ISIL, Syria and the Explosive Middle East

Handouts

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Acronyms and Definitions

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: present leader of ISIL
Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: Original leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and Islamic State (IS). Killed by military action in Iraq in 2006.
AQ – Al-Qaeda
AQI – Al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQAP – Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
Aynan al-Zawahiri: present leader of Al-Qaeda headquarters. Was deputy to Osama Bin Laden
Bath Party/Baathists: A socialist political party founded in Syria that became the ruling party of Iraq under Sadam Hussein in 1966
Caliphate: An area containing an Islamic steward known as a caliph – a person considered a religious successor to Muhammad
Daesh: A derogatory Arabic language acronym for ISIL
Hadith: various reports describing the words, actions, or habits of Muhammad. Different branches/sects of Islam refer to different collections of hadith.
Haider al-Abadi: Prime minister of Iraq from 2014 to present. Considered a moderate Shia following the controversial term of Nouri al-Maliki
Imam Mahdi: The ultimate Islamic savior of humankind who is to emerge with Jesus Christ in order to fulfill their mission of bringing peace to the world.
IDF – Iraq Defense Force
IS – Islamic State
ISI – Islamic State in Iraq
ISIL - Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
ISIS – Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
Levant: Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea
Mahdi Army: Originally an Iraq Shia armed group created by the Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in June 2003, disbanded in 2008, but rose again.
Muqtada al-Sadr: Leader of a Shia political party in Iraq, and one of the most influential religious and popular figures in Iraq. Leader of Mahdi Army.
Nouri al-Maliki: Prime minister of Iraq from 2006 to 2014. Shiite. Maliki’s actions led to Kurdish nationalism, Sunni insurgence and rise of ISIS
Osama Bin Laden: Leader of Al-Qaeda until his death in May 2011
Paul Bremmer: Led the occupational authority of Iraq after the invasion by the U.S., from May 11, 2003 until June 28, 2004
Quran: Central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God through Muhammad
Sadam Hussein: Dictator and fifth President of Iraq, serving from 16 July 1979 until 9 April 2003
Safavid dynasty: 1501-1722 controlled all modern Iran and established center of Shia Islam
Sayyed Qutb: Egyptian leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s; plotted assassination of Gamal Abdel Nasser
Sunni: Denomination of Islam which holds that the Islamic prophet Muhammad’s first Caliph was father-in-law Abu Bakr
Shia: Denomination of Islam which holds that Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor (Caliph)
Yazidi: An ethnically Kurdish religious community, indigenous to northern Iraq; a distinct and independent community with its own unique culture.
This is a Story About

• Empires torn apart
• Dictators
• Repression
• Brutality
• Economies in crisis
• Oil, oil, oil
• Starvation
• Frustration
• Best Intentions
• Religious Civil Wars
• Middle East Upheavals
• Religious perversion gone very bad
Flash Points Around the Middle East

- Iran – Supporting Shia interests in Gaza, Iraq, Syria, Yemen. Major threat to Saudi Arabia. U.S. backed out of Iran nuclear deal, and invoking major sanctions. Other signatories not aligned with U.S. back-out, could be sanctioned.
- Iraq – Mosul freed. Who will pay to rebuild? Will it become the center of an insurgency? Sunni vs Shia continues plus Kurds? Iraq government in tatters with battle between Shia majority and Sunni minority. 5200 U.S. in country.
- Turkey – Politics a mess. What is Erdogan up to? Wants to remain in NATO but courts Putin. Will he live with Kurds in northern Syria? Supposedly talked Trump into removing all troops in 30 days, but later identified conditions and time.
- Lebanon – Multi ethnic hub of international activity, historical cross roads of the Middle East. Supporting over 675,000 Syrian refugees. Allows Hezbollah presence in the Shia dominated south. Iran supports Hezbollah and provides rockets.
- Jordan – Major harbinger of Syrian and Iraq refugees. Having their own economic problems.
- Israel – Increased risk of new attacks from Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria. U.S. move of embassy to Jerusalem further angered Palestinians. No one or two state peace solutions in hand. Iranians in Syria considered a major threat of long range rockets and rocket supply to Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon. Israel air strikes increasing in Syria with recent attack blamed to accidental Syrian shoot down of Russian surveillance and EW aircraft.
- Palestine – Continued Israeli expansion/settlements in West Bank. Continued sporadic battles at Gaza border.
- Gaza – Extremely bad economy fueling attacks. Another war with possible Hezbollah support from Lebanon?
- Egypt – Living under military control after 2014 election when head of armed forces, General el-Sisi, took over the government from Muslim brotherhood. Supports Israel to shut weapon traffic through Sinai peninsula to Palestinians in Gaza.
- Saudi Arabia – Major U.S. weapons buyer and ally. Saudi (Sunni) vs Iran (Shia). Saudi vs Yemen. Iran supporting Yemen. New DPM (Mohammed Bin Salman) modernizing country. But Post reporter, critical of MBS, may have been assassinated by Saudi hit squad directed by MBS. Trump not willing to punish Saudi Arabia, yet.
- Yemen – Saudi Arabia still at war with Houthi (Shia’s). Original U.S. presence was against AQAP, which are still active. U.S. supplying weapons, tanking and intel to Saudi’s. Humanitarian disaster growing.
- Afghanistan – 17th anniversary of U.S. war on terror in Afghanistan 6 Oct 2018. Taliban resurgence. IS establishing a strong presence along with remaining AQ. 7,000 of 14,000 troops to be withdrawn.
- Pakistan – Still stronghold for multiple terrorist organizations and bolt hole for Afghan terrorists on Eastern border.
- East Africa – AQ resurgence in areas of Sudan and Somalia.
- West Africa, Niger/Mali – Four U.S. Army special forces troops killed in Niger by terrorists. Widening expanse of war against terrorism without authorization?