

ISIS: THE HEART OF TERROR

EUGENE BACH



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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ISIS, THE HEART OF TERROR:
The Unexpected Response Bringing Hope for Peace

ISBN: 978-1-62911-386-9
eBook ISBN: 978-1-62911-387-6
Printed in the United States of America
© 2015 by Eugene Bach

Whitaker House
1030 Hunt Valley Circle
New Kensington, PA 15068
www.whitakerhouse.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data (Pending)

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Preface

Unlike other books about ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), this work is written from the viewpoint of the Chinese missionary movement known as “Back to Jerusalem.” The Chinese underground church has a vision to take the gospel message to Iraq and Syria, and it is crossing paths with ISIS.¹ I am not an expert on ISIS; neither am I an expert on the situation in the Middle East. But I have worked with the underground church in China for more than fifteen years.

I also spend a lot of my time working in moderate Muslim countries like Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia. I often find myself in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan. I have spent time on the ground in Iraq and Syria. I have even taken some time to go skiing with Muslim friends in the mountains of Iran. Unlike most foreigners traveling in those countries, I am not insulated from the local population by Western hotel accommodations and hot spots that act as tourist bubbles, allowing one to observe the locals merely from a distance. Being involved with grassroots missions has thrown me into the fires of cultural immersion of every country where we work.

Therefore, more than just evaluating and describing the leadership and tactics of the infamous terror group known as ISIS,

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this book will examine the dark heart of Islamic jihadists and what Christians can do in response to their war. It will show how you can help to alleviate one of the largest man-made humanitarian disasters in the world today.

In *ISIS, The Heart of Terror*, you will learn what ISIS is, how it came into being, and what its vision for the future includes. You will read horror stories about ISIS and its goal of establishing an Islamic state through jihad. You will read testimonies from persecuted Christians who have fled their homes, lost their family members, and are now on the run from ISIS. You will also hear from the family of a pastor who, at the time of this writing, is imprisoned in Iran, and whom ISIS has issued an order to kill.

In these pages, you will learn about the unique way God is moving among Chinese missionaries to provide Christian materials in Iraq and Syria, and, for the first time, to share the gospel with displaced minorities who previously had been largely unreachable. These exclusive chapters will take you undercover to see how Chinese missionaries, rather than living in fear of ISIS, plan to use cutting-edge technology to “target” ISIS members with the gospel of Jesus Christ! “Are the members of ISIS any different from the apostle Paul?” asked one Chinese pastor who is involved in the outreach operation. “Didn’t Jesus die for them, as well?”

Can the terror tactics of ISIS be stopped? Can missionaries help communities that have been displaced by ISIS, and share the gospel message with unreached people groups that have never before been accessible? Can underground Chinese missionaries really change the hearts of ISIS members with the good news of Jesus Christ?

The future peace and stability of Israel, the presence of Christianity in the Middle East, and the current way of life for people living in the Western world may well rest on how we respond to the present crisis created by ISIS.

ONE

The Western World Meets ISIS

The startling video that was shown first on YouTube and then quickly spread to other Internet sites in August 2014 reminded many people of that dreadful day, September 11, 2001.

It was the video that few really wanted to see or to believe. American journalist James Foley was on his knees in the desert sand wearing an orange jumpsuit and facing a camera. A masked, black-clad Muslim jihadist stood behind him. "I call on my friends, family, and loved ones to rise up against my real killers, the U.S. government," Foley said in a scripted voice as he looked into the camera.

James Foley was gaunt and bald, his head shaven. His orange jumpsuit was a replica of those worn by prisoners in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Sweat glistened on his forehead as he continued speaking, pausing between phrases and sentences. "I wish I had more time. I wish I could have had the hope of...seeing my family once again. I guess, all in all, I wish I wasn't American."² Those were his last known words.

Many people watched the video in shock. They all knew what was coming, but few expected it to actually happen. The black-clad

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Muslim jihadist who stood behind Foley, holding on to his orange shirt, became commonly known as “Jihadi John.”

Unfortunately, Foley was not being videotaped for the purpose of extracting a ransom from his family or his government. The Muslim jihadists were not demanding money. Foley was being used solely as a prop to get the world’s attention and to help deliver a message of doom.

Jihadi John was dressed in a robe and a mask (reminiscent of a sloppy Japanese ninja), an outfit that is now synonymous with terrorist fighters. He stood in front of the camera with his feet shoulder-width apart, wearing tan, military-issued desert boots and a brown leather shoulder holster. He spoke calmly in an accent that one might hear in any Middle Eastern community in London today—not exactly British, not exactly Middle Eastern.

Jihadi John pointed his knife squarely at the camera and said,

...any aggression toward the Islamic State is an aggression towards Muslims from all walks of life who have accepted the Islamic caliphate as their leadership. So any attempt by you, Obama, to deny the Muslims their rights of living in safety under the Islamic caliphate will result in the bloodshed of your people.³

Then he walked behind Foley, whose face was as tense as steel.

The captive tightly shut his eyes, as if to mentally brace himself for what was about to happen. Who knows how many times he had gone through mock killings before this day? (Like James Foley, Amanda Lindhout was a journalist who was kidnapped by Islamic jihadists. She was held captive for fifteen months. In her autobiography, *A House in the Sky: A Memoir*, she describes the mock executions she was subjected to on a regular basis. They were demoralizing and took away any sense of security.)

Foley's body was erect and stiff. Jihadi John calmly reached around Foley's head and put his right hand over his mouth. The jihadist clinched his fingers under James's chin, gripped his nose area with his thumb, and held his palm over his mouth to muffle any screams. With his left hand, Jihadi John retrieved his knife and held it firmly to Foley's throat; then he began to crudely saw back and forth into the jugular. James's lips formed an o as he took one last breath.

Seconds later, Foley's body was shown lying on the desert sand, head detached and resting on the small of his back. A successful young American journalist who, only recently, had been full of life was now lifeless and covered in blood.

YouTube was slow to remove the gruesome video. Many people, myself included, had already seen the video before it was taken down. The problem was that the video could not be unseen. The gruesome images could not be erased from people's minds. And—even worse—the killing of James Foley could never be undone.

The horrifying act that many people had a hard time processing was shared on social media. Suddenly, instead of the regular postings of recipes and family vacation photos, Facebook was full of people's reactions to the beheading of James Foley.

The Middle Eastern quandary of radical Islam and violence was once again confronting the Western world—and it was at the gates of the Western church. The feelings of intimidation that arose in many Americans after watching the beheading of a fellow countryman hit closer to home than most wanted to acknowledge.

What Is ISIS?

To many people, Jihadi John represents a new threat from a relatively unknown group called ISIS. The graphic video prompted

many to ask, for the first time, “What is ISIS?” “Where did it come from?” and “What does it want?”

If I were to ask a Christian in Iraq who had fled from his home for fear of his life what ISIS is, his answer would be much different from that of a tourist in Paris. If I were to ask someone on a subway in downtown Manhattan what ISIS is, the passenger would answer much differently than would a typical passenger riding the Cross-Harbour ferry in Hong Kong.

“Who is ISIS?” asked a friendly lady sitting beside me on a flight from Baton Rouge to Dallas in September 2014. She had been peeking over my shoulder as I wrote notes for this book. She worked for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States, and she had just come from a FEMA seminar called “Preparing Before Disaster.”

“I have heard of ISIS on the news, and now everyone is talking about them, but I really don’t understand who they are,” she said as she pointed to the screen on my computer. “They scare me, which is silly, because I don’t even know who they are.”

Similar words are echoed in many homes throughout the Western world today, indicating ISIS’s successful propaganda campaign.

It seems as if the ISIS threat should be worlds away, in places that are never mentioned on the news. But the terror organization is now a common concern for everyone. The world is not ready for the ISIS threat—but it has arrived. Cities like Mosul in Iraq and Abu Kamal in Syria may not be places many tourists visit or would ever care to visit, but cities like London, Paris, New York, and Sydney are, and they are now on the ISIS list of targets.

Some of the information presented in this book might initially come across as sensationalistic or even as fearmongering;

but, before you jump to either of those conclusions, consider the following points, which we will discuss in more detail later:

- ✦ ISIS is more extreme and brutal than al-Qaeda, as hard as that might be to believe. In fact, ISIS is so brutal that al-Qaeda has tried to distance itself from it. Imagine that for a moment. Osama bin Laden actually felt that the tactics ISIS used were too extreme.
- ✦ ISIS is the wealthiest terrorist group in the history of the world. Never before has a terrorist organization had access to so many resources. ISIS controls many large oil and gas fields, and it has the expertise and security needed to transport and sell both the oil and the gas.
- ✦ ISIS controls a vast military that has both training and experience. It has been able to obtain much of its firepower and equipment from conquered military units in both Syria and Iraq. Much of the equipment it has acquired is from the U.S. military.
- ✦ ISIS is one of the fiercest enemies the world has ever faced. Members of ISIS have been hardened over the years and have acquired much experience in previous battles against the United States, Syria, and Iraq. Most terrorist groups attack only soft targets, such as unarmed communities, children, schools, bus stops, and so forth; but ISIS attacks both soft and hard targets, such as militaries.
- ✦ ISIS is seeking to obtain nuclear material that can be weaponized. If successful, it will be the first terrorist group to obtain nuclear capabilities while having a budget large enough to employ it.
- ✦ ISIS has recruited many foreign fighters from Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. ISIS fighters are able to take the battle from the fields of Syria and Iraq to

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Western soil. Al-Qaeda members, who are forced to obtain visas and are often from countries that are already on watch lists, do not have this ability.

As of the writing of this book, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, ISIS controls territory in both northern and eastern Syria and western Iraq that amounts to 12,000 square miles of contiguous area, roughly the size of Belgium.⁴

Unlike al-Qaeda, which does not have a capital city, a headquarters, or an official governing structure for overseeing communities, ISIS has a capital with buildings and is able to provide public services. Many of the buildings that ISIS uses as governing posts are those of former churches that they have taken over and painted black. In many ways, ISIS has indeed become an Islamic state. It has been able to carve out a small piece of land that it runs as an independent region.

This terrorist organization already enforces dress codes for women, holds court trials for criminals, and sets rules for schools. Enforcement officers patrol the streets and ensure Islamic order. In fact, in many of the schools, ISIS has even set up the curriculum for the students. "The Islamic State's Caliphate has now established a single economic system and currency for all territories under its control."⁵ Its army has taken over Mosul, one of Iraq's largest cities, and it is also on the border of Baghdad.

Those who are part of ISIS are asking the world to give them "freedom," or, essentially, to leave them alone so that they can take over both Syria and Iraq and establish a society under the Islamic caliphate.⁶ Eventually, after conquering the Middle East, ISIS will consolidate its strength and immediately turn its focus on other countries, including those in the West.

ISIS is not an organization of competing ideas. It is made up of single-minded radicals who insist that they are right, and

who will use death to silence anyone who disagrees. Again, ISIS is possibly the most brutal terrorist organization the world has ever seen. Its growth is alarming, and the magnitude and breadth of its success have caught many world leaders by surprise, including President Barack Obama.

The U.S. president grossly underestimated the jihadist group. For example, speaking of ISIS in January 2014 during an interview with the *New Yorker*, Obama said, “The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn’t make them Kobe Bryant.”⁷ Later that year, he seemed to better understand the threat, but addressing it was another matter. In a speech about ISIS that he delivered on September 4, 2014, he said, “We do not have a strategy yet.”⁸

He was not the only person to be caught by surprise. Because of the rapid growth of ISIS and most people’s lack of knowledge regarding the organization, many people find themselves scrambling for information about a terror group that is now threatening their lives.

To get an idea of the group’s swift growth, consider the following: In the early months of 2014, more British citizens joined the ranks of ISIS than joined the British Army.⁹

The brutality of ISIS is beyond anything that most people can imagine, and its members wield that violence against Christians, Jews, Kurds, Yazidis, and even fellow Muslims, such as the Shiites, who do not agree with fundamentalist Sunni Islam.

In both Syria and Iraq, ISIS has attacked tens of thousands of Christians and executed their leaders. Many of these leaders were marched out to dig the very trenches they were later buried in. Some leaders were even crucified on crosses. Not even children are immune to these attacks. Some of them have been beheaded; others have been sold as slaves.

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The Christians whom ISIS does not immediately kill are given the choice of one of three chilling ultimatums: convert to Islam, pay *jizya*—an Islamic tax imposed on non-Muslims—or die. To ensure efficiency, ISIS members walk through towns and mark Christian homes with the Arabic letter *n*, ن, signifying “Nazarene,” which they consider a pejorative term for Christians.

Moreover, while terrorist organizations like Hamas and al-Qaeda may not be working directly with ISIS, they still target Israel and the Western Christian world. Even though these three organizations are separate, it would be a mistake to think of their efforts and vision as different from one another. They are unified in their faith, their hatred, and their terror tactics.

ISIS, along with Hamas and al-Qaeda, desires to wage jihad until Israel is destroyed and a caliphate is established. From the perspective of ISIS, these goals are nonnegotiable; a peaceful compromise does not exist, and peaceful coexistence with Israel is not an option.

ISIS now attempts to annihilate huge populations of people groups, and the momentum is in their favor.

After the Holocaust, the world vowed that it would never again fail to take action to prevent genocide. Recently, I walked through the killing fields of Cambodia with my youngest son. As we gazed upon the “killing tree”—where hundreds, if not thousands, of babies were killed—and walked through the mass grave site of so many Cambodian Christians, whose bone fragments are still scattered all around, I could not help but think that, in every generation, some person and/or organization arises that becomes a killing force in the world. To counter this threat, every generation must have a group of Christian believers who will not accept this situation and will arise and put a stop to it.

ISIS must be stopped, and, God willing, it will be stopped; but the question my generation will have to answer to my young son’s generation is, “Who stopped ISIS?”

The Radicalization of ISIS Leader Al-Baghdadi

The photograph of a black-hooded man standing on a brown cardboard box that was flashed across news sites around the world became an international symbol of torture. It was a shocking image that then president George W. Bush could not ignore.

The photo was among those that CNN released on May 1, 2004, of the American-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. In addition to the picture of the man in the hooded mask standing on a box, his outstretched arms attached to electrical wires, was another photograph of a woman holding a leash wrapped around an Iraqi prisoner's neck as he lay on the ground. Another was of a group of nearly naked prisoners who were stacked in the form of a pyramid on the ground. These images were burned into the minds of many people who viewed them.

Because of the outrage that followed the release of the photos, the United States began to transfer prisoners from Abu Ghraib to Camp Bucca, another American-run prison in Umm Qasr, Iraq.

The new arrivals from Abu Ghraib did not know it then, but they were sharing a prison with someone who would one day be the most wanted man in the world, the self-appointed caliphate and leader of ISIS, which, as we have noted, is the wealthiest and arguably the most powerful terrorist organization in history.

The name Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi does not roll off the tongue as easily as does the name Osama bin Laden; consequently, his name is not yet as synonymous with evil. However, he is just as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than Osama bin Laden ever was. And, to fully understand the history and characteristics of ISIS, we must understand the personality of its leader.

Al-Baghdadi's danger is in his elusiveness. Even though he is a powerful terrorist leader, he is not very well known. Little information can actually be confirmed about him, but he was apparently

born in Iraq as Awwad Ibrahim Ali Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai. Most observers agree that he is a disciplined military strategist, a lucid entrepreneur, a genius recruiter, and, above all, a ruthless, cold-blooded killer. Al-Baghdadi obtained his doctorate at Iraqi University in Baghdad, which is why one of his many titles is “Doctor.”¹⁰ He is well-educated and, at one time, was an Islamic preacher. Al-Baghdadi is not a man who enjoys being in front of the camera. As a result, there are only a few pictures of him. The image that was released in January 2014 by the Iraqi government to identify him is merely a photo of a black-and-white photo.

Another reason that al-Baghdadi is so dangerous is that he is thought to be a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad.¹¹ Few followers would argue that al-Baghdadi has not earned his top leadership position with ISIS; and, being considered to be in the lineage of Muhammad—whether true or not—adds to the power of his position.

It has been speculated that al-Baghdadi’s stay at Camp Bucca might actually have contributed to his radicalization. Like the prisoners at Abu Ghraib, al-Baghdadi was subjected to mental and physical torment and humiliation. Reliable sources say that he spent four years in Camp Bucca, from 2005 to 2009; others say he spent only ten months in prison in 2004.¹² Colonel Kenneth King, the commanding officer in charge of Camp Bucca in 2009, remembers al-Baghdadi. “While he was dangerous, he was not one of the most dangerous, at least at the time,” Colonel King said in a TV interview with CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer on June 16, 2014.¹³

In 2009, the United States was making every effort to pull out of the war in Iraq. In order to do so, it had to downsize U.S. troops there, which necessitated downsizing the number of prison guards at Camp Bucca. Large numbers of prisoners had to be set free. In 2009, the United States unwittingly released al-Baghdadi, unaware that it would encounter him again. Some confusion has

arisen from the claim that al-Baghdadi was released in 2004 and therefore was not actually in prison in 2009; however, Colonel King and other guards, including James Skylar Gerrond, remember seeing al-Baghdadi in prison.¹⁴

Colonel King also remembers the ISIS leader saying, when he was released from prison, “I’ll see you in New York.”¹⁵ And now an ISIS spokesman has pledged to raise the black flag of jihad over the White House.¹⁶

It is clear that al-Baghdadi intends to finish what al-Qaeda started in New York. The fantasy that ISIS will remain confined to Iraq and Syria must be dispelled, because, unfortunately, al-Baghdadi seems to be a man of his word.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)

Soon after his release, al-Baghdad joined the fighting efforts of a group known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). It is important to note that al-Qaeda didn’t necessarily start many of the groups that have fought together under its umbrella. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which eventually morphed into ISIS, was a small group that shared the vision and purpose of al-Qaeda, and submitted, for the most part, to its leadership. This does not necessarily mean that the al-Qaeda leadership communicated directly with al-Qaeda in Iraq or ISIS. There is ample evidence that contributes to the theory that AQI/ISIS had independent leadership that was isolated from Pakistani and Afghani operations and did not adhere to the tactics and commands of the al-Qaeda leaders.

In 2010, after several leaders of al-Qaeda in Iraq were killed and jihadist morale was low, al-Baghdadi assumed leadership of the group.¹⁷ At this time, the joint military efforts of the foreign coalition that had begun a few years earlier were paying off. Terrorist leaders were being taken out one by one, making the life

expectancy of a leader like al-Baghdadi fairly short; yet his resilience, his ability to survive, and his capacity to produce results began to pay off.

Unlike former terrorist leaders, al-Baghdadi was able to learn from military skirmishes with the foreign coalition, and he adjusted his strategy accordingly. He maximized the few resources he had and used his local knowledge of Iraq to his advantage. He observed the weaknesses in the Iraqi Army and exploited their unhealthy dependence on U.S. troops. It was not long before others began to hear about al-Baghdadi's successes.

Al-Baghdadi might have been confined to Iraqi tit-for-tat battles had it not been for a change in Middle Eastern politics. Only a few months after al-Baghdadi had assumed leadership of al-Qaeda in Iraq, the uprisings known as the "Arab Spring" swept through various Middle Eastern countries.¹⁸ Though media outlets called it a freedom movement, the Arab Spring actually contributed to the radicalization of moderate Islamic countries.

The methods and violence of ISIS plant fear in the hearts of millions of people, and much of that fear comes from a lack of understanding of what ISIS is and what it is capable of. To more fully understand the organization and its position of power today, it is essential to comprehend how the Arab Spring contributed to its success. In the following chapter, we will look at that movement in more depth.