



## Lesson 95

### The History of Radical Islam

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In this lesson, we are going to be looking at the history of radical Islam from when it started, way back in the eighteenth century all the way until one of its major leaders were killed three years ago.

## **Pre-reform Line**

### **1744: Wahhabism**

There are two main branches of Islam: Sunni and Shia. These two branches are further divided into smaller branches. The most popular of the two main branches, Sunni Islam, is broken down into four smaller groups. One of those groups is the Hanbali school, and it was from this group that Wahhabism formed. Wahhabism is a very conservative, radical branch in Islam. Wahhabis believe in a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, which is Islam's holy book, and they want to establish a society based only on these strict interpretations. They fight to return to a "purer" form of Islam, mainly pushing to return to its origins. Wahhabis condemn all other religions and sources of doctrine: they see everyone else, such as Christians and Jews, as enemies. However, Wahhabi believers consider the word "Wahhabism" derogatory, as it is used by outsiders to distinguish them; Wahhabis prefer to call themselves "salafis" which means "followers of the pious forebears", and muwahhidun which means "Unitarians" (meaning they're in unity with God). Wahhabism gets its name from its founder, Mohamed ibn Abdul Wahhab. Wahhab was born in the 18th century, in a place that is now Saudi Arabia. Wahhab began to promote his new teachings in Huraymila, a region in Saudi Arabia, around 1740. Wahhab came from a family who were part of the Hanbali school, so his ideas were rooted in their teachings. However, his teachings were rejected by Hanbali officials, and he was expelled from Huraymila. In 1744, Wahhab arrived in al-Dir'iyah, another region in Saudi Arabia. The emir (ruler) of this region was Muhammad ibn Saud, and he liked Wahhab's teachings. From then on, Wahhab and Saud royal family had an alliance, and Wahhabism began to spread throughout what is now Saudi Arabia.

### **1932: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi Arabia of today really began in 1932 because in that year the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formed. Before that year the descendants of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud continued to work together and try to establish an empire. Their descendants began to be called the Wahhabis. They were opposed by the Ottoman empire and Egypt and several of the kings were taken hostage. But there were also internal struggles with local tribes and leaders (like the Rashidis) wanting more power or opposing them because they thought they had stopped practicing true Wahhabism. In 1901, Abd al-'Aziz (Ibn Saud), the son of the last Wahhabi leader, who was exiled in Kuwait, went back to the Arabian Peninsula. In January of 1902, he (with only 15 soldiers) captured the city of Riyadh, which is the capital of Saudi Arabia today. Ibn Saud continued to fight, mostly the Ottomans and Rashidis, to unite all of the Arabian Peninsula, but he sometimes acknowledged the authority of the Ottomans and got help from Britain. In 1921, Ibn Saud proclaimed himself the leader of Najd (and the surrounding areas)- a region in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula. Then in 1926, he was made the ruler of the Hejaz- a part of the Arabian Peninsula to the west, where both Mecca and Medina are located, but he ruled these two areas separately. After that he built up an army and established the government, but some of the less powerful leaders opposed him. Finally, on September 23, 1932, Ibn Saud sent out a royal decree uniting Hejaz and Najd (and the surrounding areas) into

one kingdom. He named this new territory the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (or just Saudi Arabia); other countries recognized Saudi Arabia after that. It is a monarchy so his descendants have reigned absolutely over the country ever since. And just like in the past, Saudi Arabia is still in an alliance with Wahhabism so the royal family has to support that extreme form of Islam in order to appear qualified to control their kingdom (because it includes Mecca and Medina).

### **1938: oil found**

In 1938, an oil well was set up in Saudi Arabia. It would later become identified as the largest source of oil in the world. The name of that oil field was Safaniya. Saudi Arabia decided to sell the oil that they were harvesting to the West. Now this is where the problem arises. Saudi Arabia is an extremely conservative country, and then, because of the oil they were selling, they also became extremely wealthy. It is now the 15<sup>th</sup> richest country in the world because of its oil production. And because they became wealthy they could further the spread of Wahhabism. The oil fields allowed for its greater spread.

## 144,000 Reform Line

### 1979-1989: four key events

Four key events took place in four countries in the Middle East from 1979 to 1989.

#### Pakistan

On July 5, 1977, Ziaul Haq staged a coup on Pakistan's government; he overthrew it, then he imposed martial law on the country. Zia was the head of Pakistan's army and he had Wahhabi leanings. What Zia did next, from 1977 to 1989, was the Islamization of the country. Zia imposed Sharia law (Sharia law is Islamic law based on the Qur'an) on Pakistan's laws, making them more religious. In 1980, Zia established the Federal Shariat Court, which is a Federal Court based on Sharia law. In 1986, Zia amended Pakistan's blasphemy laws to make crimes against Muhammad (the founder of Islam) punishable by death. However, Zia was an ally of the United States. After the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979 the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan went into an alliance to help fund the Mujahideen to fight the USSR.

#### Iran

The Iranian revolution began in January of 1978. In January of 1978, an Iranian newspaper, under the direction of the Shah (monarch of Iran), disparaged Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a religious and political leader that had been exiled since 1963 for opposing the Shah. Thousands protested the Shah's actions. On September 8, 1979, the Shah declared martial law, and security killed 100 protestors in Iran's capital. In December of 1978, protests all over the country demanded the removal of the Shah and the return of Khomeini. On January 12, 1979, Khomeini formed the Revolutionary Council to help put him in power. On January 16<sup>th</sup>, the Shah and his family left Iran and went to Egypt for "vacation." On February 1<sup>st</sup>, Khomeini returned to Iran and was greeted by millions and became the de facto leader. Three days later Khomeini appointed a prime minister for his interim government. On February 11, 1979, the remainder of the Shah's government collapsed. In early December, Khomeini's new Constitution was approved. Lastly on January 25, 1980, Iran's first president was elected. After the new government was in place, it got to work enforcing Islam on the country. The new government replaced the Shah's "modern legal system," which was a secular system, with a legal system that is based on Sharia Law. So, after the Iranian Revolution, Iran's government went from secular to a theocracy.

#### Afghanistan

The Soviet-Afghan war began in 1979 where two sides were fighting for control of the country. On September 4, 1979, Nur Muhammad Taraki (the president of Afghanistan) was killed by his second in command- Hafizullah Amin. People had rebelled against Taraki for overthrowing the president before him, but the rebellion didn't end, it grew. On December 24, 1979, the USSR sent some troops into the capital of Afghanistan at night. On December 27, 1979, those troops killed Amin, and made Babrak Karmal the new leader of Afghanistan. The USSR also sent 100,000 soldiers into Afghanistan on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Violent demonstrations began against Karmal and the Soviets. The USSR began to take control of Afghanistan, but they were resisted by the Mujahideen- a title that many groups of Afghan guerrilla fighters took. Civil war continued until February 15, 1989 when the USSR withdrew its troops, but there was still a civil war between

the communist government and the Mujahideen. This was a proxy war because the USSR supported the government and the United States (among other countries) supported the Mujahideen.

## **Saudi Arabia**

In 1979, Saudi Arabia began to become more religious. On November 20, 1979, 500 extremists took control of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The extremists demanded the overthrow of the Saudi royal family, saying they were controlled by the West and had betrayed Islam. Two weeks later the terrorists were finally removed from the mosque. The Royal family next had to prove they were still religious, so they pushed Wahhabism more strongly. They started sending billions of dollars to radical Wahhabi preachers. They also set up religious schools along Pakistan's border. In 1985, a Wahhabi translation of the Qur'an began to be printed- millions of copies per year. This Qur'an (called the Noble Qur'an) is the most wide spread Qur'an in the English speaking world. This is what Saudi Arabia began to do in 1979.

## **1986, 1988: al-Qaeda**

Because of the Soviet war in Afghanistan Muslims from all over went to Afghanistan to help. Saudi Arabia saw this as a good opportunity, so they sent the most conservative Islamic teachers to the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan (where the people were congregating), then they set up hundreds of schools all along the border to teach the people about Wahhabism- and it worked, many extremists were educated there, like some of the founders of the Taliban. Close to the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a town called Peshawar and it played a big role in this. One of the teachers there was a man named Abdullah Yusef Azzam; he was an extremely conservative Sunni Muslim scholar who is considered the founder of global jihad. While he was there he invited one of his friends: Osama bin Laden, to join him. Bin Laden was from Saudi Arabia and he followed Wahhabism. But he had been in Afghanistan supporting the Mujahideen in the Soviet-Afghan war since 1979; in 1986 he went to Pakistan, to Peshawar. While there Osama bin Laden set up bases and trained fighters for the war. By 1988, he had formed al-Qaeda: a Sunni Muslim terrorist group- out of the fighters he trained. When the Soviet-Afghan war was over all of the people went home. In 1989, Osama bin Laden also went back to Saudi Arabia, to the people of the region he was a hero for having fought in the war against the Soviets. He offered to use his al-Qaeda fighters that he had trained to protect Saudi Arabia from Iraq who had just been in a war with Iran and then started a war with Kuwait- but Saudi Arabia refused. They were actually scared of Wahhabism and they didn't follow it strictly themselves, so instead they invited the United States to help protect them. Osama bin Laden didn't like this at all and criticized the Saudi government, so in 1991, he was forced to flee with his fighters, first to Afghanistan and then to Sudan (in 1992). In Sudan he continued to enlarge al-Qaeda.

## **1996, 2001: war against the USA**

By 1996, Osama bin Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden was back in Afghanistan. In that same year, on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Osama bin Laden declared war on the United States. "On August 23, 1996, Osama bin Laden declared war on the United States.... Within a few months of his arrival [to Afghanistan in 1996], he issued a 30-page fatwa, 'Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places,' which was published in a London-based newspaper, Al-Quds Al-Arabi, and faxed to supporters around the world. It was bin Laden's first public call for a global jihad against the United States...His central lament was the presence of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, or 'the occupation of the land of the two holiest sites'," *The Atlantic*. His main grievance with the United States was that they had troops in Saudi Arabia. This was why he launched a war against the United States- the first phase from 1996-2001. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda under Osama bin Laden attacked the United States and killed nearly 3,000 people. The United States invaded Afghanistan in retaliation.

## **2003: the Iraq War**

The Iraq war began on May 20, 2003. Back in 1998, the United States was worried about perils posed by Iraq- they focused on a worst case scenario where Iraq might obtain nuclear weapons and attack the United States, however, this wasn't a major concern at the time. But after 9/11, the United States became very concerned about Iraq having nuclear weapons, and about the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, who they didn't like- so they set about trying to make up a reason for invading Iraq. The United States sent the then Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations to get permission to go to war with Iraq on February 5, 2003. Powell's argument was that since al-Zarqawi (an extremist connected to al-Qaeda) was in Iraq, Saddam Hussein must be helping al-Zarqawi train fighters for al-Qaeda. Powell also gave other evidences that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. But of course this wasn't completely true, there was no evidence that Iraq's government harbored al-Qaeda; al-Zarqawi was indeed in Iraq but he was in the North- the area Saddam didn't control; although the United Nations had previously found some weapons Iraq wasn't supposed to have, they didn't find any "weapons of mass destruction." But regardless of not getting United Nations permission, on March 17, 2003, the United States gave Saddam an ultimatum to leave the country within 48 hours. Saddam refused to leave, so on March 20, 2003, the United States started blowing up bunkers where Saddam was suspected to be. In days United States' troops invaded the country. Probably the major mistake that the United States made in Iraq during the war was how they treated Iraq's army. They dissolved the Iraqi army, and with no leader, many of the soldiers went and joined extremist groups such as al-Qaeda. This left a vacuum in Iraq that extremists were willing to fill. The war in Iraq lasted eight years, until December 15, 2011, when the invasion of Iraq officially ended.

## **2004: al-Zarqawi and AQI**

Shortly after the Iraq war began another terrorist organization formed. That organization was called al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). This group was formed by (Abu Musab) al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi was from the country of Jordan and he was troublesome so he was in jail often. He then went to Afghanistan to fight in the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989), but he got there when the war was ending so he didn't fight much; in Afghanistan he also worked as a journalist. But he was still a criminal so he ended up in jail again. While in jail he became

radical and more violent. Al-Zarqawi was released in 1999, and some people think he met Osama bin Laden at that time. Al-Zarqawi then started a camp to train terrorists, from all over the region in Afghanistan, and he also was in charge of several small terrorist groups. After the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 al-Zarqawi and his main group began to conduct terrorist attacks there. He did not like the United States being involved in the region, but he also didn't like many of the local governments. Then in 2004 he formally joined Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda and renamed his group al-Qaeda in Iraq. He did not get along very well with bin Laden though because bin Laden was focused on foreign countries (like the United States) while he was focused on local governments; al-Zarqawi also had an extreme hatred for Shiite Muslims, and attacked places trying to start a Sunni-Shiite war. Al-Zarqawi often did not listen to al-Qaeda and his group was responsible for numerous violent terrorist attacks where government workers and lots of regular people were killed. At first radical Sunni Muslims groups in Iraq supported him, but that slowly disappeared when they saw how he was so violent and his group had a lot of non-Iraqis in it. In 2006, al-Zarqawi was killed by the United States, but his group: al-Qaeda in Iraq continued to operate although it was very weak.

## **2011, 2013: Syria and ISIS**

In 2011, Arab Springs began the Syrian civil war. "The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several largely Muslim countries ... Similarly, the civil war in Syria ... began in the aftermath of the Arab Spring..." *History.com*. The Syrian civil war had two fighting sides: the government under the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against the rebels. Most countries sided with the rebels against Assad. To solve that problem, Assad released a lot of prisoners from Syrian jails, knowing they'd all go to the side of the rebels. With criminals such as terrorists on the side of the rebels, it was harder for other countries to support them. The following year, in 2012, the al-Qaeda branch in Iraq (AQI) changed its name to ISI: the Islamic State in Iraq, completely disconnecting themselves from al-Qaeda. During the Syrian civil war, when Assad freed a lot of prisoners, ISI brought many of them into their group. They also contributed to the freeing of prisoners during 2012 and 2013. They thereafter changed the name to ISIS: the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2013 because of all the Syrians that joined them from prison.

## **2014: the caliphate**

ISIS formed a caliphate in 2014. On April 11, 2012, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the leader of ISI) went from Iraq to Syria, and renamed ISI (Islamic State in Iraq) to ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria); he was combining ISI with another group called Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) that he had sent to Syria back in 2012. The leader of JN rejected this action, but al-Baghdadi had more power, and many people left JN and joined ISIS anyway. From July 2012 to July 2013 ISIS performed its "Breaking the Walls" campaign, where it conducted bombings and prison breaks. On July 21, 2013 (which is a significant date), ISIS launched its "Soldier's Harvest" campaign to capture territory and decline Iraqi security forces. From August to December, ISIS began to attack rival groups, and take control of land in Iraq. In January of 2014, ISIS took control of Raqqa in Syria and declared it the capital of the ISIS emirate. In February, al-Qaeda officially cut ties with ISIS. From February to June, ISIS took control of more and more territory in Iraq and Syria. On June 29, 2014, ISIS established a caliphate on the land it controlled in Iraq and Syria and changed their name to the "Islamic State." They proclaimed their leader, al-Baghdadi, as the caliph. A caliphate is an Islamic institution that controls a certain territory. The leader is called the caliph and is considered the religious successor of Muhammad and the ruler of all Muslims. At its peak, the

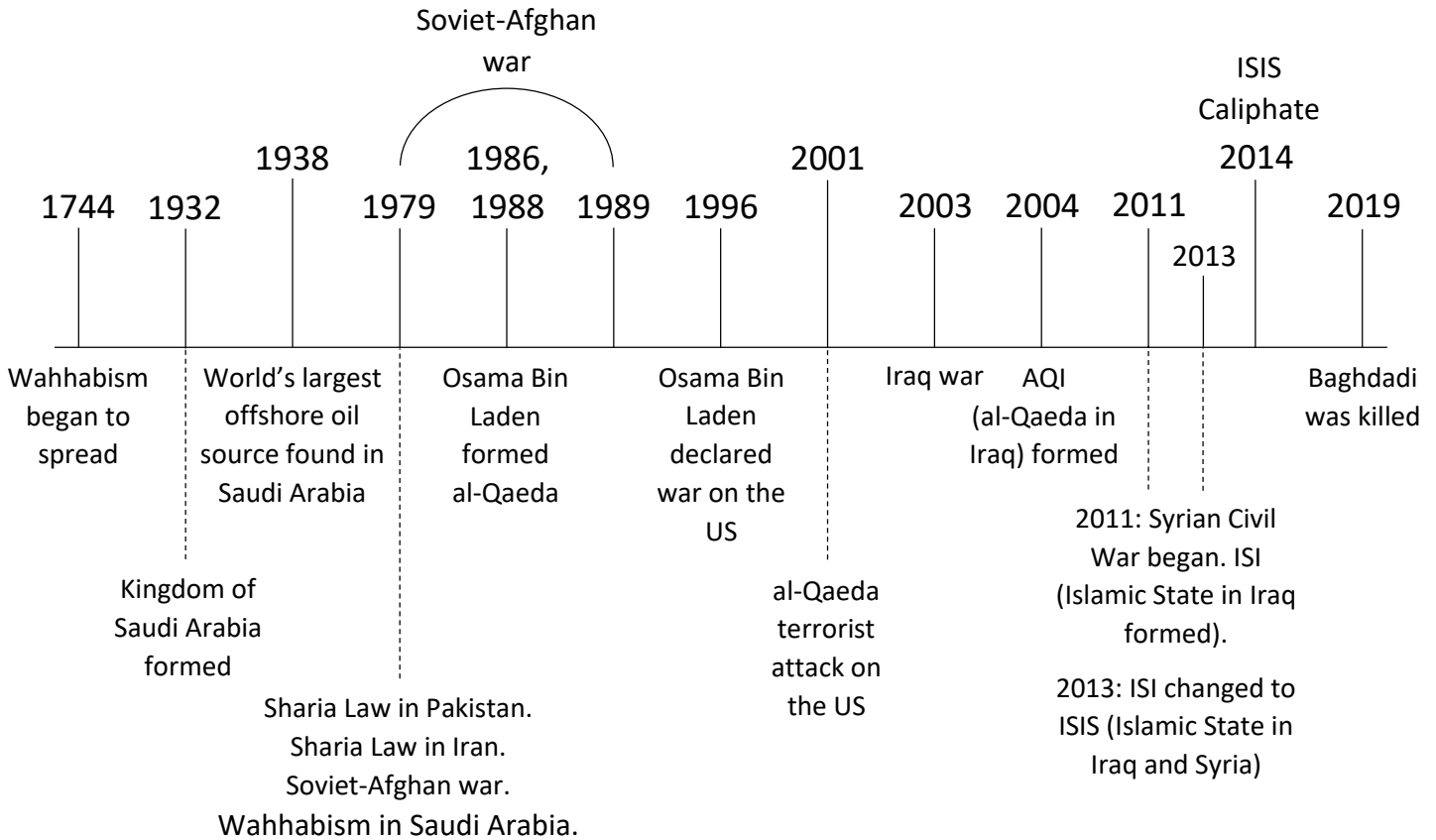
caliphate controlled between 39,000 and 42,000 square miles (101,000 and 108,000 square kilometers), which is about one third of Syria and 40% of Iraq. ISIS ruled their territory harshly; Iraqis and Syrians were forced into slavery and to pay taxes. ISIS, who is Sunni, targeted Shi'ites and other non-Sunnis, attacking their homes and taking spoils, as well as taxing them and forcing them to convert on pain of death. In September 2014, ISIS attacked a city in Syria called Kobani, in which almost all of the people fled to Turkey. ISIS fought the United States and the Kurds over the city in what is called the siege of Kobani. At the end, US airstrikes allowed the Kurdish army to regain control of the city. This defeat is marked by many as the beginning steps that led to the end of the ISIS caliphate.

## **2019: al-Baghdadi killed**

The ISIS caliphate reached its height in 2015, but it was always in danger and continuously being attacked by the armies of Iraq and Syria, other countries, and other groups like the Kurds. By 2016, it started to decline and in March of 2019 they lost a town- their last significant piece of territory. Later in 2019, the leader of ISIS (al-Baghdadi) was killed. After the ISIS caliphate began everyone had been looking for him, and for the last few years he had not been very visible- only occasionally releasing audio recordings or videos (the most recent being in September of 2019). Then in October of 2019, the United States found out where al-Baghdadi was hiding and decided to attack. He was in a walled compound in northwestern Syria with several other people; he was planning to go somewhere else but he hadn't yet. On October 27, 2019, at night, eight military helicopters flew for about an hour to the compound. The soldiers then attacked the compound after first telling the people to come out (some did). A few people died, but all of the soldiers were okay. Al-Baghdadi went into a tunnel and killed himself. His body was almost immediately identified and then buried at sea. The soldiers also destroyed the compound where he had been. Former president Trump watched the operation live in the White House and then began to boast about it to everyone. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, ISIS confirmed that al-Baghdadi was dead, but they also announced another leader (Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi). At that point there were around 14,000 ISIS fighters still in Syria and Iraq, so although ISIS was weakened, it was not defeated by the death of al-Baghdadi.



## In summary:



Official Youth Prophecy Group website!

[youthprophecygroup.org](https://youthprophecygroup.org)

If you have any questions or comments on any of the material contact us (YPG) at:

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Link to YPG Zoom meetings which are at 10:00am Pacific Time on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of the month:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87170293849>