

For decades, the Middle East has been a hotbed of persistent, complicated wars, but ISIS has introduced the world to a new breed of evil that even al-Qaeda deems excessive.

So, how did a group like this come to be?

Salafi Jihadism, a hardline doctrine preached by radicals claiming to speak for all Muslims, will eventually give rise to ISIS. Although the ideology's origins can be traced back to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement of the 1950s, the political repression and incarceration meted out to its adherents over the following decades means that today's jihadis show little similarity to their moderate forefathers. Many people wanted to change through democratic methods in the 1950s, but today's insurgents solely use violence.

The purpose of these chapters is to explain why this alarming transformation evolved.

What you'll learn in these chapters are:

- how one man's captivity became the world's most feared terrorist organization.
- Why has terrorism increased after the US-led invasion of Iraq; and,
- The Syrian Civil War was the missing piece of the puzzle that allowed ISIS to form.

Chapter 1 - The origins of ISIS may be traced back to the 1999 release of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi from a Jordanian jail.

Are you familiar with the name Zarqawi? This al-Qaeda commander had a significant impact on recent history.

He was born in the Jordanian city of Zarqa in 1966, giving him the moniker "al-Zarqawi," or "the Zarqawi." After a long and winding road that began in the mid-1990s, he went on to manage a brutal terrorist network that would eventually become ISIS. Here's how it goes:

Zarqawi had traveled to Afghanistan earlier in the decade to join the "holy jihad" against the Soviet-installed pro-Moscow government. After his arrival to Jordan, he was detained on March 29, 1994, and imprisoned in al-Jafr jail alongside 12 other men who had been caught in possession of illicit weapons that they planned to use in a terrorist assault against an Israeli outpost. They intended to avenge the murder of 20 Muslims by a Jewish fanatic on February 25, that same year.

Prison, on the other hand, did little to undermine Zarqawi's or his fellow Islamist convicts' commitment. Rather than spending time in prison among normal criminals, the gang studied the Koran, deepening their hate for people they considered as Allah's enemies, notably the US and Israel.

And after that, in 1999, Jordan's King Abdullah II freed Zarqawi and many of his associates, making him the riskiest detainee in al-Jafr at the time. King Hussein had died, and his son, Abdullah, was hell-bent on mending the kingdom's strained ties with multiple political factions.

It was past time to appease the Islamists, so he presented them with a reward: the release of 16 Muslim Brotherhood militants who had been imprisoned. Zarqawi had become a father figure to many around him while in prison, and the king had no idea. This leadership paid off when Zarqawi was released, as he was surrounded by a group of devoted followers who would blindly obey his every command.

Chapter 2 - After being released from prison, Zarqawi established a network of terrorist training camps.

Six months after his release, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi entered the Queen Alia International Airport's departures area, where he was instantly accosted by Jordanian intelligence personnel.

Zarqawi's lying was evident when he said he was only on his way to breed honeybees in Pakistan's mountains, but the authorities had no evidence against him and had no choice but to let him go. In reality, he was fleeing to Afghanistan, where he would be put at the head of a terrorist training camp by al-Qaeda.

Zarqawi proceeded to see Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda, as soon as he arrived. Bin Laden first declined to meet with Zarqawi, doubting his sincerity. He ultimately realized that the newcomer may assist al-Qaeda to expand its influence.

He agreed to let Zarqawi conduct a training camp for Jordanian Islamist volunteers, with al-Qaeda covering the initial costs and overseeing Zarqawi's achievements from afar.

When US forces entered Afghanistan in 2001, however, everything changed. Zarqawi's soldiers were in desperate need of a safe refuge, and the northeastern Iraqi highlands were the ideal location. The training camp relocated quickly.

In this new country, Zarqawi set about establishing a terrorist network. Soon later, in 2002, the then-unknown Zarqawi was implicated in the killing of American ambassador Laurence Foley in Amman, Jordan, putting him on the radar of senior Bush administration officials.

Zarqawi has been busy at work in the Middle East despite his lack of notice in the West. He had created a small Islamic theocracy by joining forces with the Iraqi terrorist organization Ansar al-Islam.

The US knew exactly where he was at the time, and CIA operatives suggested attacking his terror camp. However, the Bush administration, which was already planning a confrontation

with Iraq, was concerned that an early attack might kick things off before they were ready. They missed upon a fantastic chance because of their hesitancy.

Chapter 3 - As Iraq fell into turmoil, Zarqawi took advantage of the situation.

When the US invasion of Iraq began in 2003, there was still no proof of the danger that had prompted the invasion. Despite months of searching, no weapons of mass destruction were discovered, and the United States was unable to establish any links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda militants.

Despite this, President Bush proclaimed victory in May 2003, only two months into the war. While the US looked to be confident in its ability to succeed, it was unable to sustain stability in Iraq.

A series of explosions hit the nation shortly after the invasion. The first, on August 7, 2003, a vehicle bombing hit the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, killing 17 people. Another explosive rocked the UN building in Baghdad twelve days later. This was the bloodiest attack on a UN facility in history, with 22 people killed, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN mission's chief. All of the evidence is linked to Zarqawi's terrorist network, Ansar al-Islam.

But how did the gang cause such a ruckus?

Zarqawi had evolved his little group into a strong and well-developed terrorist network at this stage. Ironically, while the US lacked substantial proof to back up its invasion, it was clear that post-war Iraq was now housing terrorists. The Bush administration ultimately recognized in late 2003 that Iraq now had many more al-Qaeda-style terror groups than it did before the war.

The country was on the verge of chaos and disorder, which provided Zarqawi with the freedom to carry out his mission and a slew of powerful allies to back him up. In reality, his organization was warmly greeted by thousands of Iraqis who had been traumatized by the war, and it even drew support from around the Muslim world. Former captains and sergeants from Saddam Hussein's army joined the terrorist network because it was so enticing.

In little than a year, Zarqawi had developed a huge terror network. He could now carry out large-scale attacks one after the other.

Chapter 4 - Despite disagreements, Zarqawi partnered with al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Zarqawi sat down in January 2004 to draft a letter to Osama bin Laden, requesting a favor. Zarqawi's organization had been growing and had previously planned big operations in Iraq,

but it could inflict even more harm if it could acquire the resources and the support of al-Qaeda.

Zarqawi had thought that bin Laden would rush at the chance, but the commander was once again hesitant. Zarqawi's heinous murders of Arabs and innocent bystanders had been too much for the al-Qaeda founder.

Despite this, Zarqawi continued to carry out brutal terrorist acts across Iraq. He was responsible for the brutal death of American radio technician Nicholas Evan Berg in 2004.

Berg was in Iraq to start a business repairing radio towers. Zarqawi's men abducted him before he could go too far. On May 8, a military patrol discovered something dangling from a motorway bridge. The patrol realized they were gazing at a human torso on the end of a rope as they neared. It was Berg, who was suspended above his severed head.

A video of Zarqawi personally decapitating the prisoner was published two days after the discovery. Berg was assassinated because he was an American, it was made obvious. The video went viral, and Zarqawi became known as the "sheik of the slaughterers."

This wasn't a unique instance; Zarqawi's gang was responsible for scores of killings, as well as suicide bombs that murdered both foreigners and Arabs.

Al-Qaeda has now partnered up with Zarqawi to form al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). What caused bin Laden's change of heart?

Bin Laden, on the other hand, disliked Zarqawi. Zarqawi, on the other hand, was providing bin Laden with a much-needed "victory" three years after the 9/11 atrocities. Bin Laden gave his formal consent for collaboration with Zarqawi in an audiotape aired on Arab media outlets, so founding the new organization.

Chapter 5 - Zarqawi's brutality went too far, and he was assassinated.

For the first time in history, Iraq elected a National Assembly on January 30, 2005. Zarqawi, predictably, blasted the election as a conspiracy with the United States of America, accusing all participants of being sinners.

He made it a point to disrupt the polls. Zarqawi's forces killed at least 44 people in a series of assaults targeting Sunni political candidates and polling centers in Sunni regions. Zarqawi got what he wanted in the end; the Sunnis were too afraid to vote, and the election was thrown out.

Zarqawi's adversaries grew in number as a result of his proclivity for committing brutal crimes against both foreigners and Muslims. Ordinary Muslims were appalled by the group's

violent tactics, and Iraqi civilians reported the terrorist network's operations to police authorities on a daily basis.

As a result, by the fall of 2005, US special forces under the direction of General McChrystal were tearing apart Zarqawi's command structure. Hundreds of jihadist lieutenants were killed or imprisoned in the process.

However, Zarqawi's most egregious miscalculation was his attack on three Jordanian hotels favored by international officials. On November 9, 2005, 60 individuals were killed in suicide attacks, including 38 Arab wedding guests. Jordan's determination was strengthened by the severity of the killing, and the country grew resolute in its struggle against ISIS.

Zarqawi was ultimately apprehended, thanks in part to the increasing pressure. The information that clinched the deal came from a high-ranking Zarqawi insider arrested by Jordanian intelligence. Jordan learned that Zarqawi had a religious advisor, Sheikh Abd al-Rahman, an Iraqi imam residing in Baghdad, during his interrogation. The couple would meet once a week, so all the US soldiers had to do was find the imam and track his travels.

When American fighter planes hit Zarqawi's safe home on June 7, 2006, this meticulous research paid off. Shortly after US ground soldiers got on the area, the terrorist commander was seriously hurt and killed.

Chapter 6 - As Syria crumbled in 2011, Zarqawi's depleted terrorist group found itself in a precarious position.

At first, it appeared that Syria would be immune to the Arab Spring upheavals that swept over North Africa and the Middle East in 2010. But, in 2011, as tragedy exploded in Syria, that illusion vanished.

Bashar al-Assad, the country's ruler, refused to listen to cries for reform and instead retaliated violently, murdering nonviolent protestors. Assad refused to step down and instead allowed a full-fledged civil war to erupt; anarchy was unavoidable, and the Syrian state's security institutions began to crumble one by one.

Zarqawi's supporters, understandably, saw an opportunity to seize on another weak country. It was a once-in-a-lifetime chance for them. The once-dominant terror group – now called the Islamic State of Iraq or ISI – was becoming obsolete five years after its leader's death.

The group had been decimated by US commandos, who had killed and captured a large number of terrorists. As a result, ISI was short on resources, had few fighters, and had no cover. They discovered answers to all of these issues in Syria.

Syria resembled Iraq nine years prior in that it was a lawless country with few impediments to the unrestricted flow of weapons and fighters. Not only that, but the terrorist organization had a new, powerful leader in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who stood in sharp contrast to Zarqawi.

Unlike his predecessor, Baghdadi was not a brutal tyrant. He was a well-educated Islamic scholar and college lecturer who was able to use Sharia law to justify horrific acts of terror on religious grounds.

He was from Iraq's al-Badri tribe, which claimed to be descended directly from the Prophet Muhammad. Baghdadi's extensive skills made him an ideal candidate for the job of the caliph, a crucial symbolic asset for a group seeking to establish an Islamic state.

Chapter 7 - The terrorist group expanded into a full-fledged army, and Islamic State was officially established in 2013.

Thousands of pious Muslims from the Sunni Arab nations of the Persian Gulf and North Africa placed their lives on the line for jihadists fighting the Syrian tyrant Assad in 2012. Thousands of sympathetic Arabs gave money and supplies, while Arab nations secretly donated weaponry to the cause.

ISI, on the other hand, was expanding. Not just Arab Muslims, but radicalized Muslims from all over the world invaded Syria from Turkey to join ISI and its Syrian offshoot, fueled by a regular inflow of money and weapons. Even thousands of young Muslim guys from Western Europe were making the voyage.

As a result, Baghdadi possessed the best-armed and best-trained forces in the fighting by 2013. His group would soon be able to defeat four Iraqi army divisions and take a third of the country's territory.

The creation of ISIS became formal as the group's influence rose rapidly. Baghdadi designated this new group as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, on April 9, 2013, with the final word alluding to the "Levant," or eastern Mediterranean regions stretching from Turkey to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.

The new organization resembled a nation-state government, with departments for social media, logistics, finance, training, and recruiting, among other things. It wasn't long before ISIS designated Raqqa, Syria, as its new capital, and on July 4, 2014, the organization announced its ambition to build a global caliphate under the name Islamic State.

Baghdadi's aspirations to reign over restricted Middle Eastern territory had grown considerably, and by late 2014, ISIS had taken control of vast swaths of land in both Iraq and Syria. They were in a great position to continue their growth push. Baghdadi's aspirations to govern over restricted Middle Eastern territory had grown considerably, and by late 2014,

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Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS by Joby Warrick Book Review

After decades of instability and warfare in the Middle East, the notorious terrorist group ISIS was formed. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a single guy, is responsible for the founding of this infamous terror organization.

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