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## ISIS

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. The names are well known. They all refer to ISIS, the infamous terrorist organization whose every movement is followed by the world media. However, although everyone knows the ISIS of today, comparatively few know it's history.

ISIS began not as a single terrorist cell, but a collection of disparate groups, each already notorious for cruel Jihadist actions in the Middle East. Most notably among these six groups was Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, a subset of the al-Qaeda. They were led by the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jihadist killed by a US airstrike in Iraq. Seeking strength in numbers to resist NATO forces, these Sunni groups united under the banner of IS, still closely related to the al-Qaeda.

Great success did not come to these zealots at first, as joint Iraqi-US operations in 2007-2008 resulted in numerous successful eliminations of IS and al-Qaeda leaders. According to a single international press conference, 34 of 42 top IS leaders had been killed, including the first chairman, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. Total annihilation looked near at hand for the terrorists of Iraq.

Families of NATO soldiers in Iraq were not the only ones to rejoice in the mass withdrawal from the country. IS leaders, seeing their old haunts left empty, invaded once more, led this time by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his chief lieutenant, ex-colonel Samir al-Khlifawi. By July 2012, IS had reclaimed much of their old territory, and were ready for another assault. Numerous IS members broke off from the main

organization to take up the al-Nusra front against the Assad regime of Syria, but these fighters were soon disavowed by the main IS leaders. By this point, IS's motives had become clear to most: total opposition to sharia law and the establishment of a Sunni Islamic state.

By 2014, al-Baghdadi had taken the title of caliph, to denote his growing power within the realm of Sunni extremism. In October of that year, IS insurgents had struck deep into Iraq, almost capturing Baghdad. Fortunately, IS's attempt to spread into Afghanistan failed swiftly, almost entirely due to military actions undertaken by the Taliban and US airstrikes. However, their influence found its way into Africa, when the infamous terrorist group Boko Haran pledged the entirety of its territory to al-Baghdadi.

As of 2015, no ground-based operations have been undertaken against IS by NATO countries. However, numerous airstrikes have been directed against IS targets, and a massive coalition arming program has begun to eliminate the IS threat, with countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and Turkey hoping to contribute to the military power. President Obama has stated his intention to assault IS positions in Iraq to push them out of the country.

In truth, no true conclusion has been reached on what level of military action should be taken against the insurgents, with suggestions ranging from pinpoint strikes via unmanned drone ordnance to all-out warfare with complete cooperation among the coalition nations. Obviously, each solution poses its own quandaries and benefits. Should we commit only to further drone strikes and small defensive raids, IS will likely retain control of their Iraqi holdings, and potentially fortify locations until direct

assaults are no longer deemed affordable. However, this would likely result in only a very few, if any, coalition deaths, while a ground war would inevitably follow the path set by the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. This asymmetrical "Terrorist Hunt" warfare has become extremely grounded in the minds of citizens and soldiers across the free world, who know the stories of hidden terrorist cells conducted guerilla strikes upon the unknowing western "occupiers". Additionally, this full-scale war would require numerous resources, which many nations do not have the capacity to produce and maintain in a reasonable length of time, save the United States, United Kingdom, and other heavy-hitting coalition nations. For this reason, much of the burden of fighting would likely be placed upon the larger nations' shoulders. Another problem presents itself in the total lack of a free Iraqi defense force in the areas held by IS. In Afghanistan, the local defense forces conduct the majority of wartime tasks, as shown by the casualty numbers compared between the various coalition forces involved (the Afghan National Security Force has experienced almost 13 times more combat-related deaths than US forces, and 57 times more than the UK). Any and all fighting would have to be done by the coalition forces.

The threat of IS will not die out overnight. Currently, insurgents hold a territory roughly the size of Pennsylvania, and they continue to add more land to it, butchering as they go. The NATO coalition will respond to this threat, though the exact level of this response is still in contention.