



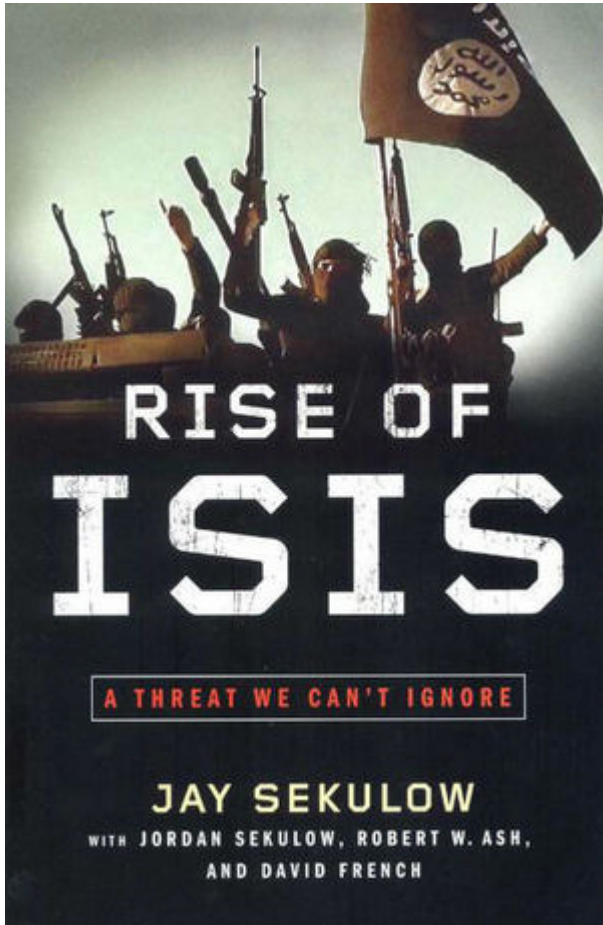
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DAILY NEWS

A 'somewhat terrifying read'

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"The Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore," by Jay Sekulow. New York, NY: Howard Books (Division of Simon & Schuster), 2014. 128 pages, \$12.99.



"It was the video no one wanted to see, that few people could bear to watch," Jay Sekulow writes at the beginning of "The Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore," his timely new volume on the terrorist organization that has dominated the headlines for much of the past year.

"A young American, James Foley, was on his knees next to a masked, black-clad jihadist," Sekulow continues. "The jihadist was holding a knife. Foley began reciting a prepared text – delivered under the ultimate duress – condemning America. When he finished, he visibly braced himself. We all knew what was coming."

I am certain my reaction to the beheadings of several innocent civilians at the hands of the militant organization ISIS was not unlike that of most Americans. I was outraged. That human beings could subject other human beings to this kind of barbarism and then brag about it to the rest of the world was utterly puzzling and deeply repugnant. What cause could possibly warrant such brutal tactics? What could anyone hope to gain by engaging in these kinds of heinous acts?

When some people want to know more about a particular topic, they turn to newspapers and magazines, their favorite cable TV shows or the Internet. When I want to learn more about something that interests me, I typically make a pilgrimage to Barnes & Noble. Such is the case with "The Rise of ISIS." And although all information is inherently biased to some extent, I always feel like I get a more complete picture when I take the time to explore the matter in some depth – which usually means reading a book.

Sekulow is chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice as well as the European Center for Law and Justice. He was named one of the "One Hundred Most Influential Lawyers in the United States" by The National Law Journal and hosts a syndicated radio show carried by almost a 1,000 stations across the country. A visiting fellow at Oxford University's Harris Manchester College, he has argued several cases involving religious freedom before the U.S. Supreme Court.

“The Rise of ISIS” is extensively researched, with 26 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the 11 chapters that comprise the main text. Much of the book is adapted from a series of papers Sekulow and his collaborators presented at Oxford University’s History, Politics and Society program on Religion and Politics in the Middle East in July.

The author’s motive for publishing “The Rise of ISIS” is fairly straightforward, as he notes in “The Horror of Jihad,” the first chapter: “The goal of this book is simple: to understand the horrific jihadist threat to Christians and Jews in the Middle East, a threat that will undoubtedly come to the United States if it is left unchecked abroad.” Indeed, the picture Sekulow paints of ISIS is both gripping and unnerving.

It is important to understand that Sekulow is not unsympathetic to the plight of the millions of Muslims who are often judged by their affiliation with the same religion that seems to drive organizations such as ISIS and Hamas. Moreover, government leaders often work hard to distinguish between “moderates” and “extremists” when deciding who the West should align itself with (and support) as the more civilized countries strive to combat global terrorism. At the same time, Sekulow warns that caution must be exercised when forming these alliances.

“Too many Americans have already died at the hands of moderates,” he explains in “ISIS: The World’s Most Ruthless and Powerful Jihadist Army,” the third chapter. “The world must know the truth about ISIS. It must see that its strength comes about only through systematic violation of the very Muslim laws it claims to uphold, creating a world that is unbearably violent and oppressive for the citizens of jihadist-held territory. Claiming to uphold Allah’s law, ISIS, in fact, routinely violates Sharia for its own purposes.”

At several points throughout the book, Sekulow goes to some lengths to accentuate the similarities between the fight against organizations such as ISIS and the initial response by many countries to Nazi aggression in the years leading up to the Second World War. The following passage from “The Stakes Could Not Be Higher,” the next to last chapter, is a good example of this kind of reference:

“History rightly looks at Neville Chamberlain and other appeasers of Hitler’s Germany as instruments of death and disaster. Today’s appeasers are not morally better and are indeed often much worse. After all, when Chamberlain appeased Hitler, Germany’s leader had not yet unleashed his murderous armies across Europe. When the U.N., Red Cross, and – sadly – even our own American president and State Department appease jihad, they do so with their eyes wide open, fully aware of the evil they empower.”

As many readers will no doubt surmise, Sekulow leans decidedly to the right politically, and to be completely honest, I did not think that I would find myself in agreement with him as much as I did. But he does make a compelling argument that the consequences of not addressing the threat posed by ISIS will be dire and extend well beyond the confines of the Middle East. As the organization continues to thrive – despite air strikes from above and enhanced support for those fighting the organization on the ground – its potential to wreak havoc globally also grows.

My advice: If you want a better understanding of ISIS; i.e., a comprehensive perspective you simply can’t get from your favorite “news” channel or other media outlet, I highly recommend picking up a copy of “The Rise of ISIS.” It’s a good, if somewhat terrifying, read.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.