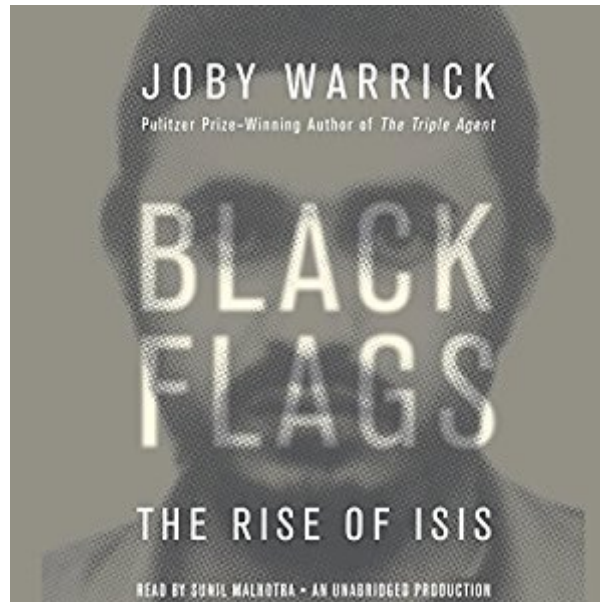




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# **Black Flags: The Rise Of ISIS**



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize, General nonfiction, 2016 In a thrilling dramatic narrative, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Joby Warrick traces how the strain of militant Islam behind ISIS first arose in a remote Jordanian prison and spread with the unwitting aid of two American presidents. When Jordan granted amnesty to a group of political prisoners in 1999, it little realized that among them was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a terrorist mastermind and soon the architect of an Islamist movement bent on dominating the Middle East. In *Black Flags*, an unprecedented account of the rise of ISIS, Joby Warrick shows how the zeal of this one man and the strategic mistakes of Presidents Bush and Obama led to the banner of ISIS being raised over huge swaths of Syria and Iraq. Zarqawi began by directing terror attacks from a base in Northern Iraq, but it was the American invasion in 2003 that catapulted him to the head of a vast insurgency. By falsely identifying him as the link between Saddam and bin Laden, US officials spurred like-minded radicals to rally to his cause. Their wave of brutal beheadings and suicide bombings persisted until American and Jordanian intelligence discovered clues that led to a lethal airstrike on Zarqawi's hideout in 2006. His movement, however, endured. First calling themselves al-Qaeda in Iraq then Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, his followers sought refuge in ungoverned pockets on the Iraq-Syria border. When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, and as the US largely stood by, ISIS seized its chance to pursue Zarqawi's dream of an ultraconservative Islamic caliphate. Drawing on high-level access to CIA and Jordanian sources, Warrick weaves moment-by-moment operational details with the perspectives of diplomats and spies, generals and heads of state, many of whom foresaw a menace worse than al Qaeda and tried desperately to stop it. *Black Flags* is a definitive history that reveals the long arc of today's most dangerous extremist threat.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author did an excellent job of making this book interesting to read. For me, it was an absolute page turner. The writing was as good as I could ever hope to read on a subject like this. It was well researched and authoritative. I had expected a book filled with information that I'd have to wade through. However, from the first page I was drawn in and found myself enjoying the book so much that I wanted to find time so I could just enjoy it and finish. I was completely delighted that it was so easy to read. The author just did a great job crafting the book around the lives of a few key players, and has their story wind its way around those connected to them, so that the book ends with how they have fared in the course of time. But it IS full of information, especially about Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and how he rose to be so influential in ISIL, and also Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Another central character is King Abdullah II of Jordan, a leader I really admire in the fight against the extremists. It was fun to read and learn more about him. The stories of all these men are told in a way that is so very human, with their multi-dimensional personalities shown through little vignettes and stories of their actions, big and small, good, and horrendous. I feel like I have a much better understanding of some of the key players, as well as the ideology and goals of this very dangerous group. I know a lot of people want to play a big blame game with the group, but really there is more than enough of that to go around, and the book doesn't shy away from it, but I felt like it was ultimately a very fair telling of where ISIL came from, and how they remain a threat today. Little side note: I could not help but trip a bit at a small bombshell about 3/4 of the way through the book, when it mentioned King Abdullah II talking with a gulf state counterpart that admitted agreeing with the ideology of the group and to having funded them! It really made me wonder even more about those classified pages in the 911 Commission report. I just wish the author had identified who that was.

Black Flags follows Zarqawi from his initial imprisonment to terrorist in Jordan and Iraq, connections with Al-Qaeda. The last third of the book follows uprisings in Syria against al-Assad through the rise of the ISIS leader, Baghdadi. Written in brief chapters covering numerous events and characters, Warwick does an excellent job taking complex stories and making them easy to follow. It appears that he covered all of the main events while providing background information. He reveals

background of the main players from all sides, including terrorists, Middle Eastern leaders, intelligence officers, military leaders, and others. It's the background info, and the details that make this book worthwhile. He delves into tactics used by terrorists, and the counter moves by the U.S. Military and the CIA. The events are gruesome, and Warwick does not hold back. Unfortunately, I suspect Warwick will be updating his book with many new editions to come.

This was a really clearly documented account of the events that preceded and then led to the rise of Isis. It really helps to see how little cohesion exists between various factions with separate agendas. I am much more aware of why the long term solution to this problem is so complicated. We are not dealing with Iraqis, Syrians, Afghans, but a variety of tribal and sectarian groups not really representing any country or borders. The horrible accounts of thugs being able to rise and recruit all over the world is amazing while the moderate Muslim groups of Sunis, Shiites, Christians and others are not politically coherent to fight back in any organized way. This is a clearly written hard to put down read that finally helped me understand our reluctance to dive in to the fray. Any group we support is opposed by others and leads to further animosity of the populations we don't support. It is also clear that Islam is not a warring evil religion. The terror comes from a bastardizing of the Koran that even Muslims reject. Walter

This was an extraordinary read. From the detail to the engagement of the writing, this is one book that everyone needs to read. The title is a bit misleading though, because as it does account for the rise of ISIS, the first two books of this book are devoted to Al-Zarqawi, who in fact rose to found and lead ISIS. I would say that it does explain how ISIS rose to be in power, it should have been titled Al-Zarqawi and the rise of ISIS. I had always wondered how ISIS became so powerful and what led to that being able to happen, and the information in this book adequately explains all of that to you, from the prison that bred these people to hate America so much to the mistakes that Al-Zarqawi made that turned many Middle Easterners against him who were initially sympathizers. This was a fantastic book and a must read for anyone wanting to know what the make up of the Middle East and Iraq especially are like.

I really wish everyone would read this book. It reads like a novel, but sadly recounts the rise of a cult created from the mind of a poorly educated and initially a mostly non religious man who used Islam to create the excuses for self aggrandizing power. It then chronicles the rise and current existence of the well educated, and very religious man who also twisted Islam to justify a very warped, sick

ideology. The mistakes we and other governments made and how they affected this horrible cult of ISIS will just make you shake your head. Islam is NOT the culprit...greed, power and ignorance along with fear are the fodder for this virus.

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