Ten Things You Need to Know about ISIS

Washington Institute research explains the complexities of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

#1
ISIS is an extremist Sunni Islamist movement.
Ejected from al-Qaeda, its founding organization, as too radical, ISIS now pursues its jihadist agenda with unprecedented resources, territory, and arms. MORE

#2
ISIS wants to be known as “Islamic State.”
ISIS has declared a Muslim caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at its head. MORE

#3
ISIS is rich, and not beholden to foreign patrons.
The capture of Mosul’s central bank bolstered an ISIS war chest already well-funded by criminal enterprises. MORE

#4
ISIS brought foreign fighters back to Iraq.
Moving into Syria enabled ISIS to more easily recruit foreign fighters. MORE

#5
ISIS capitalized on Iraq’s alienated Sunnis.
Former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki created fertile terrain for ISIS operations. MORE

#6
ISIS has weaknesses.
ISIS’s early successes—largely due to its foes’ ineptitude—can be rolled back. MORE

#7
ISIS is still gaining ground.
ISIS has all but erased the border between Iraq and Syria. MORE

#8
ISIS threatens more than Iraq and Syria.
Core American interests are at stake. MORE

#9
ISIS would benefit from more Iranian involvement in Iraq.
The American and Iranian shared interest in the defeat of ISIS is no cause for collaboration. MORE

#10
ISIS won’t be defeated without a comprehensive strategy.
The United States needs to take the lead in building a local and international coalition to defeat ISIS. MORE