

### **Article of the Week (AoW) Directions**

1. Mark your confusion – either highlighting or underlining.
2. Mark up the text. Annotate the article with comments, questions, inferences, etc. You can use a variety of sentences, phrases, and symbols to show your thinking.
3. Write a developed paragraph response to one of the prompts below.

## **What Is ISIS?**

The terrorist group has taken credit for beheading an American journalist.

Source: Gil Kaufman/MTV News/ 8.21.2014

President Obama pledged this week that the U.S. would be “relentless” in the wake of the beheading of an American journalist by the militants in Syria known as ISIS.

The president said that the video of a masked militant killing James Foley — who was kidnapped in Syria nearly two years ago — has “appalled” the world and will not deter America from its escalating military effort to root out terrorists in Iraq.

ISIS has also threatened to kill another captive journalist, Steven Sotloff, if the U.S. does not change its course in Iraq. “No faith teaches people to massacre innocents,” Obama said. On Thursday (August 21), it was revealed that U.S. special forces attempted to rescue Foley and other hostages earlier this summer after the terror group had demanded a \$130 million ransom for his release.

### **Who Is ISIS?**

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS, also known as ISIL) used to be known as Al Qaeda in Iraq. After the 2006 U.S. troop surge in Iraq seriously hampered the group’s ability to carry out terrorist actions, ISIS reorganized and began to rebuild its strength.

### **Are They Still Part Of Al Qaeda?**

Al Qaeda broke ties with ISIS in February after Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri became frustrated with ISIS’s refusal to heed his orders to kill fewer Syrian civilians. The group is expanding its reach on the long border between Iraq and Syria, where the combination of the Syrian civil war and a weak government in Iraq has allowed ISIS to expand.

### **How Many ISIS Soldiers Are There?**

No one knows how many fighters ISIS has, but some estimates have put their numbers at 15,000 or more, with up to three times that number available to fight if necessary. Their increasingly brutal, brazen attacks and tactics have raised alarms that they could have their sights on expanding their operations beyond Iraq and Syria.

### **Could They Attack America?**

Former CIA deputy director Mike Morell told CBS News that the beheading video is an attempt to intimidate the U.S. “The definition of terrorism is violence for political effect,” Morell said. “We should mark this date down because this is ISIS’ first terrorist attack against the United States.”

On August 9, someone posted a picture of the ISIS flag unfurled outside of the White House. “[W]e are here #America near our #target :) soooooooooooooon,” read the accompanying message; the Secret Service is investigating the incident.

### **Could They Really Set Up Their Own State?**

They kind of already have. In addition to having their own flag, ISIS has claimed a large swath of land around the Syria/Iraq border and has continued to advance into other adjacent areas, forcing more than one million Iraqis from their homes in the process. Their total land holdings are now larger than the neighboring state of Jordan.

### **Who Is Their Leader?**

Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi believes that all of the world's Muslims should live under one Islamic state ruled by sharia law. With large portions of Iraq and Syria already under their control, the ultimate goal is to have a vast state in the eastern Mediterranean that would include parts of Cyprus, Lebanon and Jordan.

The mysterious al-Baghdadi (only two known photos of him exist) walked out of the largest U.S. detention camp in Iraq in 2009, allegedly telling some U.S. reservists from Long Island, "I'll see you guys in New York." He is now considered to be the world's most dangerous jihadi, or, as some have called him, "The New Osama Bin Laden."

### **What Do They Want?**

The insurgent militia is bent on creating a Sunni Islamic state — or caliphate — in the region through the use of extreme violence against its perceived enemies. They have targeted the Iraqi government and American forces in Iraq, as well as Shia Muslims and Christians and, increasingly, civilians of all faiths in unpredictable, violent attacks that include beheadings and suicide bombings.

### **Who Is Funding Them?**

ISIS doesn't depend on foreign funds to survive, but instead they've hoarded millions thanks to theft and the sale of oil from areas they've overrun. In July, the group is reported to have pulled off the biggest bank heist in history, allegedly lifting more than \$430 million from a Mosul bank after overrunning that Iraqi city. They've also reportedly extorted money from humanitarian workers and have been selling electricity back to the Syrian government they're fighting against.

The group has also bragged of stealing millions of dollars in U.S. military equipment, making it one of the world's most well-funded terrorist groups.

**Respond to one of the following prompts. Use a separate sheet of paper.**

1. Should the U.S. go after ISIS in the Middle East? Explain.
2. Choose a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph from the article and respond to it.