

THE RISE AND FALL OF ISIS

- ❖ In 1979, the Soviet Union invades Afghanistan to defend the communist government against rebels.

Then a group of young men called **Mujahideen**, flock to join the rebels. They're backed by the US because US and Soviet is still in Cold War. Among them is a young saudi named **Osama bin Laden**. And a boy from Jordan names **Abu Musab Zarqawi**, that will later become an important key.

Mujahideen: those who engaged in holy struggle

- ❖ In 1989, the Soviet fails to implement a sympathetic regime in Afghanistan and agree to withdraw its troops. The fighters return home.

Osama bin Laden creates Al-Qaeda. Many observers believe that the group's primary goal remains to inspire, plan, and carry out attacks against countries in the West, or non-muslim in general that they saw as "Islam's enemies"

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda attacks US, now known as **9/11 attacks**. At the time, Bin Laden was in Afghanistan, protected by the Taliban, radical Islamist who ran Afghanistan, and refuses to hand him over to the US. The US then invades Afghanistan while Osama bin Laden flees to Pakistan. In the other hand, Abu Musab Zarqawi flees to a lawless corner of Iraq.

- ❖ In 2003, the **US invades Iraq** to topple Saddam Hussein's dictatorship who is a Sunni, and disband the Iraqi army

In Islam, there are many denominations. Sunni and Shia are two major denominations in Islam.

Majority of Iraqi is Shia and with the fall of Saddam Hussein, Shia comes back to take over Iraq. Thousand of Sunni Iraqi, angry and unemployed, join Zarqawi's Sunni insurgent group. Sunni from other countries saw this as repetition of what happened to Afghanistan, and again flood in to fight. This group then attacks Shia in Iraq, deliberately sparking a civil war in Iraq between **Sunni and Shia**

It is important to note that this is not the best representation of how Sunni and Shia relationship works. Both may have difference in seeing Islam but in one place, they often get along well. In this case, the extremist part of both groups make it more political than it should be.

❖ In 2004, al-Qaeda that has weakened then forming an alliance with Zarqawi's group, which becomes known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). But AQI has bigger ambition than the original al-Qaeda founded by Osama. **AQI wants to set up an Islamic state, so they banned music, smoking, creates a very strict rules that aren't even that strict in Al-Qur'an, and they began beheading civilians who disobey their rules.**

❖ Starting in 2006, AQI's brutality lost them the support of Iraqi Sunnis that once supported them, who partnered with US forces to help push AQI out of the country

In 2006, the US kill Abu Musab Zarqawi in an air strike. Abu Ayyub Al-Masri then step up as the new leader of AQI. But after all the previous events, Masri then changes their name with **Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)** and choose Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi as the leader. They're still a branch of al-Qaeda but with different name.

❖ In 2010, both Masri and Abu Omar died in US-Iraq operation. **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** then becomes the new leader of ISI.

❖ In 2011, US troop's withdraw in 2011 from Iraq that looks a little stable. In the same year, the **Arab Spring** spreads across the Middle East.

In Syria, dictator Bashar Al-Assad cracks down violently on protesters. The pro-democratic insurgent groups fire back that **lead Syria to a civil war.**

Many Islamist prisoners are released from Syrian prisons at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War (which many sources have suggested indicated a strategic attempt to strengthen jihadist factions over other rebels)

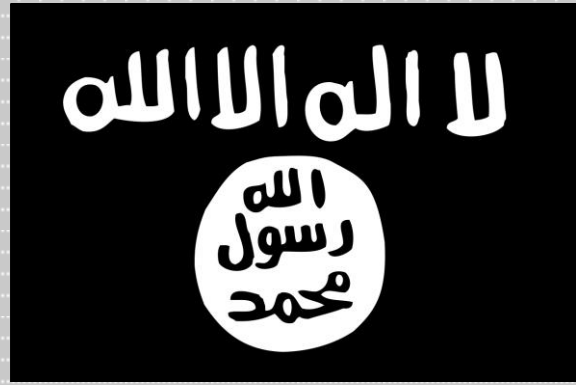
❖ In early 2012, Baghdadi sends a deputy to Syria to start a new al-Qaeda branch to fight alongside the rebels fighting the Syrian government named Nusra Front. ISI also attack various prisons in Iraq to release former jihadist and recruit new ones so they'll get stronger.

❖ In 2013, Baghdadi announces he is taking control of all al-Qaeda forces in Syria and Iraq with Nusra Front as part of them and **rebranding as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS** (sometimes also called ISIL with L stands for al-Sham).

Nusra Front rejects this since they're not agree with the way ISIS handle things, they try to presenting themselves as "moderate" in comparison. While they had the same aim of establishing sharia and a caliphate, they intended to implement it in a more gradual manner. They prefer approach by al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda agrees with Nusra Front and critics ISIS for killing and fighting other Sunni Muslims. Al-Qaeda then choose to **cut ties** with ISIS and Nusra Front becomes the only al-Qaeda branch in Syria.



A. al-Qaeda's Flag



B. ISIS' Flag

- ❖ In 2014, ISIS takes over Raqqa city in Syria and make it the capital of the caliphate in Syria.

ISIS also launches attacks to Iraq. The already weak Iraqi army and the tired Sunni of Shia-dominated and authoritarian government where they arresting Sunni politician and breaking up Sunni protest, give in to ISIS easily. Only a tiny percentage of Sunnis actively support ISIS' goals but they let ISIS take their city because they see ISIS as an alternative to a Shia government they despise.

Within days, ISIS controls a third of Iraq, a big part of Syria, oil resources, and a big amount of military equipments.

They make Mosul city the group's capital in Iraq, where they declare to revive the Islamic Caliphate, that set them different from other terrorist organization. Thousands of Muslims flock to join the group, either for personal or religious reason or brainwashed.

Caliphate ("Khilafat" in Arabic) was a semi-religious political system of governance in Islam, in which the territories of the Islamic empire and the people within were ruled by a supreme leader called Caliph ("Khalifa" in Arabic—meaning successor)

This is when the terror starts

In Iraq, ISIS killed thousand of Yazidi people and forces Yazidi's woman to be sex slave where they opens slave market and allow people to buy slave from there.

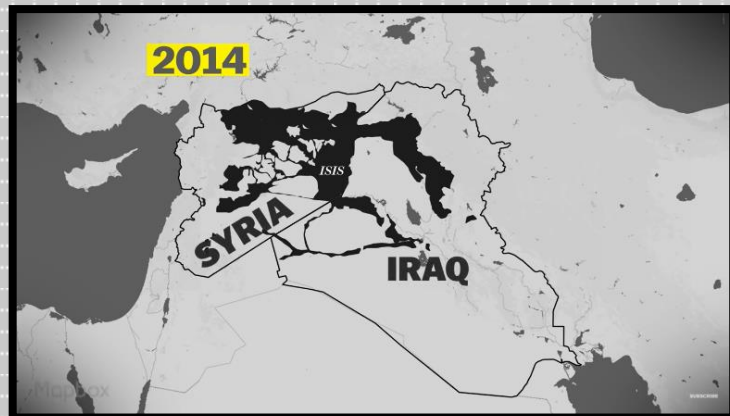
In Syria, ISIS behead their foreign hostages especially those from the West and murders the American journalist James Foley on camera.

They make public execution and leave the body there as warning for a week. They rain the children to be murderer, with real knives and guns, and punish those who don't want to practice but cutting their leg or arm. Recording their gruesome action and show it to the world, including where they burn alive a pilot from Jordan for passing their territory. They even execute people for things that even in Islamic law people won't be executed such eating during Ramadhan

The woman-only brigade who are responsible for policing and punishing other woman makes a very strict policy where they lash woman who has pattern in their abaya. In 2015 to 2016, ISIS starts to lose their territory. Iraq and Syria, both backed by US forces manage to reclaim their city.

- ❖ 2017 is when **ISIS lost Mosul city**, a symbolic loss for them. Syria regime backed by Iran and Russia push ISIS out of their country and reclaim their cities. Iraq's prime minister says 95% of ISIS territory has been reclaimed. This continues until 2018 where ISIS officially lose most of their territory.

ISIS' territory in 2014



ISIS' territory in 2017



- ❖ In 2019, **ISIS lost**. ISIS invades Kurdish territory, Baghouz city, close to the border of Iraq and Syria, sparking counter attacks from the better-organized Kurdish forces for four years. Kurdish people are said to be the first people that stand on their ground and defend their territory. This is where the Islamic State was defeated where ISIS fighters made their last stand and lost the most brutal, most aggressive, best-funded terrorist group in modern history.

Jihad means struggle of striving. Jihadist is the person who did jihad. In Al-Quran, this term appears in a different context. It used to be the name of people who went to war with the prophet against people/government that killed and tortured muslim just because they're a muslim. Nowadays, it could also mean a struggle someone should fight to become a better person. ISIS clearly doesn't fit the definition of a jihadist and the islam state they wanted to build is questionable since almost all of their action and rules are against the rules in Islam.

What happens after ISIS falls?

Problem number one is that these fighters are going to want to go home.

In 2014 when ISIS captured a huge swath of territory in Iraq and Syria, tens of thousands of foreign fighters came from all over the world to join the caliphate. According to UN estimates as of July 2016 there are upwards of 30,000 foreign fighters. These fighters were drawn to ISIS for all sorts of different reasons, but a big one was that it had actual territory and was supposed to be building a Caliphate based on its own extreme interpretation of Islamic law. ISIS propaganda pushed this narrative in flashy violent videos and magazines online encouraging people from all walks of life, not just fighters, to come and help build this glorious Islamic state. And the people who came were not just young men, they weren't just fighters, there were women children and even families who came as well. But now as ISIS territory shrinks and the state that they tried to build collapses, anyone who survives will have to find somewhere else to go... and that's a major problem because many of these people are now indoctrinated, they're now well-connected and they're capable of carrying out deadly terror attacks.

A similar dynamic actually happened back in the 1980s in Afghanistan. After the Soviets left a lot of these fighters dispersed to various different theaters of jihad including Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia, Sudan, and elsewhere. These fighters ended up forming a loose network of transnational jihadists, most of whom had links to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, thanks to their time fighting in Afghanistan. And some of them actually went on to carry out attacks against the West. The worry now is that ISIS fighters will do something similar but this time they might actually make it home to places like Europe and launch attacks there.

Problem number two is ISIS moving from a place to an idea.

ISIS goes from being the kind of place people go to fight to being the idea that people fight for. It's an idea that's compelling, it's an idea that its followers are willing to kill for and as followers are willing to die for. When they first came to power people thought it's a group that has its own territory, it wants to control that territory, but it's not al-Qaeda, it's not a terror group that wants to carry out attacks outside of its borders in the West. That was proven tragically wrong in October of 2015. In their online magazine they posted photos of the bomb that they said had been used to blow up the plane. And that was a reminder for what was about to come. A wave of ISIS attacks that have killed hundreds of people in London, in Paris, and in Nice. And have inspired attacks that have killed dozens in California and in Orlando. It's worth remembering that these are not always attacks carried out by people who

are part of ISIS. In many cases these are people who are radicalized in the countries where they lived and that's the danger of the idea. Take what happened in San Bernardino, California where a married couple killed 14 people. Or in Orlando where a single shooter killed 49 people. In both cases ISIS claimed responsibility but in both cases there is no connection between those people and Isis. They got radicalized over the Internet.

Isis has known that propaganda matters and ISIS is really good at it. It has people all over the world who use English language Arabic language to have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts that are full of incredibly slickly produced videos. They're really compelling and if you're someone predisposed to have that worldview, they can push you over the edge from just thinking that's an idea worth killing for, to actually killing for it. ISIS takes it so seriously that it refers to these people as media operatives and says those media peratives are carrying out a form of martyrdom akin to killing, to literally killing for the cause. And at the end of the day that's the hardest thing about ISIS. It can be beaten on the ground in Iraq and Syria. It is being beaten on the ground in Iraq and Syria, but it's going from being a place to an idea. And it is impossible, impossible to defeat an idea.

Sources:

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