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## **ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Warns Israel: We're Getting Closer Every Day**

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi releases new voice recording, including threats to attack Israel.



ISIS commander Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi published a voice recording Saturday in which he threatened that Islamic State militants would attack Israel.

"With the help of Allah, We are getting closer to you every day," al-Baghdadi told his Israeli listeners. "The Israelis will soon see us in Palestine. This is no longer a war of the crusaders against us. The entire world is fighting us right now."

The ISIS leader continued, "The Israelis thought that we forgot Palestine and that they had distracted us from it. That is not the case. We have not forgotten Palestine for one moment."

"You will never find comfort in Palestine, Jews," continued the terrorist leader. "Palestine will not be your land or your home, but it will be a graveyard for you"

"Allah assembled you in Palestine so that the Muslims kill you, so that you may hide behind stones and trees (a Muslim tradition regarding the killing of Jews)," declared the head of the self-styled caliphate.

"Be confident that God will grant victory to those who worship him, and hear the good news that our state is doing well," said the leader. "The more intense the war against it, the purer it becomes and the tougher it gets."

## Inside the Difficult, Dangerous Work of Tallying the ISIS Death Toll

### Trying to calculate casualties in a war zone



ISIS militants posing outside of Damascus, Syria, in April. Balkis Press/Sipa USA/AP

The week after ISIS launched its catastrophic November attacks in Paris, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) published its annual "Global Terrorism Index." It contained an unexpected finding: By killing 6,664 people in 2014, the Nigerian Islamist extremist group Boko Haram was the world's deadliest terrorist group, beating out ISIS by nearly 600 victims. But the report, with its exact-sounding figures, raises a question: Is it really possible to know how many people ISIS has killed?

As in many conflicts, assessing the actual toll of the Syrian civil war is a difficult, potentially dangerous business. And when it comes to putting a precise number on ISIS' death toll, researchers who track these grim statistics are skeptical. "My gut instinct is, we don't know," says Megan Price, the executive director of the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG). "I don't think those are knowable numbers."

"What we know is just a part of what is going on," says Bassam al-Ahmad, the spokesman for the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC), a monitoring organization that gathers information from inside the country to maintain a running count of how many people have died in its nearly five-year-old conflict. Using a three-stage documentation process, the VDC has confirmed the deaths of 4,406 people at the hands of ISIS so far. But Ahmad says that is by no means the total number. "What is the percentage of what we know?" he asks. "Maybe around 50 percent."

And uncovering the information needed from ISIS territory presents even greater challenges. Media and NGO access is all but barred. In the group's Syrian capital, Raqqa, internet cafés have been forced to close, and in other areas ISIS militants have put them under surveillance, making it difficult for activists to share information with the outside world. There are consequences for those who dig up information that the insurgent group doesn't want publicized, like kidnappings, torture, and executions. In January 2014, ISIS militants kidnapped one of the VDC's reporters in Raqqa. "They came to his house and abducted him," says Ahmad. "Until now, we don't know anything. We have sources who say he was beaten and tortured."

That reporter, as well as four other VDC employees who disappeared from the Syrian city, Duma, in December 2013 and have not been heard from since, are not included in the group's tally of the dead. The VDC does not know if they're alive, but it also has no way to confirm their deaths. It's not an uncommon problem. "We hear many stories about people who are kidnapped by ISIS and are executed. But sometimes you have no information about them. If you don't have information about an incident, that doesn't mean something hasn't happened," Ahmad says. The number of people who have simply vanished in Syria is in the tens of thousands. They are not included in the VDC's count.

"Violence can be hidden," says Price. "ISIS has its own agenda. Sometimes that agenda is served by making public things they've done, and I have to assume, sometimes it's served by hiding things they've done." For example, after Kurdish forces recaptured the northern Iraqi city of Sinjar from ISIS last month, as many as 16 previously unknown mass graves were uncovered.

In determining ISIS' 2014 death toll at 6,073 people, the IEP drew its data from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland, which uses publicly available materials like news articles and legal documents to establish its estimates. It's a common documentation method, but it can be limiting because more newsworthy events, like bombings with a high number of casualties, make it into the data, but under-the-radar deaths may not.

"Traumatic events that cause multiple deaths get very well communicated—and maybe even exaggerated—in their frequency and occurrence compared to more mundane, violent acts that result in death," says Les Roberts, a professor of population and family health at Columbia University and a former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention epidemiologist who has led dozens of surveys on mortality in war zones, including in Iraq. "A bomb is newsworthy. A bomb is big enough that the people in the morgue when you call them will say, 'Oh yeah, we had four deaths in here,' because they came in together and they create a psychological image, even though they had 42 dead bodies come in from a variety of other causes, mostly gunshot wounds." In ISIS' case, this may mean that public mass executions and suicide bombings get counted while other atrocities are overlooked.

Getting a grip on ISIS' impact is just part of the larger struggle to get an accurate picture of the carnage in Syria. The VDC has confirmed approximately 200,000 casualties by name, photos, or videos. Their number is dwarfed by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights' most recent estimate of as many as 330,000 casualties. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stopped providing public enumerations of Syrian casualties after January 2014, saying it could no longer guarantee the accuracy of its source material.

According to Price, the HRDAG intends to publish new numbers in early 2016—nearly two years after the last public UN count. These figures will be based on not only cases gathered by the VDC and three other groups documenting deaths in Syria, but an extrapolated estimate of unreported deaths. Even if it's the most accurate account to get presented, however, the new number will still likely be off. "Having looked

at the data in this particular conflict, as well as several others, the safe answer always is: that number is too low," Price says.

Roberts notes that it can be hard to collect reliable casualty data even in a country that's at peace. "In the United States, which I think is a near-optimal environment for us investigating murders," says Roberts, "our best estimate is that something in the ballpark of one-third of murders are never detected." Sometimes a death is misclassified as an accident or a suicide, or a body is never found. Now imagine trying to get this information with ISIS breathing down your neck. "If in the United States we have a gross undercount of murders, how can we expect in the anarchy of Syria that it's going to be even comparable?"

And as for the public perception of what is going on?

## **AP Poll: Islamic State conflict voted top news story of 2015**

By DAVID CRARY

Dec. 22, 2015 7:06 AM EST



NEW YORK (AP) — The far-flung attacks claimed by Islamic State militants and the intensifying global effort to crush them added up to a grim, gripping yearlong saga that was voted the top news story of 2015, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of U.S. editors and news directors.

The No. 2 story was the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that led to legalization of same-sex marriage in all 50 states. But several of the other stories among the Top 10 reflected the impact of the Islamic State, while another group of major stories related to the series of mass shootings in the United States.

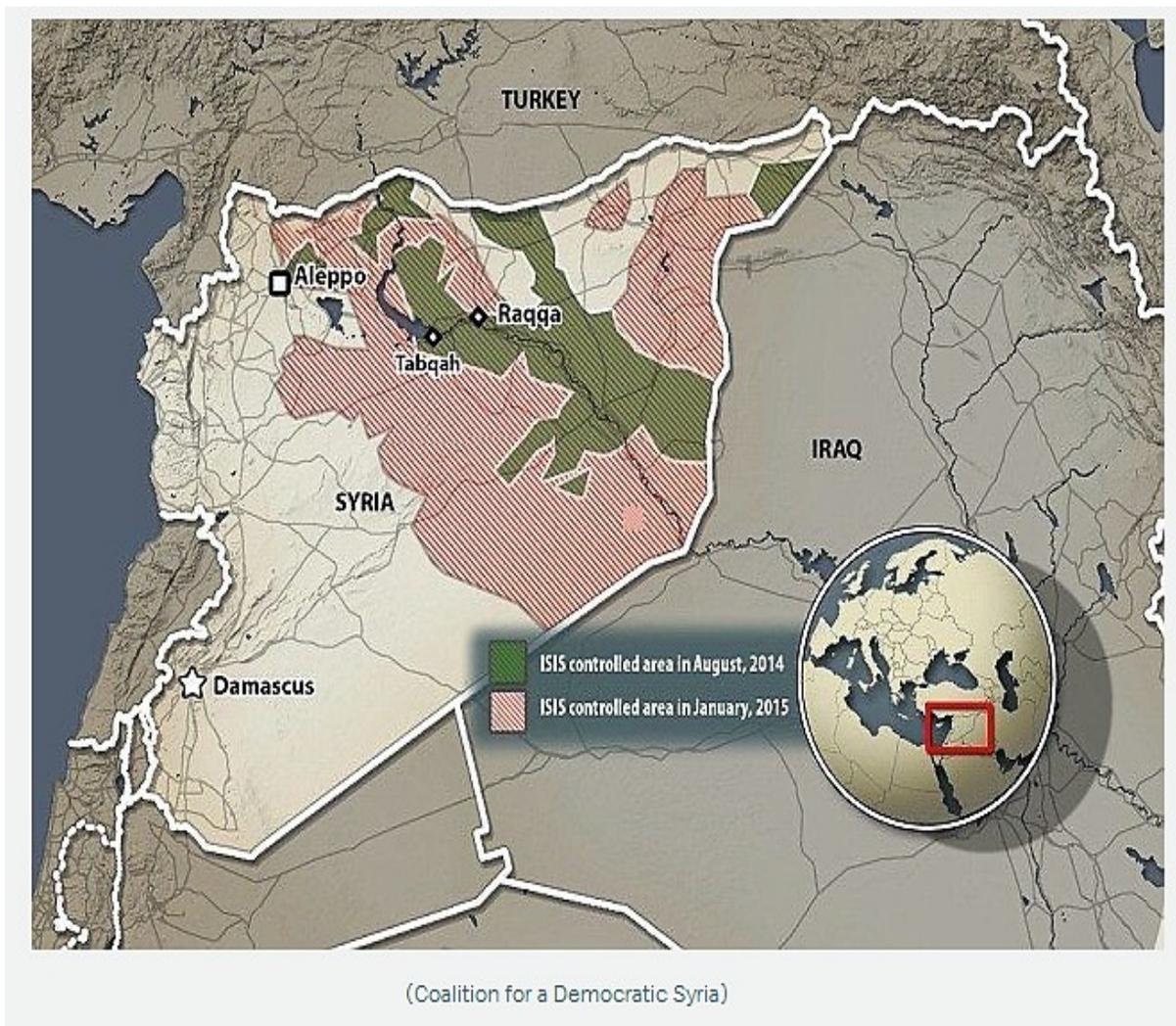
Among the 100 voters casting ballots, first-place votes were spread among 17 different stories. The Islamic State entry received 37 first-place votes and same-sex marriage 13. The No. 3 story — the deadly attacks in Paris in January and November — received 14 first-place votes.

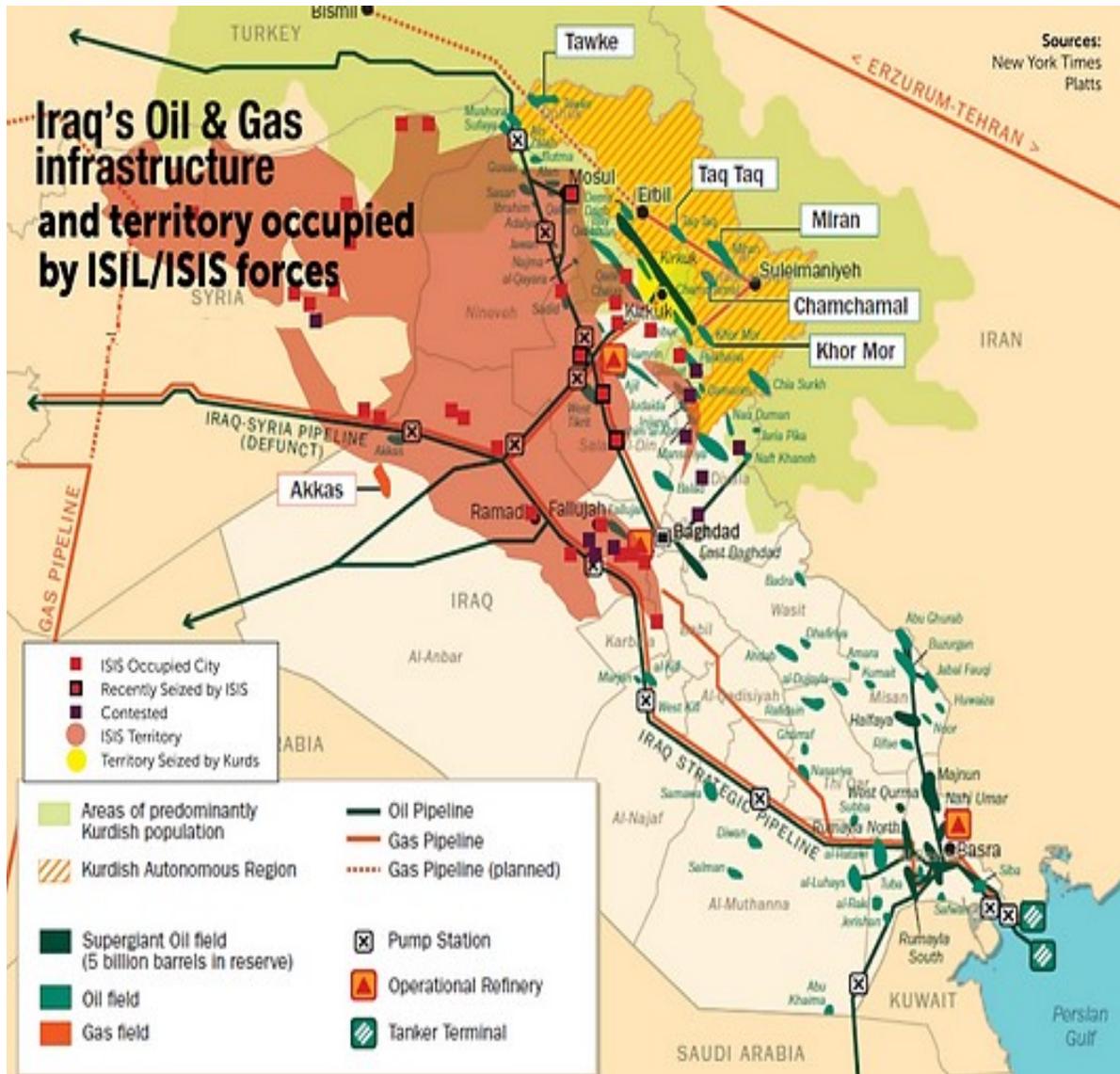
Commentary:

As the world rolls into its generally accepted calendar (astrological) year of "2016" it would appear safe to declare that the ominous specter of radical Islamic jihad remains entrenched, strong and will continue to make its presence felt.

Although the global anticipation of continued extremist violence on all populations ... in all geographic segments is assuredly well founded, what everyone should perhaps be more wary of is the "caliphate" nature of this movement currently manifest in ISIS!

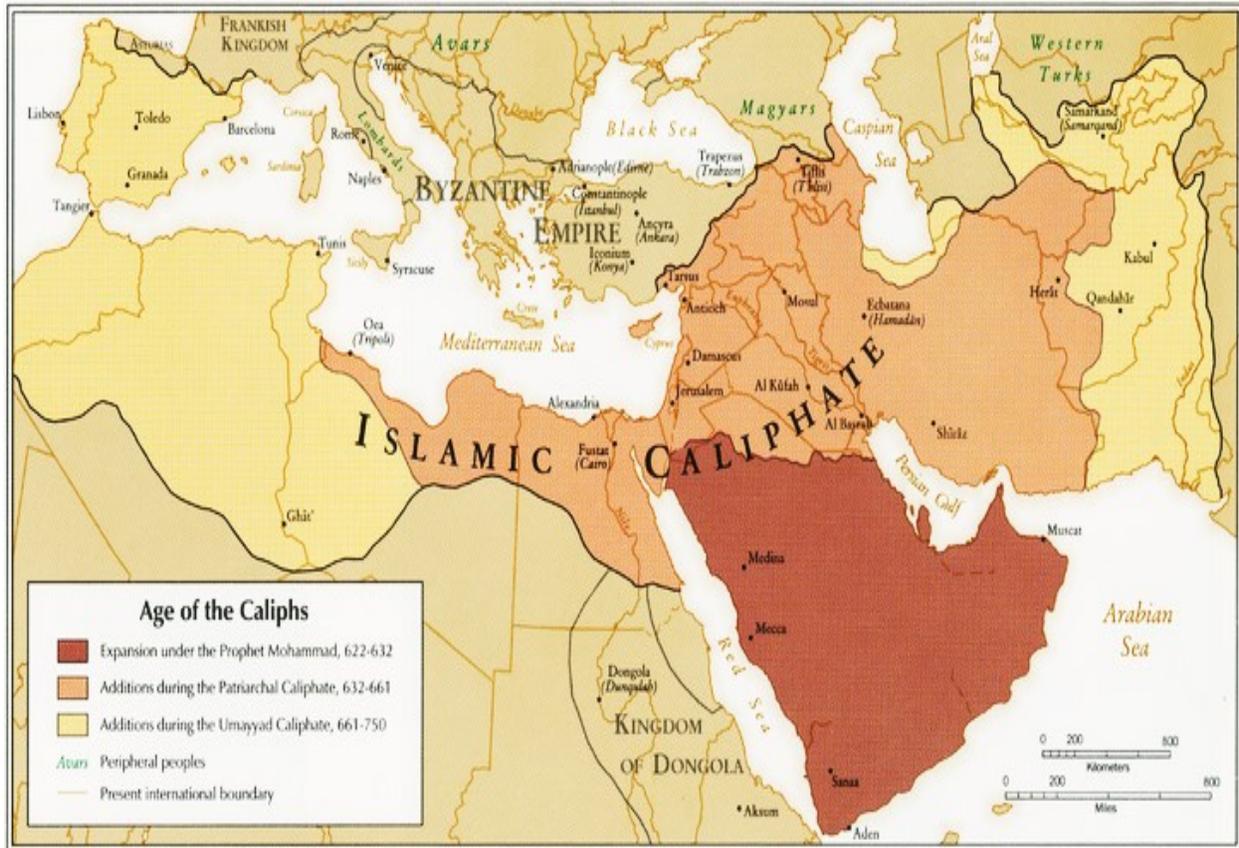
As the maps below more than suggest, ISIS has been allowed (another conversation for another day) to promulgate its plan and is certainly in a position to begin upsetting the nature of the globe's tenuous economic dynamic.





So ... it would seem that there is good reason why public opinion would consider ISIL to be the main story of calendar year 2015. It would also seem to not be a far stretch to conclude that this perspective is shared across the globe!

The point to be made is that the United States ... it's Western allies ... the rest of the nations can continue to sit back and watch the "caliphate" spread like it did before across the region (see ensuing map) ... as it is now doing ... as it will most assuredly continue doing voraciously when Iran realizes its nuclear weapons capability; or a path of action can be chosen. Sadly this path would appear to be a military path!



And like before it is apparent that Jerusalem ... Israel ... the Jews are directly in the crosshairs of the jihad's scope. It would not take rocket science level probability models to conjecture that this showdown will occur. But let us not fool ourselves and think that because of geographic separation the West will not be impacted. Look closely at the map ... look closely at the shifting economic dynamic ... look closely at an entirely new global dynamic.

So ... you think it can't happen ... you believe somehow that the "good guys" will prevail ... hmmm!

Perhaps a better option is to pray ... and to pray sincerely and with much passion. Pray for Israel ... pray for humanity ... but keep in mind that we pray always that G\_D's will be done!

And now let us take a brief tour down the modern history of the world ... a post 2nd world war perspective wherein we see the near extinction of the Jewish people ... the miraculous emergence of national Israel against seemingly impossible odds ... the loss of Western civilization's colonial domination ... the maturation of the modern fossil fuel economic dynamic ... the emergence of Islamic jihad ... the manifestation of the imperial caliphate ... the weakening of Western civilization's character and resolve!

So ... when push comes to shove how will Western civilization react when "it hits the fan"?

Perhaps ... just perhaps what is manifesting right before our eyes as we move into calendar year 2016 is exactly what was always going to happen.

Let us pray that G\_D's will be done and that HE is merciful!

Let us pray that "when it hits the fan" that HE remembers that the days will be shortened for the sakes of the "elect"!

Let us pray that those who are destined to call out "Barukh habah b'SHEM ADONAI" (blessed is he who comes in the NAME of THE LORD) do not hesitate!

Let us pray that at the right time YESHUA will come quickly for the sake of HIS people Israel and those who call upon the G\_D of Israel!

Let us pray that it be HIS will that "this not be the time of visitation" ... but if these times fall upon us let us be counted worthy "TO STAND" against evil!

At the end of the day within a Biblical end-times framework, it appears that we are moving closer to the inevitable fulfillment of prophecy. When these events will manifest fully ... who is to say?

In the meantime we should be mindful of what is actually going on right in front of our eyes. Clearly it ain't a pretty picture.

*Shalom Aleichem*

*P. R. Otokletos*