

INFORM. INSPIRE. DEVELOP CIVIC LEADERS.

THE POLICY CIRCLE

TERROR GROUPS & ROGUE STATES



➤ TERRORIST GROUPS AND ROGUE STATES ◀

THE FBI DEFINES TERRORISM AS "VIOLENT, CRIMINAL ACTS COMMITTED BY INDIVIDUALS AND/OR GROUPS WHO ARE INSPIRED BY, OR ASSOCIATED WITH, DESIGNATED FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS OR NATIONS (STATE-SPONSORED).

ACCORDING TO THE OXFORD DICTIONARY, A ROGUE STATE IS "A NATION OR STATE REGARDED AS BREAKING INTERNATIONAL LAW AND POSING A THREAT TO THE SECURITY OF OTHER NATIONS". THE US STATE DEPARTMENT'S COUNTERTERRORISM BUREAU MAINTAINS AN OFFICIAL LIST OF FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS WORLDWIDE. THIS PRESENTATION COVERS A SMALL SUBSET.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST





THE TALIBAN



THE TALIBAN EMERGED IN 1994 IN THE POWER-VACUUM LEFT AFTER THE SOVIET UNION WITHDREW FROM AFGHANISTAN. THEY GAINED POPULAR SUPPORT AND CAME TO POWER IN AFGHANISTAN IN 1996. THE TALIBAN IMPOSED A STRICT INTERPRETATION OF SHARIA LAW ON AFGHANISTAN'S PEOPLE, BANNING MUSIC AND TELEVISION AND REQUIRING WOMEN TO WEAR HEAD-TO-TOE BURQAS.

IN 2001 THE U.S. AND NATO FORCES REMOVED THE TALIBAN FROM POWER. TALIBAN LEADERSHIP AND AL-QAEDA MEMBERS THEY HAD SHELTERED REGROUPED IN PAKISTAN. OVER THE SUMMER OF 2021 AS U.S. AND NATO TROOPS WITHDREW FROM AFGHANISTAN, THE TALIBAN ADVANCED AND TOOK FULL CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY.

THE TALIBAN'S STRICT ISLAMIC RULE IN THE 1990S HAS MADE MANY SKEPTICAL OF NEW PROMISES IN 2021. THE TALIBAN HAS ALREADY RENEGED ON THE PROMISE THAT GIRLS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO ATTEND SECONDARY SCHOOL. NO WOMEN HOLD GOVERNMENTAL POSITIONS, AND MANY FEMALE JUDGES FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST AFGHAN CITIZENS WHO PROTESTED, AND INTERNATIONAL INTELLIGENCE REPORTS SAY THE TALIBAN HAS TARGETED INDIVIDUALS LINKED TO THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION AND U.S.-LED FORCES.

THE TALIBAN'S MAIN GOAL HAS BEEN TO ESTABLISH A TALIBAN-CONTROLLED GOVERNMENT AND A "DIVINELY ORDERED ISLAMIC SYSTEM" IN AFGHANISTAN. AFTER 2001, THE TALIBAN'S LEADERSHIP WAS BASED PRIMARILY IN PAKISTAN, UNTIL THE GROUP REGAINED CONTROL OF AFGHANISTAN. THE TALIBAN DOES HAVE SOME SUPPORT AMONG THE LOCAL POPULACE WITH TRADITIONAL VIEWS, AND SOME BELIEVE TALIBAN RULE TO BE MORE TOLERABLE THAN THE MISMANAGEMENT AND CORRUPTION FROM THE U.S.-BACKED STATE GOVERNMENT.

FOREIGN AID COMPOSED A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF AFGHANISTAN'S FINANCES, BUT HAS MOSTLY BEEN SUSPENDED SINCE THE TALIBAN TOOK CONTROL IN 2021. AFGHANISTAN'S ECONOMY IS COLLAPSING AND FOOD AND MEDICAL SHORTAGES MEAN THE COUNTRY IS ON THE BRINK OF FAMINE. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WILL NOT DELIVER FURTHER INTERNATIONAL AID UNLESS THE TALIBAN MEETS HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS LIKE WOMENS' EDUCATION AND TOLERANCE FOR RELIGIOUS MINORITIES. THE TALIBAN'S INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY LARGELY DEPENDS ON HOW THE TALIBAN PROCEEDS.



AL-QAEDA



AL-QAEDA, A WORD THAT MEANS "THE BASE" IN ARABIC, IS THE MULTINATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SEPTEMBER 11TH ATTACKS, THE 1998 BOMBING OF TWO U.S. EMBASSIES IN EAST AFRICA, AND THE BOMBING OF THE NAVAL DESTROYER THE USS COLE IN 2000. AL-QAEDA'S COMMAND STRUCTURE HAS BEEN DECIMATED SINCE THE 2011 KILLING OF OSAMA BIN LADEN AND SUBSEQUENT DRONE STRIKES AGAINST HIS SUCCESSORS.

THANKS TO THE INTERNET, AL-QAEDA REMAINS AGILE AND GRAPHICALLY DISPERSED WITH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MEMBERS OPERATING IN AT LEAST TEN COUNTRIES. SOME OF AL-QAEDA'S LARGEST AFFILIATES INCLUDE AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA, WITH ~7,000 FIGHTERS IN YEMEN'S CIVIL WAR; AND AL-SHABAB, WITH 7-9,000 FIGHTERS IN SOMALIA. AL-QAEDA IS A BITTER RIVAL OF THE ISLAMIC STATE, WITH BOTH GROUPS CLAIMING TO LEAD THE GLOBAL JIHADIST MOVEMENT.

AL-QAEDA'S REMAINING LEADERSHIP IS IN HIDING IN THE MOUNTAINOUS BORDER REGION BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN. AL-QAEDA ASPIRES TO UNITE MUSLIMS AROUND THE WORLD UNDER A CALIPHATE, A POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ISLAMIC STATE RULED BY A CHIEF MUSLIM RULER CALLED A CALIPH. IN AREAS IT CONTROLLED, AL-QAEDA IMPOSED A STRICT VERSION OF ISLAMIC LAW.

THE 2019 ATTACK BY A SAUDI SLEEPER AGENT AT A U.S. NAVY BASE IN FLORIDA WAS A REMINDER OF AL-QAEDA'S ABILITY TO MOUNT INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS THROUGH ITS FRANCHISES. A CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S. WILL BE BALANCING COMPETING NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES, ALONG WITH THE TALIBAN'S PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN SINCE THE TALIBAN AS AGREED TO SUPPRESS INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST THREATS BUT HAS IN THE PAST AIDED AL-QAEDA.

➤ ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA ◀

THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA, ALSO KNOWN BY ITS ARABIC ACRONYM DAESH, IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS TERRORIST GROUPS. IT STARTED AS AN AL-QAEDA SPLINTER GROUP WHEN IT EMERGED IN THE POWER VACCUUM AFTER THE 2011 WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN TROOPS FROM IRAQ. ITS GOAL IS TO CREATE A GLOBAL CALIPHATE ACROSS IRAQ, SYRIA, AND BEYOND.

ISIS LACKS THE CAPABILITY TO CARRY OUT LARGE SCALE TERRORIST ATTACKS, BUT AS OF 2022, CONTINUES TO EXIST AS AN COHESIVE ORGANIZATION WITH INTERNATIONAL AFFILIATES. THE GROUP HAS SYMPATHIZERS THAT CARRY OUT LONE-WOLF ATTACKS AROUND THE WORLD AND HAS RECRUITED FOREIGN FIGHTERS TO ITS TERRITORIES IN IRAQ AND SYRIA. MEANWHILE, GOVERNMENTS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA HAVE STRUGGLED TO REINTEGRATE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF IS AFFILIATES HELD IN PRISON AND SECURITY CAMPS. SOME OF THESE CAMPS HAVE BECOME ISIS'S NEW TARGET FOR RECRUITMENT.

BETWEEN 2014 AND 2018, ISLAMIC STATE EXPLOITED THE CHAOS OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND SECTARIAN DIVIDES IN IRAQ TO CONQUER LARGE SWATHES OF SYRIA AND IRAQ. AT ITS PEAK, ISIS RULED OVER 10 MILLION PEOPLE AND CONTROLLED 1/3 OF SYRIA'S TERRITORY AND 40% OF IRAQ'S TERRITORY. U.S.-BACKED FORCES IN IRAQ AND SYRIA PUSHED ISIS OUT AND DECLARED THE TERRITORIAL DEFEAT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN MARCH, 2019. ISIS'S BRUTALITY TOWARDS THE POPULATIONS IT RULED MAKE IT UNLIKELY TO COULD REGAIN POPULAR SUPPORT.

AN INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF 74 COUNTRIES CONTINUES TO ADDRESS THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS LEFT IN THE WAKE OF ISIS' DEFEAT, ALTHOUGH THE ONGOING SYRIAN CIVIL WAR HAMPERS ANY RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS IN FORMER ISIS-CONTROLLED AREAS OF SYRIA. GIVEN THE GROUND ISIS GAINED SINCE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION TURNED TO PUBLIC HEALTH IN 2020, MANY U.S. MILITARY ANALYSIS BELIEVE ISIS POSES A DIRECT THRAT TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND ARE CONCERNED ABOUT FURTHER REDUCING U.S. TROOPS IN THE REGION.

➤ THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN ◀

IRAN BECAME AN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC IN 1979 AFTER CONSERVATIVE CLERICAL FORCES OVERTHREW THE MONARCHY AND ESTABLISHED A THEOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE NOT HAD OFFICIAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS SINCE THE 1979-1981 IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS, WHEN REVOLUTIONARIES BROKE INTO THE U.S. EMBASSY AND HELD 52 U.S. CITIZENS CAPTIVE FOR 444 DAYS. IRAN HAS BEEN DESIGNATED A STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM AND REMAINS SUBJECT TO U.S., UN, AND EU SANCTIONS.

IRAN'S POLITICAL SYSTEM HAS SOME ROLE FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS, BUT ONLY WITHIN THE STRICT LIMITS SET BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THEIR APPOINTEES. THE SYSTEM IS DOMINATED BY RELIGIOUS CLERICS AND LEAVES THE CHURCH AND STATE HEAVILY INTERTWINED. THE REGIME IS EXTREMELY REPRESSIVE; REPORTS INDICATE CITIZENS FACE INVASIONS OF PRIVACY AND RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, AND POLITICAL DISSIDENTS, PROTESTERS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FACE TORTURE, IMPRISONMENT AND EVEN EXECUTION.

IRAN IS ONE OF THE FEW MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES COUNTRIES WHERE THE SHIA FORM OF ISLAM ACCOUNTS FOR THE MAJORITY OF BELIEVERS. IRAN TENDS TO SUPPORT SHIA MUSLIM TERRORIST GROUPS AND PROXY FORCES THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AGAINST ITS MAIN GEOPOLITICAL RIVALS, INCLUDING ISRAEL. IRAN IS ONE OF THE STRONGEST ALLIES OF THE SYRIAN DICTATOR BASHAR AL-ASSAD IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR, SENDING BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN MILITARY AID AND DEPLOYING IRANIAN TROOPS TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT.

IRAN'S QUEST FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND BALLISTIC MISSILES IS A MAJOR CONCERN FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. UNDER A 2015 AGREEMENT CALLED THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA) THAT INVOLVED THE U.S., IRAN, AND OTHER MAJOR POWERS LIKE THE UK, FRANCE, RUSSIA AND CHINA, IRAN WOULD ACCEPT MAJOR RESTRICTIONS ON ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM IN RETURN FOR LOWERED SANCTIONS. IN 2018, PRESIDENT TRUMP WITHDREW FROM THE IRAN DEAL AND REIMPOSED SANCTIONS TO TRY AND RENEGOTIATE A STRICTER VERSION OF THE IRAN DEAL. AS OF EARLY 2022, THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS ARE SEEKING TO RENEGOTIATE.



HEZBOLLAH



HEZBOLLAH, AN ARABIC TERM THAT MEANS "THE PARTY OF GOD," IS A STATE WITHIN A STATE THAT CONTROLS SHIA MUSLIM MAJORITY AREAS OF SOUTHERN LEBANON. HEZBOLLAH IS A MASSIVE ORGANIZATION WITH A POLITICAL WING REPRESENTED IN LEBANON'S PARLIAMENT, A MILITARY FORCE WITH ITS OWN TRAINING CAMPS, AND A SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK FOR ITS SUPPORTERS IN LEBANON. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE DESIGNATED HEZBOLLAH A TERRORIST GROUP.

HEZBOLLAH WAS FOUNDED IN 1982, WHEN ISRAEL OCCUPIED A PORTION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON DURING THE COUNTRY'S CIVIL WAR. HEZBOLLAH'S FOUNDING DOCUMENT CALLS FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AND THE END OF WESTERN INFLUENCE IN LEBANON AND THE MIDDLE EAST. IRAN IS HEZBOLLAH'S MAIN ALLY, AND HEZBOLLAH'S COMBAT FORCES ARE ALSO FIGHTING ON THE SIDE OF THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IN SYRIA'S CIVIL WAR. HEZBOLLAH LAST CAME INTO DIRECT CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL DURING ISRAEL'S 2006 INTERVENTION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, WHEN HEZBOLLAH LAUNCHED THOUSANDS OF ROCKETS INTO ISRAELI TERRITORY.

HEZBOLLAH RECEIVES HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS FROM CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES, LEGAL BUSINESSES, AND ITS LEBANESE SUPPORTERS. U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS LIKE THE 2015 HIZBALLAH INTERNATIONAL FINANCING PREVENTION ACT ARE FOCUSED ON SANCTIONING FOREIGN ENTITIES WITH U.S. BANK ACCOUNTS THAT PROVIDE FUNDING TO HEZBOLLAH.

HEZBOLLAH HAS A HISTORY OF PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES TO THE LEBANESE POPULATION, WHICH HAS GARNERED SUPPORT. HOWEVER, ITS INTERVENTION IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR HAS MADE IT UNPOPULAR WITH SOME SUPPORTERS WHO FEEL IT HAS IGNORED DOMESTIC LEBANESE ISSUES. THE COALITION GOVERNMENT HEZBOLLAH PARTICIPATES IN HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO ADDRESS LEBANON'S ECONOMIC CRISIS. IN RESPONSE TO WIDESPREAD FOOD AND FUEL SHORTAGES, HEZBOLLAH HAS ARRANGED FOR SHIPMENTS OF IRANIAN OIL TO LEBANON THAT WOULD VIOLATE US SANCTIONS ON IRAN RELATED TO THE COUNTRY'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM.



HAMAS



HAMAS IS A PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT THAT IS ALSO ONE OF THE TWO MAIN PALESTINIAN POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS. SINCE 2006, IT HAS GOVERNED MORE THAN 2 MILLION PALESTINIANS IN THE GAZA STRIP. HAMAS'S STATED GOAL IS THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ISLAMIC STATE COVERING ALL OF PRESENT-DAY ISRAEL AND PALESTINE. SINCE THE 1990S, HAMAS HAS A HISTORY OF USING SUICIDE BOMBINGS AGAINST ISRAELI CITIZENS AND LAUNCHING ROCKETS INTO ISRAEL.

EGYPT AND ISRAEL HAVE CLOSED THEIR BORDERS WITH GAZA STRIP SINCE HAMAS CAME TO POWER, AND PALESTINIANS IN THE AREA DEPEND ON INTERNATIONAL AID TO SURVIVE. HAMAS'S STATUS AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION MEANS THAT IT IS CUT OFF FROM MOST SOURCES OF INTERNATIONAL FUNDING, BUT THE GROUP DOES RECEIVE SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM IRAN, AND DONATIONS FROM WEALTHY SUPPORTERS IN GULF STATES LIKE SAUDI ARABIA.

HAMAS HAS FOUR SEPARATE ORGANIZATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES: THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA, ISRAEL'S PRISON SYSTEM, THE GAZA STRIP PORTION OF PALESTINE THAT HAMAS CONTROLS, AND THE WEST BANK REGION OF PALESTINE CONTROLLED BY THE MORE MODERATE FATAH GROUP.

MAY 2021 SAW THE DEADLIEST VIOLENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS IN YEARS, WHEN RIOTS BROKE IN JERUSALEM AND HAMAS BEGAN LAUNCHING ROCKETS INTO ISRAEL, CLAIMING IT WAS RETALIATING AGAINST ISRAELI AGGRESSION TOWARDS PALESTINIANS IN JERUSALEM. HAMAS'S COMMITMENT TO VIOLENCE AGAINST ISRAEL MEANS THAT ITS OPPONENTS INCLUDE ISRAEL AND THE U.S., AS WELL AS MORE MODERATE PALESTINIAN GROUPS LIKE FATAH THAT HAVE RENOUNCED TERRORISM AND COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL.