

## TIMELINE OF THE SUNNI/SHIA DIVISION OF ISLAM:

### NEARLY 1,400 YEARS OF VIOLENCE AND WAR

The division of Islam into Sunni and Shia branches began in 656. It originated in a dispute over who should succeed the prophet Muhammad after his death in 633.

The standard Arabian practice at the time was for the prominent men of a kinship group, or tribe, to gather after a leader's death and elect a leader from amongst themselves. When Muhammad died that process resulted in conferring the title of caliph on Abu Bakr.

Sunni Muslims believe and confirm that Abu Bakr was chosen by the community and that this was the proper procedure. Shia Muslims, in contrast, argue that Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad, was chosen by Muhammad as his spiritual and temporal successor and so Ali was the only person deserving to be caliph. The name "Shia" derives from the Arabic "Shiat Ali," meaning a follower of Ali.

Shia Muslims are the distinct minority comprising just 10% to 15% of all Muslims. Sunnis represent most Muslims worldwide, about 85% to 90%.

#### Timeline<sup>1</sup>

570	Muhammad is born in Mecca.
598	Ali is born.
610	Muhammad begins his mission, the revelation of the Quran.
633	Muhammad dies. The Muslim community elects his father-in-law and close associate, Abu Bakr Siddique, as caliph.
633-661	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Abu Bakr Siddique, on his deathbed, nominates Umar ibn Khattab as his successor.</li><li>• Umar is assassinated by a Persian named Piruz Nahavandi.</li><li>• Council of electors choose Uthman Ibn Affan as Umar's successor.</li><li>• Uthman is assassinated by members of a disaffected group.</li><li>• Ali takes control but is not universally accepted as caliph.</li><li>• Ali is assassinated by Abdl-alRahman.</li><li>• Violence between Shia and Sunni continues from then until today.</li></ul>
1099	European Crusaders take Jerusalem from the Muslims. Eventually Muslims defeat the Crusaders and regain control of the holy land.
1258	The Mongols destroy Baghdad, ending the Sunni Arab caliphate.
1299	The earliest Ottoman state is formed in Anatolia, Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> Events relating specifically to **Iran** are in **bold type**.

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1453	Ottomans conquer the Byzantine seat of Constantinople and change its name to Istanbul.
1501	Ismail I establishes the Safavid dynasty in Persia (now Iran) and declares Shiism the state religion.
1918	World War I ends with the defeat and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the last of the Islamic empires.
1922-1924	Kemal Ataturk abolishes the Ottoman sultanate and the Turkish Sunni caliphate.
1932	Iraq becomes an independent nation under King Faisal, a Sunni Arab.
1935	<b>Persia is renamed Iran.</b>
1953	<b>A joint CIA/British intelligence operation in Iran keeps the shah on the throne and ousts nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh.</b>
1963	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The shah implements an aggressive campaign of social and economic Westernization that the Iranian public intensely opposes.</b></li> <li>• <b>Amid widespread protests in Iran against the shah, Ayatollah Khomeini is arrested, then exiled.</b></li> </ul>
1976	<b>In one of a series of reforms that alienate his people, the shah replaces the Islamic calendar with an “imperial” calendar, beginning with the founding of the Persian Empire. Many of the shah’s growing number of critics see this as anti-Islamic.</b>
1978	<b>Iranians resort to rioting, mass demonstrations and strikes to protest the shah’s authoritarian rule. In response, he enforces martial law.</b>
1979	Saddam Hussein seizes power, becomes president of Iraq.
1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The shah flees Iran amid intensifying unrest.</b></li> <li>• <b>Islamic nationalist Ayatollah Khomeini returns from exile. Under his guidance, Iran declares itself a theocratic republic guided by Islamic principles, and a referendum is held to name it the Islamic Republic of Iran.</b></li> <li>• <b>Islamic students storm the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking hostage 52 American employees.</b></li> </ul>

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1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Iran and the United States sever diplomatic ties over the hostage crisis.</b></li> <li>• <b>The shah dies in exile in Egypt.</b></li> <li>• <b>Iraq invades Iran after years of disagreements over territory.</b></li> </ul>
1980-1988	<b>Hundreds of thousands die on each side in the ensuing Iran-Iraq war. It ends in a stalemate.</b>
1985	<b>The United States covertly seeks to sell arms to Iran in exchange for the release of seven American hostages being held by Iranian-backed militants in Lebanon, prompting the Iran-Contra scandal.</b>
1990	Saddam Hussein orders his army to seize Kuwait.
1991	The U.S. military ousts the Iraqi army from Kuwait. Shiites of southern Iraq rebel against Saddam, who puts down the rebellion brutally, killing thousands of Shiites.
1991-2003	Iraq is placed under economic sanctions. U.N. weapons inspectors destroy some of Iraq's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs.
1995	<b>The United States places oil and trade sanctions on Iran, accusing the country of sponsoring terrorism, committing human rights abuses and seeking to sabotage the Arab-Israeli peace process.</b>
1999	Group now known as “ISIS” for “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” originates among Sunnis in Iraq as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad.
2001	Al-Qaida, led by Sunni Muslim fundamentalists from Saudi Arabia, mounts attacks in New York and Washington, killing more than 3,000 people. The United States invades Afghanistan and ousts the Sunni Taliban government.
<b>2003</b>	The U.S. military invades Iraq, topples Saddam Hussein. An Iraqi insurgency erupts, led by Sunni Baathists and al-Qaida.
<b>2003</b>	<b>The International Atomic Energy Agency says Iran admits to plutonium production, but the agency says there is no evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Iran agrees to more rigorous U.N. inspections of nuclear facilities.</b>
2003	Group now known as ISIS participates in the Iraqi insurgency following the United States invasion.

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2004	Group now known as ISIS renames itself Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn - commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) – and pledges allegiance to al-Qaeda.
2004	<b>Conservatives reclaim control of Iran’s parliament after controversial elections that were boycotted by reformists. Iran’s government says it will consider re-starting its nuclear program.</b>
2005	<b>Hard-line fundamentalist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected president in Iran. Iran pursues acquisition of nuclear technology.</b>
2005-2006	Shiite parties elected to power in Iraq, backed by Iran. Sunni minority excluded from power, intensifying Sunni-Shiite sectarian violence.
2006	Group now known as ISIS joins other Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq to form the Mujahideen Shura Council. Later that year the group proclaims the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). ISI gains a significant presence in Al Anbar and Baghdad provinces.
2006	<b>The U.N. Security Council imposes economic sanctions on Iran in response to nuclear activities.</b>
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The United States announces new economic sanctions against Iran targeted to impact the country’s military and halt Tehran’s disputed nuclear program.</b></li> <li>• <b>A U.S. National Intelligence Estimate report finds that Iran stopped developing nuclear weapons in 2003, but continues to enrich uranium and could still develop atomic arms in the future.</b></li> </ul>
2008	<b>The International Atomic Energy Agency releases a report saying Iran’s suspected research into the development of nuclear weapons remained “a matter of serious concern.” European Union nations agree to impose new sanctions against Iran.</b>
2011	ISI, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, sends delegates into Syria after the Syrian Civil War begins. There the group calls itself the al-Nusra Front and establishes a large presence in Sunni-majority areas of Syria.
2013	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announces the merger of his ISI with al-Nusra Front, and announces the name of the reunited group is now Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but leaders of al-Nusra and al-Qaeda reject the merger.

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2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ISIL proclaims that it is a worldwide caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph and renames itself Islamic State.</li><li>• After an eight-month power struggle, al-Qaeda cuts all ties with ISIL, citing its failure to consult and "notorious intransigence." Later that year ISIL renames itself "Islamic State."</li></ul>
2014-2015	U.S. and other nations negotiate with Iran to limit Iran's nuclear program. Deadline for agreement is extended twice. Deadline for "framework" agreement is now March 31, 2015.