



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on April 20, 2015

Keeping Track of Militant Islamic Groups

Almost daily, mass media reports contain newer outrages committed by one or more of the militant Islamic groups spreading their particular brand of terror. Keeping track of these murdering terrorists brings to mind going to a sporting event and needing a scorecard. Here's a brief glimpse at the leading perpetrators of carnage currently spreading murder and mayhem wherever they are able.



Al-Qaeda: The oldest of these groups, al-Qaeda, began in late 1988-early 1989 as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was winding down. Led by Osama bin Laden (now deceased), its new leader is Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Qaeda is responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States that killed several thousand, the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that produced hundreds of fatalities, the 2002 bombings in Bali, and more. This terrorist group has incited sectarian violence among Muslims in several countries. Al-Qaeda's success in these and other attacks has encouraged other militant groups to rise up and begin slaughtering innocent people.

Boko Haram: Based in northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram initially allied with al-Qaeda but recently announced its desire to become part of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Led by Abubakar Shekau, its adherents made worldwide headlines in 2014 when they kidnapped at least 276 females (mostly schoolgirls and several teachers) from their school in Chibok. None of the schoolgirls has been seen again. More than 1.5 million have fled the conflict zone that has spread into neighboring Chad. Shekau has boasted of his hope to die in "the garden of eternal bliss."

Houthis: Named after founder Badreddin al-Houthi (now deceased), this militant Islamic group operates in Yemen where it has gained control of the country's capital city Sana'a and its parliament. Founded in response to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and linked to al-Qaeda, it is now led by Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. Pronounced admirers of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini who led the ousting of the Shah in 1979, the Houthis receive military aid from Iran.

Al-Shabaab: Based in Somalia, al-Qaeda affiliated al-Shabaab (meaning "Movement of Striving Youth") has launched attacks against parts of neighboring Kenya as well as in Somalia. One of its recent forays led to the murder of 148 students and a few college officials at Kenya's Garissa College. In that raid, warriors identified Muslims from Christians then spared the former and killed those who could not recite a Muslim prayer. Shabaab forces have conducted numerous bombings in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, and continue to promise more mayhem in their native country and in Kenya.

ISIS: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, looks for territorial conquests beyond Syria and Iraq and has gained control of portions of Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, and Libya. Led by self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, its origins stem from al-Qaeda in Iraq. It has established a caliphate over large portions of western Iraq and eastern Syria, enforced Sharia law, and conducted sensational beheadings of victims, and forced slavery upon many. As Sunni Muslims, ISIS leaders contend that Shiite Muslims are also their enemy. Insurgents in Libya pledged their allegiance to ISIS (ISIL) in 2014.



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Of course, no one should ignore that [weapons and other categories of aid from America](#) have worked their way into the hands of these groups. U.S. foreign policy that unconstitutionally entangled our forces in several regions where Americans didn't belong [actually spurred the rise](#) of [widespread militancy](#). Yes, it would be wrong to ignore the determination of these groups to establish Muslim domination and Sharia law. But an even larger mistake would be refusal to recognize that current and recent U.S. leaders and policies must be reformed or changed. In the long run, that is more important than monitoring any number of militant Islamic groups.

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