

FALSE  
NARRATIVE

## The U.S. purposely created the Islamic State

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### The False Narrative

The United States purposely created the Islamic State (IS) as a tool for achieving its foreign policy objectives.

### The Facts

There is no evidence that the United States created the militant organization the Islamic State (IS) or that it currently controls the group in any way. Rather, the group grew out of other organizations that can be traced to a radicalized Jordanian national, according to scholars and other experts in the region.

IS follows the ideology of Salafi Jihadism. Liberal think tank The Brookings Institution describes followers of jihadism as the relatively small number Muslims who believe that carrying “religiously-sanctioned warfare” is an obligation for all adherents of Islam. Believers in Salafi Jihadism, Brookings states, follow “the military exploits of the Salaf (the early generations of Muslims) to give their violence an even more immediate divine imperative.” IS has been called different names throughout its history, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and Daesh.

Scholars typically agree that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian citizen, is the founder of the group that would become IS, according to The Atlantic. Zarqawi

became radicalized while in prison for sexual assault and drug possession, according to the Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation's Freeman Spogli Institute. After his release in the late 1980s, he went to Afghanistan to fight against Soviet occupation. He embraced Salafi Jihadism during the 1990s, gained followers, eventually setting up a militant training camp in Afghanistan.

Following the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S., American intelligence began tracking Zarqawi, who moved around the Middle East, forming new groups and gaining new followers, according to the Stanford institute. The U.S. designated this network of groups under the name of Zarqawi's most well-known organization, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad. In 2004, Zarqawi joined Al-Qaeda and renamed his group AQI, or Al-Qaeda in Iraq. According to fact-checking site FactCheck.org, Zarqawi took advantage of public sentiment in Iraq — including opposition to the U.S. — to strengthen AQI.

Following Zarqawi's death in 2006, his successor rebranded the group as the Islamic State of Iraq, although the group continued to use the AQI name, according to the Stanford institute. In 2013, prompted by the chaos caused by the Syrian Civil War, AQI seized territory in Syria and was renamed the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria — that is, ISIS. The group rebranded again, to IS, in 2014.

According to FactCheck.org, experts point to several actions by the U.S. that could have contributed to the rise of IS, including the invasion of Iraq, the subsequent dissolution of the Iraqi army, and the 2011 withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. However, there is no evidence that U.S. officials made any decision with the intention of creating or strengthening IS.

Furthermore, the U. S. has treated IS as a foe since its inception. According to the Wilson Center, a nonpartisan think tank, the U.S. and coalition forces began bombing IS in 2014 after the group gained territory in Iraq and Syria. By 2016, the U.S. and its allies had conducted over 11,000 strikes. A raid by U.S. military forces

in 2019 led to the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was the leader of IS at the time. In February 2022, President Joe Biden announced that another U.S. raid had killed Baghdadi's successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.

## **Where the False Narrative Spread**

Media organizations in the Middle East have often claimed that the U.S. created IS and that its attacks throughout the region are the product of U.S. support for the group. For example, state-run newspaper Iran Daily claimed in a December 2022 article that the U.S. was to blame for an attack by IS on the Shah Cheragh shrine, a religious site in the Iranian city of Shiraz.

“In addition to the criminal and traitorous perpetrators, the main supporters and creators of Daesh (Americans) are complicit in this crime,” Iran Daily quoted Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khomeini as saying. “They (Americans) tell lies, they are black-hearted, disgraced and treacherous. In words, they raise the flag of human rights, but in practice, they create dangerous terrorist groups.” (Daesh is another name for IS, based on the acronym of the group's Arabic name.)

The Iran Daily article noted (accurately) that, in 2016, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump said (inaccurately) that ISIS had been founded by then-President Barack Obama and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton. However, at the time, multiple media outlets debunked the claim, and Trump later said that he was “being sarcastic.”

“The Islamic State has its origins in the U.S. invasion of Iraq,” Princeton University professor Bernard Haykel told FactCheck.org, following Trump's comments. “It is tied to a man named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who was killed in an American attack in 2006. I don't see that Obama has anything to do with it – at all. He wasn't even on the scene when the founders of ISIS set it up.”

The false narrative resurfaced in September 2023 by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi during a speech he gave to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City. “Some time ago, the former president of the United States announced

that ISIS was created by the United States; It doesn't matter to us that ISIS was created by which of the American governments,” Raisi said, in a nod to Trump’s 2016 comments. “The problem is that a government on the other side of the globe decided to redraw the geography of our region at the cost of shedding the blood of hundreds of thousands of women and children, but the Islamic Republic stopped this project and then pushed it back.”

An oft-repeated variation of this claim is that the United States supports or funds branches of IS. For example, in November 2022, Iran state outlet PressTV quoted Russian Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov, who accused the U.S. of aiding ISIS-K, the Afghan branch of IS. “Americans, together with their British collaborators, are putting their frantic efforts into strengthening the positions and the destructive potential of the Afghan offshoot of Daesh,” Kabulov said.

Asked about the claim by Polygraph.info — the fact-checking offshoot of the U.S.-funded but editorially independent Voice of America — a State Department spokesperson said: “This is just another example of total nonsense from Russian media with the intent to distract and disinform.”

*Editor’s Note: This Misinformation Fingerprint was updated on Sept. 26, 2023, to add an example of the claim from Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.*

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## Examples of this False Narrative ⓘ

- [https://parstoday.com/en/news/world-i188290-us\\_britain\\_strengthening\\_daesh\\_terrorists%E2%80%99\\_foothold\\_destructive\\_potential\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_russian\\_diplomat](https://parstoday.com/en/news/world-i188290-us_britain_strengthening_daesh_terrorists%E2%80%99_foothold_destructive_potential_in_afghanistan_russian_diplomat)

 7.5/100 [parstoday.ir](https://parstoday.ir) (en\_US)

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- <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2022/11/04/692139/US,-Britain-strengthening-Daesh-terrorists%E2%80%99-foothold,-destructive-potential-in-Afghanistan--Russian-diplomat>

“Russian Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov has held the United States and Britain responsible for the growth of the notorious Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in Afghanistan and the uptick in violence across the South-Central Asian country....

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- <https://french.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/04/21/701949/Les-Etats-Unis-ont-cree-Daech-Robert-F-Kennedy>

“Insistant sur le fait que le gouvernement et les médias "nous mentent", Kennedy a admis que Washington a créé Daech et que la police américaine est corrompue.

”

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- <https://rusreinfo.ru/fr/2023/01/interview-de-nikolai-patrushev-successeur-potentiel-de-vladimir-poutine/>

“Non seulement en Afghanistan, mais aussi dans d’autres régions. Ils ont eux-mêmes créé des organisations terroristes, telles qu’Al-Qaïda, le Mouvement taliban ou ISIS, pour atteindre leurs objectifs, et les ont eux-mêmes combattus.”

 20 / 100 [rusreinfo.ru](https://rusreinfo.ru) (en\_ALL)

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- <https://en.irna.ir/news/85089246/American-regime-is-godfather-of-Daesh-Iran-FM-Spox>

“Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has said that the American regime is the godfather of Daesh.

In a tweet on Friday, Kanaani said that “there was no doubt the US is the creator of ISIS.””

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- <https://netherlands.mfa.ir/en/newsview/694250/The-full-transcript-of-HE-Ebrahim-Raisi-speech-at-the-77th-session-of-the-United-Nations-General-Assembly>

“Some time ago, the former president of the United States announced that ISIS was created by the United States; It doesn't matter to us that ISIS was created by which of the American governments. The problem is that a government on the other side of the globe decided to redraw the geography of our region at the cost of shedding the blood of ...

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- <https://bnn.network/politics/courts-law/iranian-court-orders-us-to-pay-313-million-in-damages-for-2017-tehran-terror-attacks/>

“The court’s decision was based on statements by high-ranking US officials, who admitted to playing a major role in organizing and directing terrorist groups. The ruling specifically highlighted the CIA’s involvement in creating terrorist organizations, including Daesh (ISIS).”

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- [Iran court orders US to pay billions in damages to 2017 Tehran terror attack victims](#)

“The court said the reasons behind attributing the crimes to Washington is the statements of high-ranking US officials about the main role of that government in organizing and directing terrorist groups, reliable news and information published in US media, as well as US official’s speeches and books about the role of the CIA in creating ...

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- <https://sana.sy/en/?p=288409>

“Syria condemned, in strongest terms, the cowardly terrorist attack targeted Shah Cheragh shrine in Iranian city of Shiraz, asserting that it shows once again that terrorism has become one of the main tools of the US policy to destabilize the countries.

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- <https://tass.com/world/1533069>

“On October 28, the interim imam of Friday prayers in Tehran said that the United States was guilty of organizing the attack on the mausoleum and vowed that Iran would take vengeance on Washington for the bloodshed.

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- <https://syrianobserver.com/news/79780/syria-condemns-cowardly-terrorist-attack-on-shrine-in-iranian-shiraz-city.html>

“The source added that this terrorist attack shows again that terrorism has become one of the main tools of the US policy to destabilize countries and undermine peace in them to subject them to U.S. subordination.”

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- <https://irandaily.ir/News/326005.html?catid=3&title=326005>

““In addition to the criminal and traitorous perpetrators, the main supporters and creators of Daesh (Americans) are complicit in this crime,” Ayatollah Khamenei said.

“They (Americans) tell lies, they are black-hearted, disgraced and treacherous. In words,...  
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- <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/iran-judiciary-chief-says-west-funded-protected-mko-isis:-ex>

“US officials admitted during the presidential election for the former administration admitted that they conceived ISIS. “While ISIS elements were besieged, the United States and certain Western countries were giving them airlifts and providing them with arms and giving them strategic support.””

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## Reliable Sources

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/isis-origins-anbari-zarqawi/577030/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/12/middleeast/here-is-how-isis-began/index.html>

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

<https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state>



<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

<https://www.factcheck.org/2016/08/trumps-false-obama-isis-link/>

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/biden-details-us-raid-syria-left-isis-leader/story?id=82638736>

<https://www.polygraph.info/a/fact-check--fresh-russian-disinfo-falsely-claims-us-u-k-are-backing-islamic-state-in-afghanistan/6825373.html>

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