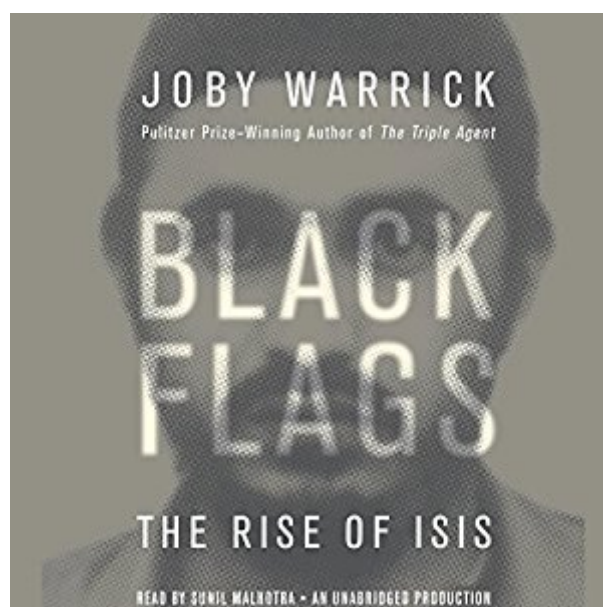


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# Black Flags: The Rise Of ISIS



## 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

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 13 hours and 33 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 29, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B014RHT8T0

Best Sellers Rank: #3 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Middle East #6 in Books >

## 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.

I love history books, and this one is about a very modern (and relevant) story, so I ordered it. I find it to be well written and researched, with a lot of detail and no judgement by the author. The book details the rise of the specific brand of militant Islam that resulted in ISIS. The author uses personal stories and quotes to trace this organization over the last 20 years or so from an isolated person (al-Zarqawi), into a regional monster. I learned a lot from the telling, including the fact that the US inadvertently gave al-Zarqawi a rise to prominence, how the movement was overcome in Iraq by the late 2000s, and then how it was resurrected by the Syrian crisis to morph into the monstrosity known today. I did not realize that al-Zarqawi basically invented the butchery of barbaric bombings, or that the bombings were cleverly used to divide the Iraqi people into religious sects. And I did not know that his organization was defeated in central Iraq after his death, only to be brought back to

life by the Syrian crisis. The details of the American effort to defeat al-Zarqawi in 2004-2006 were really great, and I came away impressed by Gen McChrystal. I was fascinated to find that even Bin Laden himself was afraid of al-Zarqawi's tactics. This book is chock full of amazing stuff! But most of all I was surprised to read of the mistakes made by two different Administrations in dealing with Iraq (Bush) and Syria (Obama). None of this need have happened (according to compelling personal stories in the book) if officials had simply exercised better judgement in resolving affairs in the region. I won't share the conclusions of the book, from my view after reading this, ISIS can be defeated, but it won't be easy or likely from direct US intervention.

ISIS, The Global Terrorist Network This Labor Day weekend, we are seeing the results of the civil war in Syria and the rise of ISIS. Thousands and thousands of refugees are pouring out of Syria to the European countries. How has this happened, what was the role of the U.S., and who is ISIS? Understanding the history of this terrorist network may be one of our most important responsibilities. The author, Joby Warrick, has written a book tracing the rise and evolution of ISIS, but more importantly told with detail and giving us a look at the history of the Middle East, and the characters involved. I read Warrick's last book, 'The Triple Agent, the Al-Qaeda Mole Who Infiltrated The CIA'. That was a terrific book filled with insight and inside sources within the CIA. This is also an eye-opening book for all of us who have difficulty sorting out Al-Qaeda vs. ISIS, the cast of characters, the politics involved within the Mideast countries, and how the U.S. played a part in all of this. After reading this book, I have a basic understanding about ISIS and the background history. We meet King Abdullah of Jordan, newly appointed in 1999, who granted amnesty to political prisoners who were deemed as low risk. Unknown to him was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one of the prisoners, a terrorist from Zarqa, Jordan. While in prison, he became a leader of the Islamist movement in the Middle East. We are privy to the rise of terror, and to some insight into this man's mind and his philosophy. In 2003 when the U.S. invaded Iraq he was given instant fame by the Bush/Cheney administration as a link between Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. This was entirely false, and gives us insight into the lack of real information and analysis of that administration.

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