the killer said in a calm, matter-of-fact tone.

This was not a one-off communiqué. It was a promise of more bloodshed to come.

Extensive media coverage highlighted the case, as journalists publicly mourned one of their own and ISIS spread images of the execution far and wide on social media, even prompting Twitter to intervene in ways it had long scorned, by suspending dozens of ISIS supporters' accounts.

By the time the second execution came, exactly as promised, followed by the addition of a third victim to the queue—this time a British citizen—a slow rumble was spreading through America and the world. ISIS expanded its targeted messaging to include “the allies of America,” with special attention to the United Kingdom, and threats to bordering countries such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

In corner stores and restaurants, on television and radio broadcasts, over dinner tables and on social media, people began to ask: Why can't the most powerful nations on earth stop these medieval-minded killers? The questions soon transformed into an anger not seen since the days after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

“These guys need to be killed,” a middle-aged police officer with a friendly face was heard saying in an even tone to a store owner in Cambridge, Massachusetts—one of the most notoriously liberal cities in the United States—and the sentiment was repeated again and again, around the world, in greater or lesser length, and with greater or lesser intensity.

Who are these men? Where did they come from? What do they want? How are they transforming the nature of terrorism and the war the international community is fighting against it?

What can we do about ISIS? What should we do?

These are the questions that fuel this book.

If journalism is the first draft of history, a book such as this can only be the second draft, and certainly not the final word. It is written at a point in history when ISIS has fully emerged in the world, but before its ultimate fate has become clear.

Regardless of that fate, what ISIS has accomplished so far will have long-term ramifications for jihadist and other extremist movements that may learn from its tactics. A hybrid of terrorism and insurgency, the former al Qaeda affiliate, booted out of that group in part due to its excessive brutality, is rewriting the playbook for extremism. It has inverted many of the dynamics that have been applied to violent extremism for a century or longer and changed the rules of engagement on multiple fronts. It is a daring experiment in the power of horror, but also in the marketing of utopia. While most observers view ISIS's “state” as a dystopia, ISIS claims to have formed as a refuge from a

impure world, a place where believers can be secure in the knowledge that they are living accordance with Islam, at least as interpreted by ISIS. And it has documented its attempts governance with the same attention to detail as its well-publicized atrocities.

There are many dimensions to the rise of ISIS. Some see the problem as explainable only with reference to competition among neighboring states for access to oil, natural gas, and pipelines.⁵ Some blame the problem on poor governance and lack of democratic institutions, accusing the U.S. government of evangelism in regard to spreading democracy⁶ while paying too little attention to the importance of civil and political rights.⁷

Some view ISIS as a symptom of a kind of “untamed Wahhabism,”⁸ deliberately spread by Saudi Arabia and others,⁹ or as a prop in a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, among other states. Still others see it as the public face of the resurgent Ba’athist party, determined to take back what was lost (and more) immediately after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While researching the book, we heard many points of view.

We are observers of violent extremism, with many years of experience speaking to terrorists, monitoring their messages, and studying their organizations and beliefs. Therefore our book is an effort to situate ISIS within the global jihadist movement, and within the field of extremism more broadly, so that its true implications can be better understood.

This book is written in the midst of a fast-changing story; in the short period between the book’s completion and its publication, ISIS could conceivably double in size or be dealt a massive defeat. Although neither outcome seems probable, ISIS’s short history is a series of contradictions and surprises, and we believe that whatever its fate as an organization, it has instituted transformative changes in strategy, messaging, and recruitment that will linger long after its so-called caliphate has crumbled to dust.

Within a short span, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and his fanatical followers have sketched out a new model for fringe movements to exploit changing social dynamics and new technologies, exerting an influence over world politics that is wildly disproportionate to its true size and strength.

To cover this ground, we will examine the history of the organization, its innovative propaganda and unprecedented manipulation of social media, and its recruitment of foreign fighters. We also explore the stark contrast it has drawn to the terrorist organization from which it sprang, al Qaeda, as well as a multitude of other extreme ideologies. Finally, although ISIS’s evolution is ongoing, we believe some preliminary conclusions can be drawn about how to frame and approach the problem of countering this murderous movement.

There are many other important elements to this phenomenon and the conflict surrounding it, and we look forward to future books that explore some of the issues we could not. Given the fluid nature of the story, updates on ISIS and especially those pertinent to the topics covered in this book will be available at Intelwire.com.

ON NAMES AND DEFINITIONS

Definitions of many of the religious terms used in this book are included in a glossary and an appendix, and readers are encouraged to consult those sections for more information. In addition, we believe it is useful to discuss here the name of the group itself and some terms that are used frequently in relation to the “Islamic State” organization.

The group has renamed and rebranded itself multiple times. It is known as the Islamic State (its most recent self-appellation), but it is also frequently referred to as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS), or as Daesh, a derogatory term extracted from its Arabic acronym.¹⁰

Differences between ISIS and ISIL stem from issues of technical transliteration and geography. The Obama administration steadfastly referred to the group as ISIL long after most journalists had switched to ISIS (which was also generally the acronym used by the group itself in English communications).¹¹

When the Islamic State dropped the *-IS* or *-IL* from its name at the end of June 2014, concurrent with its declaration that it was now a caliphate, it seemed this was the end of the naming controversy.¹² But most journalists continued to refer to it as ISIS, while President Obama continued to refer to it as ISIL.¹³

The rationale for the latter, as explained by Matt Apuzzo of the *New York Times*¹⁴ and others, is that referring to the Islamic State by its self-appointed name would legitimize its declaration of an Islamic caliphate.¹⁵

Extremist groups often adopt a name that reflects their greater ambitions, and as a rule, people refer to them by the names they choose. Does it legitimize the concept of a white-only state to use the name “Aryan Nations”? Ironically, treating the Islamic State differently serves to elevate its claim to legitimacy, making it a special case requiring delicate handling, instead of just another extremist group. The insistence on ISIL also hints at an incorrect presumption that Muslims in general might be inclined to take the extremists seriously, and that the undecided might be swayed by nomenclature.

We prefer Islamic State as the most correct usage, but the vernacular (led by journalists) has embraced ISIS—meaning that for purposes of clarity, ISIS is much more readily associated with the content of the book in the minds of most readers.

On a more mundane level, the acronym *IS* presents challenges in a work of this length. For instance, the contraction “IS’s” is unappealing, and the pairing of *IS* with the verb “is” also leads to the unpalatable “IS is,” both of which would recur endlessly in the text.

In concession to these issues, we will generally employ the acronym *ISIS*.

An older semantic debate surrounds the use of the word *jihad*. A more comprehensive definition is included in the appendix, but we will briefly discuss our usage of the term here. The vast majority of the world’s Muslims are peaceful people, and many of them object to militants’ appropriation of the word and concept of *jihad*, which they understand to apply to nonviolent activities such as self-improvement or seeking justice.¹⁶ Military jihadists do not make such qualifications when they call their work *jihad*.

“Whenever *jihad* is mentioned in the [Quran], it means the obligation to fight. It does not mean to fight with the pen or to write books or articles in the press, or to fight by holding lectures.” Those are the words of Abdullah Azzam, the galvanizing force behind the volunteer *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan.¹⁷ This book will generally follow Azzam’s usage. We acknowledge there is a legitimate debate in the public square on this issue, but this book expediently uses the term as jihadists use it.

Another area where definitions are murky involves distinctions among terrorism, insurgency, and war. For purposes of this book, we define terrorism as an act or threat of violence against noncombatants, with the objective of exacting revenge, intimidating, or otherwise influencing a target audience. We define terrorists as nonstate actors who engage in violence against noncombatants in order to accomplish a political goal or amplify a message. Two characteristics of terrorism are critic

for distinguishing it from other forms of violence. First, it is *aimed* at noncombatants. It is this characteristic of terrorism that distinguishes it from legitimate war-fighting. The laws of war, and both the Islamic and Judeo-Christian just war traditions explicitly forbid deliberately targeting noncombatants.¹⁸ Thus, terrorist acts might usefully be defined as war crimes that are perpetrated by nonstate actors. Second, terrorists use violence for dramatic purpose: instilling fear in the target audience is often more important than the physical result. This deliberate creation of dread is what distinguishes terrorism from simple murder or assault.¹⁹ Terrorists may be supported by states, but they have a fundamental quality of independence—or at least of disavowal and deniability. Thus, the Third Reich would not be considered a terrorist organization, but American and European neo-Nazis would.

The characteristics of terrorism, as we have defined it, raise additional thorny questions. How do we define “noncombatants”?²⁰ The term is controversial. A soldier on the battlefield is unquestionably a combatant. But what if the country is not at war, and the soldier is sleeping in his barracks, as was the case for the victims of the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing? In our view, noncombatants include civilians, military personnel not engaged in conflict, and political leaders (such as Anwar Sadat). Second, are child soldiers combatants or non-combatant victims? While it is clearly illegal under international law to recruit child soldiers, there is no consensus about the treatment of children who commit war crimes or terrorism.²¹ This question is particularly important in regard to ISIS, which, according to the United Nations, “prioritizes children as a vehicle for ensuring long-term loyalty, adherence to their ideology and a cadre of devoted fighters that will see violence as a way of life.”²² (For more on this topic, see Chapter 9).

Will these child-perpetrators of atrocities be treated as victims of ISIS’s war, or as terrorists? International law is not yet clear on this issue.²³ A Syrian child, who said that ISIS recruited him by “brainwashing” him with stories about Shi’a soldiers’ rape of Sunni women, defected to Iraqi authorities while claiming to his ISIS masters that he planned to carry out a suicide attack.²⁴ The case highlights the uncertainties regarding how child-perpetrators should and will be treated.

While ISIS claims to be a state, for purposes of this book, we will generally discuss ISIS as a nonstate actor, albeit one at the very edge of the definition, possessing extraordinary infrastructure and expertise, much of it acquired or stolen from state actors, and a will to govern. Similarly, ISIS pushes the boundaries of the definition of insurgency, which is usually defined as an armed rebellion by non-state actors against a recognized government. At the time of this writing, ISIS was fighting an insurgency against the Iraqi and Syrian governments. It was engaging in acts of terrorism against noncombatants. And it was the de facto authority in parts of both Iraq and Syria. For the time being, we believe ISIS is best defined as a hybrid terrorist and insurgent organization.

ISIS is a movement and an organization that sits at the nexus of a rapidly changing region and a world. While it is rooted in history, ISIS has also introduced new elements to our understanding of radical Islamism, terrorism, and extremism writ large. For this reason, it commands a disproportionate share of the world’s attention. Into these dark unexplored waters this book intends to wade, in search of understanding.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE AND FALL OF AL QAEDA IN IRAQ

The world awakened to the threat of ISIS in the summer of 2014, but that is not where its story begins.

What we know today as ISIS emerged from the mind of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, a Jordanian turned-terrorist who brought a particularly brutal and sectarian approach to his understanding of jihad.

Many diverse factors contributed to the rise of ISIS, but its roots lie with Zarqawi and the 2003 invasion of Iraq that gave him purpose.

Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al Kalaylah was born in the industrial town of Zarqa, Jordan, located about fifteen miles from Amman. He was a Bedouin, born into a large, relatively poor family, but part of a powerful tribe. He was a mediocre student who dropped out of school after ninth grade. Like many jihadists, he took on a nom de guerre based on the place he came from, Abu Musab al Zarqawi.

In his hometown, Zarqawi was not known as an especially pious person, but as a heavy drinker, bully, and a brawler.¹ His biographer reports that those who knew him in Zarqa said he drank like fish and was covered in tattoos, two practices forbidden by Islam. He was known as the “green man” on account of the tattoos, which he would later try to remove with hydrochloric acid. He was arrested a number of times, for shoplifting, drug dealing, and attacking a man with a knife, among other crimes.²

In his early twenties, he joined Tablighi Jamaat, a South Asian Islamic revivalist organization, in part to “cleanse” himself from his life of crime. Tablighi Jamaat aims at creating better Muslims through “spiritual jihad”—good deeds, contemplation, and proselytizing.

According to the historian Barbara Metcalf, Tablighi Jamaat traditionally functioned as a self-help group, much like Alcoholics Anonymous, and most specialists claim that it is no more prone to violence than are the Seventh-Day Adventists, with whom Tablighi Jamaat is frequently compared. But a member of Tablighi Jamaat told coauthor Jessica Stern that jihadi groups were known to openly recruit at the organization’s central headquarters in Raiwind, Pakistan.⁴

In 1989, just three months after joining Tablighi Jamaat, Zarqawi joined the insurgency against the Soviet Union’s occupation of Afghanistan, by which time the Soviets were already in withdrawal. The war had left him behind.

Zarqawi was not yet a leader, or even a fighter. In Afghanistan and over the border in Pakistan, he spent much of his time working on jihadist newsletters. While it might have seemed a humble start for someone who dreamed of battle, his introduction to jihadi media would later turn out to be useful.

But that was surely not clear at the time. “Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan as a zero,” one of his fellow jihadists told journalist Mary Anne Weaver, “a man with no career, just foundering about.”⁵

He later trained and eventually fought in some of the most violent battles to emerge from the post-Soviet chaos in Afghanistan, when Afghan factions began fighting one another for control of the country. He found focus and earned a certain respect in the eyes of his peers. The experience changed him.

“It’s not so much what Zarqawi did in the jihad—it’s what the jihad did for him,” the jihadist said to Weaver.⁶

Perhaps most important were the many relationships he forged during this time. The jihadists he recruited or met during this period would one day form the kernel of an international network. And one new friend turned out to be particularly important to Zarqawi’s future—Sheikh Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi, one of the architects of jihadi Salafism, an ideology based on the principle that any government that does not rule through a strict interpretation of Shariah is an infidel regime that must be violently opposed (a fuller description can be found in the appendix).⁷

Maqdisi would become Zarqawi’s spiritual father and close friend, despite their very different backgrounds. A trained cleric of Palestinian origin who lived in various Arab countries before settling in Jordan, Maqdisi was the “bookish fatwah monk.” Zarqawi would emerge as the man who would test Maqdisi’s theories “in real time and in a real war.”⁸

Both men returned to Jordan in 1993. They were involved in a series of botched terrorist operations, culminating in their arrest for possessing illegal weapons and belonging to a banned jihadist organization.⁹

Like Afghanistan, prison was transformative for Zarqawi, according to Nir Rosen, who interviewed many of the jihadist’s Jordanian peers:

Their time in prison was as important for the movement as their experiences in Afghanistan were, bonding the men who suffered together and giving them time to formulate their ideas. For some, it was educational as well. One experienced jihadi who knew Zarqawi in Afghanistan told me: “When I heard Zarqawi speak, I didn’t believe this is the same Zarqawi. But six years in jail gave him a good chance to educate himself.”¹⁰

Zarqawi tried to recruit his prison-mates into helping him overthrow the Jordanian leadership. After he was released from prison in 1999, Zarqawi participated in the foiled “Millennium Plot” timed for January 1, 2000, a plan to bomb two Christian holy sites, a border crossing between Jordan and Israel, and the fully booked 400-room Radisson hotel in Amman.

But he was again thwarted and the plot was disrupted by Jordanian security services.¹¹ Zarqawi managed to escape, first to Pakistan and from there to Afghanistan, where he met Osama bin Laden.¹²

By most accounts, the meeting with bin Laden did not go well. And why would it? The two men were united only by a broad commitment to violent jihad. Bin Laden and his early followers were mostly members of an intellectual, educated elite, while Zarqawi was a barely educated ruffian with a bad attitude.

One version of the meeting, reported by Mary Anne Weaver, described this first encounter as uncomfortable. Bin Laden was put off by Zarqawi’s insistence that all Shi’a Muslims must be killed.

an ideological argument accepted by only the most extreme Sunni jihadists, who believe Shi'a are not true Muslims. Zaraqawi was reportedly arrogant and disrespectful of bin Laden. Others in al Qaeda felt the brash young jihadist was not without his merits, however. He was eventually allowed to set up his own training camp in Afghanistan, albeit not officially under al Qaeda's wing. But the difference aired on the day bin Laden and Zaraqawi met would continue to define the relationship between the two jihadists for years to come.¹³

Over the course of the next five years Zaraqawi operated independently from, and yet with the support of, bin Laden and al Qaeda Central. His training camp in Herat, Afghanistan, was supported by al Qaeda funds with the consent of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban. He spent time in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, where he recruited new fighters and grew his network. He was more focused on jihad in Muslim countries, such as Jordan, while bin Laden at the time was focused on the West, including his long-planned spectacular terrorist attack on the soil of the United States. In the days prior to September 11, bin Laden repeatedly sought *bayah*, a religiously binding oath of allegiance from Zaraqawi, who refused to comply.¹⁴

Nevertheless, when the Americans invaded Afghanistan after September 11, Zaraqawi fought to defend al Qaeda and the Taliban.¹⁵ Wounded in battle, he fled in 2002 to Iran, and from there to Iraq and Kurdistan,¹⁶ where he joined Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish jihadist group. The Kurds are an ethnic group inhabiting Kurdistan, a region that includes contiguous parts of Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

Zaraqawi's membership in Ansar al-Islam would later be cited by the United States as evidence that he and al Qaeda were collaborating with Saddam Hussein. But the Kurdish group Zaraqawi had joined viewed the Iraqi regime as apostate and aimed to establish a Salafi state governed by Shariah. Ironically, it was the invasion of Iraq that pushed Zaraqawi into an alliance with bin Laden and led to al Qaeda's enduring presence in Iraq.¹⁸

Armed with irrational exuberance and a handful of dubious pretexts for war, the United States and its allies invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. The invasion had been justified by exaggerated claims that Iraq possessed or was close to possessing weapons of mass destruction, and by the false claim that Saddam Hussein was allied with al Qaeda. While Iraq had a long history of sponsoring terrorist groups, al Qaeda was not one of them.

Zaraqawi's name first became widely known in the West when the Bush administration described him as the link between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, claiming that Iraq had given safe haven to the terrorists, who now plotted mayhem with impunity inside its borders.

"From his terrorist network in Baghdad, Zaraqawi can direct his network in the Middle East and beyond," Secretary of State Colin Powell told the United Nations Security Council.¹⁹ But Zaraqawi was neither collaborating with Saddam nor a member of al Qaeda.²⁰

In the early days after the invasion, many Iraqis were overjoyed that the brutal dictator had been removed from power. By April 9, Baghdad had fallen and Saddam Hussein had fled. By May, President Bush announced, "Mission Accomplished."

President Bush had spearheaded a strategy of "taking the fight to the terrorists," which he would later repeatedly articulate as "We're taking the fight to the terrorists abroad, so we don't have to face them here at home."²¹

The statement proved half true. Iraq would be a lightning rod for jihadists, who flocked to the country where they had not been able to operate successfully before in order to confront American troops. But the invasion reinforced jihadi claims about America's hegemonic designs on the Middle East, providing a recruiting bonanza at a time when the terrorists needed it most.

Jihadi leaders around the globe described the U.S. occupation as a boon to their movement, which had begun to decline in large measure due to the destruction of al Qaeda's home base in Afghanistan. Abu Musab al Suri, one of the jihad's most prominent strategists, claimed that the war in Iraq almost single-handedly rescued the movement.²²

As President Bush had claimed, Iraq became a "central front" in the war on terrorism.²³ But it was a front that the United States had created.²⁴

Soon after the invasion, terrorism within Iraq's borders rose precipitously.²⁵ There were 7 terrorist attacks in the first twelve months following the U.S. invasion; in the second twelve months this number nearly quadrupled, to 302 attacks.²⁶ At the height of the war, in 2007, terrorists claimed 5,425 civilian lives and caused 9,878 injuries.²⁷ The violence also expanded abroad, as in 2005, when al Qaeda in Iraq bombed three hotels in Amman, Jordan.²⁸ The coordinated attack had targeted Western-owned hotels, but the victims were almost all Jordanians, provoking an intense backlash within Jordan and angering many jihadists, who feared the operation would destroy al Qaeda's chances of winning support in the country.²⁹

Iraq had erupted into civil war, and the allied mission quickly changed from combat to nation building. When the mission changed direction, President Bush appointed L. Paul Bremer as head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Bremer's first major decisions would prove critical to the subsequent destabilization of Iraq: disbanding the military, and firing all members of Saddam Hussein's ruling Ba'ath Party from civil service positions.

More than 100,000 Sunni Ba'athists were removed from the government and military, leaving them unemployed, angry, and for the military personnel, armed.³⁰ Lieutenant General Jay Garner warned that the policy rendered a large number of educated and experienced Iraqis "potential recruits for the nascent insurgency."³¹ One particularly important function impacted by the purge was the Iraq border patrol. The weakened force provided little resistance to the dramatic flow of foreign fighters into the country.³²

Zarqawi was there to seize the opportunity.

ZARQAWI RISES

Zarqawi's career as a terrorist had been largely marked by failure and frustration, but the American invasion galvanized him to action and created an environment suitable for his brutal tactics and rabid sectarianism.

The Sunni and Shi'a branches of Islam had split soon after the death of Muhammad over the issue of who should succeed the Prophet of Islam as leader of the Muslims, or *caliph*. Sunnis believe that the caliph can be chosen by Muslim authorities. Shi'ites believe that the caliph must be a direct descendant of the Prophet through his son-in-law and cousin Ali.

Over generations, the separation had led to doctrinal differences and, at times, open sectarian conflict or war, although there were equally long periods of peace and cooperation. Today, sectarian tensions are intensely mixed with local and regional politics.

Under the rule of Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim, Iraq's Shi'a majority had been persecuted and massacred by the thousands, and denied political participation. After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, some of the Shi'a had risen up against Hussein, expecting support from the West, only to be crushed by the

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