



Fact Sheet on the Islamic State (IS)

"They (IS) are beyond just a terrorist group. They marry ideology, a sophistication of ... military prowess. They are tremendously well-funded. This is beyond anything we've seen."

-Chuck Hagel, Former US Secretary of Defense

Key Facts & Ideology

- AKA: Islamic State in Iraq & the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)
- IS is a Sunni jihadist group that is attempting to establish an Islamic State comprised of portions of Iraq and Syria.
- Originated from Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, or al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).
- Led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, known by his followers as Amir al-Mu'minin, Caliph Ibrahim. He was released from a US detention camp in 2009, when he [said](#) to the American soldiers, 'I'll see you guys in New York.'
- IS claims authority over all Muslims. It intends to control all countries and regions with Muslim majority populations.
- Designated as a terror organization by the UN, EU, US, UK, Australia, Canada, Israel, Turkey, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia.
- IS is a Sunni group that practices a strict form of Sharia law when governing its various populations and centers of control.
 - Ideology is a derivative of Wahabbism and the Muslim Brotherhood.
 - Completely condemns adherence and proponents of secular law. Use of violence to 'purify' unbelievers is consistent with Wahabbi theology.

Timeline & Origins

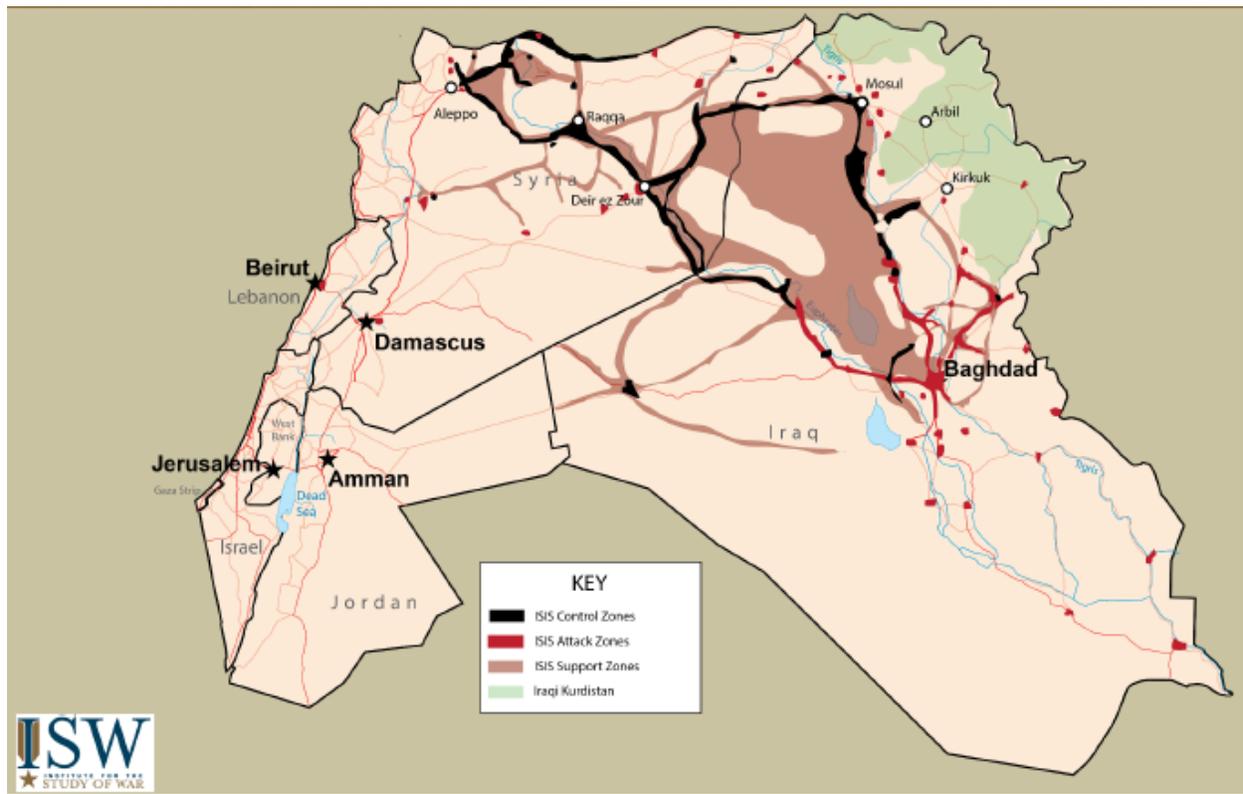
- 1999: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi establishes Jamaat al-Tahwid wa-i-Jihad (JTWJ).
- 2003: After the US invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi and JTWJ start a violent insurgency campaign against US forces. This included several terrorist attacks, the murder of UN envoy Sergio Vieira di Mello, and the beheadings of Americans Jack Hensley, Eugene Armstrong, and UK citizen Kenneth Brigley.
- 2004: JTWJ becomes an al-Qaeda affiliate when Zarqawi swears fealty (bay'ah) to Usama Bin Laden; changes name to Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, or Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).
- 2006: Zarqawi killed in US airstrike. Name changes to Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and begins a campaign to establish a Sharia based state in what is Iraq.
- 2010: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi becomes leader of ISI and signals intention to move into Syria.

- 2013: al-Baghdadi attempts to take over Syrian group Jabhat al-Nusra; renames group to Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL).
- Late 2013-Early 2014: Renamed to ISIS. Centers power in Raqqa, Syria.
- January 2014: ISIS takes parts of Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar province.
- June 2014: ISIS continues pushing into Northern Iraq, capturing Mosul with the help of Sunni rebels.
- June 29, 2014: ISIS declares itself a caliphate and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi becomes Caliph Ibrahim.
- August – November 2014: ISIS releases video of the beheading of US citizens Steven Sotloff, James Foley, and Peter Kassig.
- November 2014: IS and al-Qaeda reconcile differences during a meeting.

Territorial Control

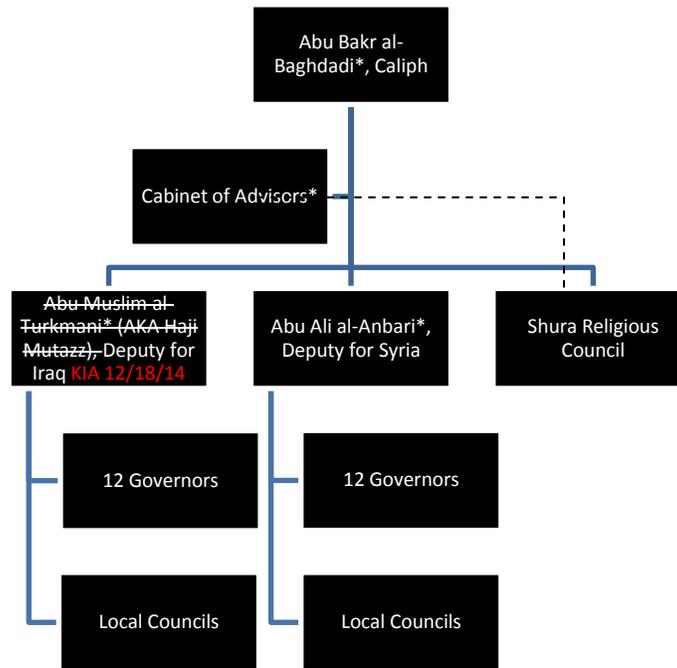
- Since announcing its establishment in 2006, IS claimed authority over 7 Iraqi provinces (Baghdad, al-Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Nineveh)
- April 2014: IS claims 9 Syrian provinces (al- Barakah, al- Kheir, ar-Raqqah, al- Badiya, Idlib, Hama, Damascus and Coast).

Territorial Control as of November 2014



*Courtesy Institute for the Study of War

System of Governance



*Denotes Executive Branch (Al Imara)

- IS organizational hierarchy is very similar to one that would be seen in a traditional government.
- The Caliph, his two deputies, and the cabinet of advisors make up the Executive branch.
- The Shura religious council serves as an oversight group that ensures Islamic Sharia law is being implemented within the government and followed by the various leaders. It reports to the Executive branch.
- At the gubernatorial level, councils exist within each local area that govern everything from financial matters to executions.
 - Financial council: responsible for weapons, oil sales.
 - Leadership council: drafts laws and policy.
 - Military council: responsible for defense of the state
 - Legal council: handles recruitment, decides executions.
 - Fighters Assistance council: handles foreign fighter aid.
 - Security council: acts as internal police, handles executions.
 - Intelligence council: responsible for IS intelligence networks.
 - Media council: handles social media presence, regulations other forms of media.
- Approximately 8 million Iraqis and Syrians currently live under IS control.
- Al-Raqqah, Syria is considered to be the headquarters of IS.
- IS has built up public works in areas under their control, which includes social services and religious proselytizing.

Logistics

- Estimates of IS forces range from CIA estimates of 20,000 to 31,500 (as of September 2014) to as many as 200,000 according to a senior [Kurdish](#) government official.

- The US State Department [estimated](#) in September that over 15,000 foreigners traveled to Syria to fight for various organizations, with as many as 10,000 joining IS. They hail from over 80 countries, with as many as 2,000 coming from Western states, including (possibly) [300 coming](#) from the US.
- A vast majority of IS weaponry is comprised of stolen arms from stockpiles left over from the Iraqi insurgency, in addition to those captured in Syria, and from the Iraqi army after the US withdrawal.

Finances

- As of mid-2014, it is believed that IS has approximately \$2 billion in assets.
 - In June 2014, it was alleged that \$429 million was [stolen](#) from the central bank in Mosul.
 - RAND corp. has made a “conservative” [estimate](#) that IS brought in \$200M in 2014.
- Oil production remains the primary source of [income](#), [earning](#) approx. \$1-3 million a day from 50,000-60,000 barrels sold.
 - The oil is sold primarily through black markets in Turkey which have been in [existence](#) since the era of Saddam Hussein. The same corrupt Turkish officials and smugglers who helped Hussein avoid sanctions now do the same for IS.
- Racketeering and extortion make up a substantial portion of the rest of the Islamic State’s income.
 - A major portion of early proceeds came from the black market [sales](#) of historical Iraqi artifacts.
 - Because they are largely self sustaining practices, airstrikes and bombardments are unlikely to stop IS from collecting on their racketeering and extortion enterprises.
- As of December 2014, [reports](#) from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have claimed that IS is engaged in a large scale human organ trafficking ring. A Mosul based doctor, Siruwan Al-Mosuli, claims that IS has dedicated [units](#) for organ trafficking. In Northern Syria alone, a local pathologist has claimed 18,000 [cases](#) of trafficking have occurred.

Strategy

- IS leadership is combat tested and organized. IS is a less a traditional terrorist organization and more a militia engaging in terrorist activities.
- IS frequently utilizes suicide bombers, car bombs, mass executions and beheadings against adversaries.
- The group frequently engages in [massacres and mass](#) rape of civilians under its control, particularly religious minorities.
- IS is particularly skilled in utilizing social media propaganda. Utilizing the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), they have been particularly adept in targeting Western audiences.
 - Twitter has been particularly well utilized by IS. The group has [created](#) an app known as “Dawn” that allows users to follow IS twitter activity.

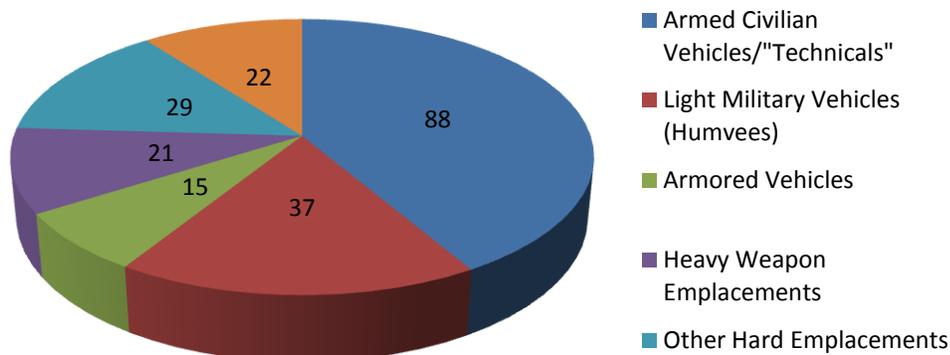
Analysis of Operation Inherent Resolve & Policy Recommendations

The current US strategy to “degrade and destroy” ISIS has, so far, been insufficient. The current air campaign has failed to substantially halt IS advances despite daily bombardments. Iraqi ground forces have had limited success since shattering two IS forces earlier this year. Potentially viable militia groups in Syria, such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), have splintered and become essentially ineffective against IS advances.

Several experts and policy makers such as [Jim Phillips](#) of the Heritage Foundation and former SECDEF [Leon Panetta](#) have said the fight against IS could take decades. That said, there will need to be reassessment of several factors should any true progress against IS occur:

- **Air strikes alone are ineffective against a highly mobile and decentralized fighting force.** A September release (see chart below) by the Pentagon explained that armed civilian vehicles (technicals) were the most frequently hit targets by US airstrikes to that point (41.5%). Technicals are easy to manufacture, maintain, and can be easily replaced.

Airstrike Targets Against Islamic State



*Data courtesy of USCENTCOM/[Breaking Defense](#)

- **Further assistance to the Kurdish Peshmerga, both the (estimated) 190,000 [in Iraq](#) and the 70,000 [in Syria](#), is a necessity.** At best, it could take several months for the Iraqi army to reestablish itself as an effective fighting force. Syrian opposition groups are splintered and the possibility of vetting and training a new force within the short term is not only logistically difficult, but could result in blowback should weapons and training be given to the wrong individuals. The Peshmerga is an established, reliable, and vetted force that has proven effective against IS.
 - **Intelligence Support:** the US should share the necessary intelligence to help the Peshmerga on the battlefield. Particularly in SIGINT and IMINT.
 - **Logistical Support:** the Kurds desperately need ammunition, parts, and equipment to maintain their existing armaments, but also should be provided with US & NATO weaponry so as to allow easy future supply lines from US & NATO allies. Anti-tank/vehicle weapons are a must-have to counter the technicals, light, and heavy military vehicles of IS.
 - **Airpower coordination:** Michael Knights of the Washington Institute [suggests](#) the US establish a Fire Support Coordination Line (FSCL) between the Peshmerga, the US, and Iraqi army to better coordinate air support on the battlefield.

"We don't need boots on the ground, we need effective weapons for the Peshmergas."

-Masrour Barzani, Kurdish Director of Intelligence & Security

- **The US should also provide assistance to other militias established by religious and minority groups in Iraq and Syria that are not susceptible to the appeals of Islamism.** These [may include](#) the Yazidis, the Assyrian Christians, and potentially other groups.
- **The US should continue to reach out to other Middle Eastern states that are our allies (i.e., [excepting Iran](#)) to provide ground troops.** Jordan may have already [offered](#) to do so.
- **Keep all options on the table.** By insisting that no US soldiers will be involved in combat roles, the President has divulged his strategy and has made it easier for IS to tailor theirs. All options, including the potential use of ground

troops, should be on the table. It is false to assume that US forces involved in combat roles will lead to a prolonged conflict. The US has special forces units that exist to deal with asymmetric threats such as the one posed by IS.

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Special thanks to Institute for the Study of War, US Central Command