

# Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe. By Malcolm Nance, Foreword by Richard Engel. New York, N.Y.: Skyhorse Publishing Company, 2016.

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***Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe.* By Malcolm Nance, Foreword by Richard Engel. New York, N.Y.: Skyhorse Publishing Company, 2016. ISBN 978-1-5107-1184-6. Common Islamic Terms Glossary. Photographs in Text. Endnotes. Sources cited. Index. Pp. xvii, 441. \$27.99.**

Malcolm Nance is featured regularly as a counterterrorism expert on MSNBC. He is well known in the Intelligence Community and has deployed to intelligence operations in the Balkans, Middle East, and Saharan Africa. Nance has authored other books in the field of counterterrorism: *An End to al-Qaeda*, *The Terrorists of Iraq*, and *The Terrorist Recognition Handbook*. His current work has a wealth of information that will be of benefit to any professional or other interested party who wishes to understand the ISIS threat in today's world. Some of Nance's statements, particularly on current and past United States policy may spark controversy, but they are also thought provoking. The Foreword by NBC News chief foreign correspondent, Richard Engle, sets the stage for the basic premise in Nance's work.

Nance offers a compelling argument to support the concept of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a cult set apart from the Islamic religion. His book is in four parts and the author offers a reasoned and logical approach for his position. Nance uses historical facts to establish that the rise of the ISIS movement is not unprecedented in the history of this part of the world. The author also stresses the point that much of the worst violence is directed at Muslims who do not adhere to the overall goal of ISIS, which is to establish a Caliphate to rule the world. According to Malcolm Nance, in order to accomplish this objective ISIS is trying to destroy traditional Islam.

Part I of this book deals with who the terrorists of ISIS really are. In this section Nance offers historical context for describing the movement as a cult. The author expands this concept in further detail in other parts of his work. He links ISIS to al-Qaeda and presents a case for ISIS rising in response to the failure of American policy in dealing with al-Qaida in Iraq. The detailed account of ISIS leadership and members is very informative. This part of the book is interesting and is useful as a reference work. The data on leadership, fighters, and the organizational structure is very detailed.

In Part II of his book Nance presents specific information on where ISIS operates in the world. The scope of its influence will be surprising to many individuals. Again Nance has done a really good job of providing detailed information about the growth and activities of ISIS components across the

areas of Lebanon, Jordan, and throughout North Africa from Egypt through Libya and into Tunisia, Algeria and Mali. He covers pledges of allegiance or loyalty, history, and significant events in each geographic area. The next chapter in Part II deals with the rise of Boko Haram in West Africa and the same ties and allegiance to ISIS. In light of recent events, people in the United States and Europe will be even more uneasy to learn that the reach of ISIS is not only Turkey and Australia, but the United States, other portions of North America, Europe in general, and France specifically. The author did an excellent job in describing the attacks in Paris and the aftermath. This book was in print before the terrorist assault in Brussels in March 2016, but these recent events only support the terrible threat posed by ISIS world-wide. The final chapter in this section deals with ISIS in Afghanistan, the Gulf States, the Arabian Peninsula, and Asia. These are areas where many people think ISIS is primarily operational, but the global reach as outlined in the entirety of Part II of this work is astounding.

Malcolm Nance does an excellent job of outlining what ISIS believes in Part III of the book. He argues that ISIS has set out to destroy Islam as a religion and rebuild a new order based on a cult of Jihad. His recounting of the historical precedents of Islamic cultism offers a strong argument for classifying ISIS as an Islamic cult as opposed to an organization based on traditional Islamic faith. Nance briefly reviews the first Islamic civil war in 658 involving the Khawarij, the next in 874 after the division of Islam into Sunnah and Shi'ite sects or denominations and the rise of the Qaramitah, then looks at the 1881 movement of Mahdists of Sudan. The latter movement may be more familiar to many Westerners because it is relatively more recent and involved the siege of Khartoum and the death of British General Charles "Chinese" Gordon. As a young man Winston Churchill was assigned to a regiment under General Kitchener. The author quotes Churchill speaking years later in a prophetic manner about the campaign to end the Mahdist movement: "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning" (p. 203). As late as 1979, the Uteybists, led by a former member of the Saudi National Guard; decided Islam had been perverted by modern innovations and must be cleansed. The group seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and fought a hard battle with government troops.

According to Nance, ISIS uses thought control, information control, behavior control, and emotional control to radicalize ISIS followers. Ultimately the radical methods result in atrocities involving women, children, prisoners, cultural cleansing, and the destruction of historical works and artifacts; which

are not only a part of the treasure of traditional Islamic people but have cultural significance for the whole world. News accounts have covered some of the excesses, but Nance goes into great detail discussing the sexual subjugation of women under ISIS. Murders, rape, and forced marriages are common as well as “temporary marriages” as a reward to fighters. Children are taught to fight and die as well as to behave in a barbaric fashion toward anyone not a follower of the ISIS goal of a world Caliphate. Hostages and prisoners have been executed in the most horrible ways ISIS can devise as a way to demonstrate ISIS power and spread terror for purposes of control. As part of the cleansing of traditional Islam ISIS has destroyed museum collections, ancient writings, historic sites, and basically any artifacts too big to move and smuggle to underground sources for sale to private buyers. Money raised is used to fund ISIS needs in other areas. Malcolm Nance’s suggestion to revive the World War II Monuments Men program is timely since so many of the irreplaceable items are already lost forever.

In Part IV of the book, Nance discusses how ISIS fights. There is a detailed account of the types and numbers of weapons ISIS possesses. Many were captured as spoils of war, but a number are of limited utility because ISIS has no ability to maintain some of the equipment. The section on weapons is another good reference source for looking at the battle capabilities of ISIS. As important is Nance’s analysis of the attitude, motivation, and tactical battle approach of ISIS fighters. According to the author the ISIS fighters prefer head-to-head frontal assaults to achieve victory. They use tactics based on an overall strategy to engage in a long war of assaults on a global basis. The author describes the ISIS tactical approach as an Alpine Troops tactical position. Move fast, hit hard, move on to the next objective. According to Nance, the fighters often are somewhat reckless and expose themselves in their determination to strike directly at the enemy in front of them. ISIS fosters a “thrill kill” mentality. They use social media extensively to exploit battle success, executions, and of course to recruit support and new fighters. In the social media war ISIS exploits the uninformed by misrepresentation and absolute deviation from the accepted doctrine of traditional Islam.

The final chapter of Nance’s book, Chapter 20, is also titled *Defeating ISIS*. Nance presents a four phase strategy to undermine ISIS and the organization’s influence on the people ISIS seeks both to recruit and to dominate. The first phase is concerned with the tactical approach of the military. Nance advocates more extensive use of special operations forces and our complete air superiority. His approach is based on using ISIS tactics

against them and totally destroying the ISIS fighters rather than securing and holding territory in a location. As a second phase, but closely related to the first, the author pushes for a much stronger effort in the area of counter-ideological warfare. This is based on the concept of turning the ISIS media efforts against them by exposing the cult qualities of ISIS and showing the ways in which they are so different from mainstream Islam. Nance's plan for phase 3, titled diplomacy unleashed, involves the creation of a new Syria to include a restructured Syrian military. The final phase, phase 4, is for the Western powers to assist in stabling a new Pan-Arab coalition to allow the Muslim nations and their military forces to lead the fight against the organizations like ISIS who want to form a new world order based on a radical approach to terror and tearing down traditional Islam.

This work is very useful in two major ways. First, there is a wealth of factual information on ISIS, including the organization and structure, belief systems, tactics and weapons, approach to control and domination of the Middle East, and long term goals. This book is a good reference source for anyone in the professional field and for individuals seeking to understand the enemy and what we and our allies face. In addition, the work is useful in a second way because of some of the issues Nance raises and the four phase plan he presents to defeat ISIS. The ideas and concepts are worth consideration and discussion from those individuals charged with the responsibility of planning and implementing our response to the ISIS threat.

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