

# TAC NEWS

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## Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (or Syria or Sham)



### Background

The Islamic State arose as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Originally called the Jama'at al-Tawhid wal Jihad (organization of Monotheism and Jihad) the group was led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The group was situated predominantly in western and central Iraq where the majority of Sunni Arabs live. Their initial actions were a series of terrorist bombings of Shia mosques and shrines. In 2005 the group swore allegiance to Al Qaeda and became known as "Al Qaeda in Iraq" (AQI). Their goal was to drive the U.S. from Iraqi soil and establish a Sunni Caliphate. In October 2006 the group changed its name to the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI). By this time, Zarqawi had been killed by the U.S. and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi took over as leader, with Abu Ayyub al-Masri as the military commander. Both men were killed by the U.S. military by April 2010. In May 2010 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, having been released from U.S. custody, became the new leader. At this time their estimated strength was roughly 1,000 men.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi set about rebuilding the group. Funding was from a number of sources, the largest of which was stolen oil sold on the black market, netting them roughly \$2 million per month. Their main opponents at this time were the Sunni tribal groups and various nationalist groups. While Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was in a U.S. prison he made extensive contacts with former officers of the Saddam-era Iraqi military. With these he formed the cadre of a new military. However by June 2010 at least 3 out of every 4 senior leaders had been killed or captured by the U.S. military.

2011 was an important year for ISI. The United States withdrew from Iraq, and the Arab Spring led to the outbreak of civil war in neighboring Syria. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sent Abu Mohammad Al-Golani to set up a Syrian branch of Al Qaeda with the goal of ending Bashar al-Assad's rule. This group became known as "Jabhat al-Nusra l'Ahl as-Sham" (Support Front for the People of the Sham). In April 2013 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISI were merging into one group to be known as the "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," also referred to as ISIL or ISIS (*Sham* is the Arabic word for the Levant region, so both acronyms are technically correct). Abu Mohammad al-Golani rejected this merger and eventually the dispute was raised to the new head of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who ordered the two groups to get along. By the end of 2013 ISIS and Al Qaeda had

ended their relationship, except for tactical arrangements in Syria, based on the needs of the moment. At that stage ISIS began to exert itself and emerge back onto the world stage.

### **ISIS Military**

Following the U.S. departure from Iraq, ISI began to grow in strength. Having begun as a guerrilla "commuter" army the addition of professional officers from the former Iraqi Army bolstered the group's abilities. Structured training facilities and programs were implemented, leading to what may be one of the best fighting forces in the region. Their armed forces are well funded from a combination of kidnapping ransoms, sales of pillaged antiquities, robberies from banks on a grand scale, and captured oil facilities. Their forces are structured to take advantage of the region and the flood of volunteers coming in from all over the world.

At the provincial level is the regular army known as the "Army of Adversity." Units are built and commanded within the various provinces within the Islamic State. The troops are armed with a wide array of Russian and U.S. weapons captured from Syria and Iraq. The various units are highly mobile, making use of captured vehicles of many types. The most observed type is the pick up truck, most commonly the Toyota HiLux but other makes and models are seen as well. These are armed with an amazing array of weapons including machine guns, anti-aircraft guns (ZSU-23-2), Type 63 rocket launchers, missile launchers from Mi-24 helicopters, recoilless rifles, etc. Several vehicles have been photographed where BTR and BMP-1 turrets have been fitted on metal frames in the back of the pick up truck. Basically, if it can be fit into a vehicle it gets used.

Troops are organized along the same lines as other irregular forces in the region. *Suriyas* (a small company), are at the base. Two to five *suriyas* make up a *Katiba*. Basically a small battalion, the word *Katiba* is routinely translated as "brigade." Above this are actual brigades called "*Liwas*." A rule of thumb to determine how many units are present is to divide the troop

numbers given by 400 to 500. The result is a good estimate of the number of battalions present.

Above the Army of Adversity is a "national" level force known as the "Army of the Caliphate." Made up mostly of volunteers from Chechnya and other nations, this group forms the hard core fire brigade of the Islamic State Army. While it is armed in the same way as the Army of Adversity it has the pick of available weapons. It is treated as a separate force primarily due to their better abilities in combat over the regionally raised forces. Because of their prowess these units can be found fighting in every theater where ISIS is engaged.

Other "branches" of the Islamic State military include snipers, artillery, air defense, and support units. Formations from these groups are parceled out as needed to the front line units. Based on photographs of ISIS operations they appear to be integrated into each *Katiba* to provide support. Tactically ISIS has shown a high degree of professionalism. Their officers learned to fight doing battle with the United States military and gained a great deal from the experience. They make excellent use of bounding overwatch techniques as well as taking advantage of local conditions. For example, the attack on Ramadi followed a dust storm into the area, allowing them to conceal their movements. While they have artillery, the number of captured pieces is relatively small. Tanks are used mostly as mobile artillery.

VBIED's (vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices) are driven into enemy lines by suicide bombers and detonated with an effect much like an artillery barrage. They combine guerrilla operations with regular operations as needed. They have disguised themselves with uniforms from their opponents to infiltrate enemy positions. Finally, they make extensive use of improvised explosive devices in defense of their positions. When ISIS leaves a position they leave large numbers of improvised explosive devices (IED's) behind to slow the opposition.

**ARMY OF THE CALIPHATE/SHIELD OF ISLAM:**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 00, Class: Conscript, Base Determination: 35%**

**Company/Suriya:**

Mujahireen Infantry Company: 2-5 x TL3 Infantry (C)/Lt. Truck,  
0-1 x TL3 Support/C)/Lt. Truck

Support Company: 0-1 x Recoilless Rifle,  
0-1 x 82mm Mortar (3)/Lt. Truck **or** 0-11 x TL3 Support/C)/Lt. Truck,  
0-1 x Lt. Truck/ZSU-23-2

**Battalion/Katiba:**

Infantry or Foreign Battalion: 1 x TL3 Infantry (C)(HQ)/Truck,  
4 x Mujahireen Infantry Co.,  
1 x Support Co.

**ISIS ARMY OF ADVERSITY:**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 00, Class: Militia, Base Determination: 35%**

**Company/Suriya:**

Infantry Company: 2-5 x TL3 Infantry (C)/Lt. Truck,  
0-1 x TL3 Support/Lt. Truck

Support Company: 0-11 x Recoilless Rifle,  
1 x 82mm Mortar (3)/Lt. Truck **or** 1 x TL3 Support/Lt. Truck,  
0-1 x Lt. Truck/ZSU-23-2

Inghemasiyoun Company: 3 x TL3 Infantry (S)/Lt. Truck

**Battalion/Katiba:**

Infantry or Foreign Battalion: 1 x TL3 Infantry (C)(HQ)/Truck,  
3-4 x Infantry Co.,  
0-1 x Support Co.

**Regiment/Brigade/Liwa:**

"Toyota Task Force" (TTF): 1 x TL3 Infantry (C)(GHQ)/Lt. Truck,  
2 x Katiba

Infantry Liwa (Brigade): 1 x TL3 Infantry (C)(GHQ)/Lt. Truck,  
3-4 x Katiba

**Available Support Units:**

Tank Platoon: 1 x T-55 **or** T-62 **or** T-72

Tank Company: 2-3 x T-55 **or** T-62 **or** T-72

Armoured Car Company: 3 x M1117

Recon Company: 3 x BRDM-2[R]

Heavy Mortar Team: 1 x 120mm Mortar (1)/Truck

Artillery Section: 1 x 122mm D-30 (1)/Truck

Heavy Artillery Section: 1 x 155mm M198 (1)/Truck

Artillery Battery: 1 x 122mm D-30 (3)/Truck

Heavy Artillery Battery: 1 x 155mm M198 (3)/Truck

MLRS Battery: 1 x BM-21 (12) **or** Type 63 MRL (3)

Improvised Rocket Battery: 1 x Launcher (1)/Lt. Truck

Artisan Missile Battery:	1 x Homemade RL (1)
SVBIED:	1 x Vehicle Bomb
Anti-Aircraft Battery:	1 x Lt. Truck/ZSU-23/2
Anti-Aircraft Missile Team:	1 x Stinger <b>or</b> 1 x SA-24 <b>or</b> 1 x SA-7
Anti-Tank Team:	1 x ATGM (TOW or AT-14)
Engineer Platoon:	1 x <u>TL3</u> Engineer, 1 x Bulldozer
Drone Team:	1 x Phantom Drone

**Notes:** 1. ISIS is capable of making mustard gas attacks, so chemical weapons can be used.

**ISIS Arsenal as of 2015:** SA-7, Stingers, M79-OSA, HJ-8, AT-4, Type 59 field guns, M198 Howitzers, HMMWV's, T-54/55, T-72, M1A1, M1117 armoured cars, DshK machine guns, Zu-23-2, BM-21 Grad, AK-74's, M-16's, M-4's, Dragunovs, Toyota pick-up trucks, GAZ-66, and misc. medium Trucks

**Sources:**

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9. <http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS%20Captures%20Ramadi%20--%20May%202015.pdf>
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11. <http://spioenkop.blogspot.com/2014/11/vehicles-and-equipment-captured.html> (Iraq)
12. <http://spioenkop.blogspot.com/2014/11/vehicles-and-equipment-captured-and.html> (Syria)

**Optional Rules:**

1. IED's: Treat as minefield per the minefield rules. If a unit is left where it can spot then the mines can be detonated rather than tripped.
2. VBIED's: Treat as barrage from 155mm cannon. Hits on vehicle before it reaches its target cause it to detonate causing the 155mm barrage to be applied at the point where it was destroyed. If the force has an engineer present then a vehicle of the owning player's choice may be converted to a VBIED before the game begins.
3. Improvised Rocket Launchers: These are rocket launchers of any diameter that consist of a rail with a bipod support. They were made to allow for rocket launches without benefit of an MRL unit. They are included as they appear to be relatively common.

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