

The boy jihadis: Sickening new images reveal gun-toting children as young as eight watching ISIS execution as Shia prison guards 'slaughter 44 Sunni inmates north of Baghdad'

- **WARNING GRAPHIC CONTENT**

- Shocking footage shows baying mob of masked insurgents - including armed children - surrounding prisoner
- Captured man is made to kneel on floor before being shot in the back of the head as jubilant crowd celebrates
- Foreign Secretary William Hague says Britain will reopen embassy in Iran as West looks to Tehran to ease crisis
- U.S. and Iran also held talks on how longtime foes might co-operate to ease threat from the Al Qaeda-linked militants
- Shia militiamen 'killed more than 44 Sunni detainees at close range as ISIS fighters tried to break them out of prison'
- Video appears to show ISIS commander taunting imprisoned Iraqi soldiers and forcing them to repeat jihadist slogan
- The men are made to repeat 'baqiya', thought to mean 'ISIS will endure', as soldiers grab their faces and mock them
- U.S. Navy moved a fourth ship to Gulf yesterday containing 550 marines - joining aircraft carrier and two missile ships

By [Kieran Corcoran](#) and [Leon Watson](#) and [Simon Tomlinson](#) and [Martin Robinson](#)

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Shocking video emerged today showing armed militant children - some no older than eight - proudly overseeing the execution of a prisoner in cold blood as jihadi fighters continue their ruthless drive to topple Iraq.

Footage shows a man surrounded by a baying mob of masked insurgents reportedly in the city of Mosul which was taken by ISIS militants last week.

Among the separatists, a number of children are seen brandishing automatic weapons as they watch on unmoved just a few feet away.

The prisoner is then made to kneel on the ground before being shot in the back of the head, prompting cheers from the crowd.

As battles raged in Baqubah, less than an hour's drive from Baghdad, there were reports that more than 44 detainees were slaughtered by Shia prison guards as the Sunni militants attacked a police station in the city.

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary William Hague today announced that Britain's embassy in Iran will be reopened as the West looks to Tehran to help ease the crisis.

Interestingly, the crisis has also brought a warming of relations between longtime enemies the U.S. and Iran as they also seek to put their differences aside in an effort to combat the escalating insurgency.

6/17/2014

New video reveals gun-toting 'boy jihadis' watching ISIS execution in Iraq | Mail Online



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Sickening: Armed militant children - some no older than eight - watch the execution of a man in the latest shocking video to emerge from the ISIS insurgency in Iraq



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Boy jihadis: The footage shows a number of children brandishing automatic weapons as they watch the man being shot in the back of the head just a few feet away



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Disturbing: An ISIS militant holds the prisoner's head as he prepares for the execution while a young boy (circled) watches on just a few feet away



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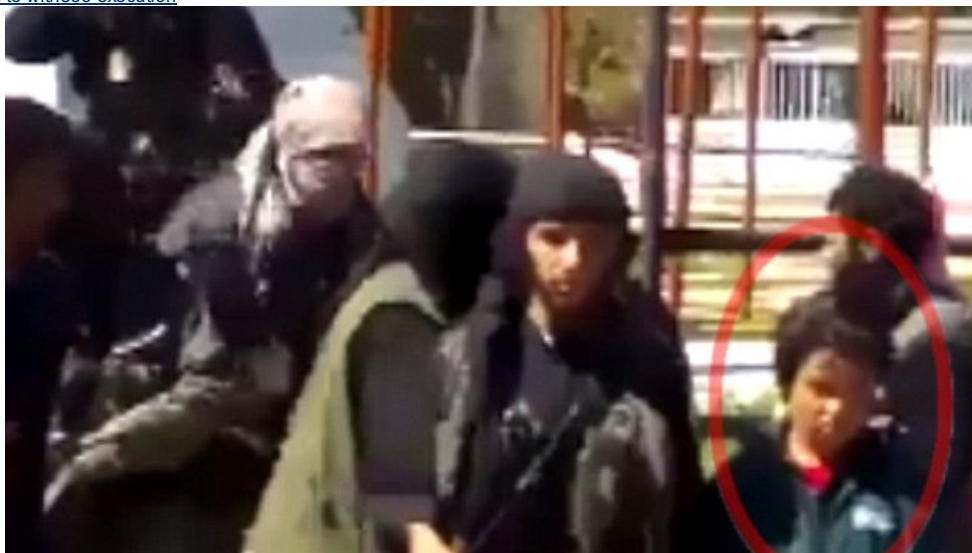
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Sickening: The baying mob celebrate as the man is executed with a gunshot to the back of the head in the latest disturbing video to emerge from Iraq

[Millitant groups allow children to witness execution](#)



Emergence of the video is the latest disturbing chapter of the uprising which has seen children on both sides of the violent insurgency taking up arms in the battle for Baghdad.

The video was uploaded on YouTube with the chilling message: 'Brutal sectarian war has come again to Iraq and many say it's as bad as in the dark days of 2007.'

'As the Sunni fighters push toward Baghdad, they are turning to extremists for help, some of them linked with the Al Qaeda affiliate often known by its Arabic acronym, pronounced "Daash".'

Daash is the acronym for Dulat al-Islam fi al-Iraq wal-Sham or the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (also known as ISIS).

In Baqubah, Iraqi police officials say at least 44 detainees died as Sunni militants attacked a police station northeast of Baghdad and fought with pro-government Shiite militiamen defending the lockup.

However, there is conflicting information on how the detainees died.





Three police officers say the station, which has a small jail, came under attack by Islamic militants in Diyala province on Monday night. The attackers tried to free the detainees, all suspected Sunni militants.

The three say the Shiite militiamen killed the detainees at close range. A morgue official in the provincial capital of Baqubah says many had bullet wounds to the head and chest.

All four spoke on condition of anonymity fearing for their safety.

Iraq's military says 52 detainees were killed when the attackers shelled the station with mortar rounds.

Images coming out of Iraq also show youths brandishing automatic rifles as they march with the militias forming in the capital to fight back against the forces of ISIS.

Similar pictures also emerged from Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, 340 miles south-east of Baghdad.



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Frontline fighters: Newly-recruited Iraqi volunteers, wearing police forces uniforms, take part in a training session in the central Shiite Muslim city of Karbala

As the crisis deepened, Mr Hague said the 'circumstances are right' to now restore the diplomatic base in Iran after a significant thawing in relations over recent months.

'Our two primary concerns when considering whether to reopen our embassy in Tehran have been assurance that our staff would be safe and secure, and confidence that they would be able to carry out their functions without hindrance,' Mr Hague told MPs in a written statement.

'There has never been any doubt in my mind that we should have an embassy in Tehran if the circumstances allowed.

'Iran is an important country in a volatile region, and maintaining embassies around the world, even under difficult conditions, is a central pillar of the UK's global diplomatic approach.'



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Armed and ready: Iraqi Shi'ite tribesmen brandish their weapons as they gather to show their readiness to join Iraqi security forces in the fight against ISIS



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One for the family album: Members of the Kurdish Special Forces pose for a picture after taking control of the northern oil city of Kirkuk

Nearly 300 armed American forces are also being positioned in and around Iraq to help secure U.S. assets as President Barack Obama nears a decision on an array of options, including airstrikes or a contingent of special forces.

The U.S. and Iran also held an initial discussion on how the longtime foes might co-operate to ease the threat from the Al Qaeda-linked militants that have swept through Iraq.

However, the White House ruled out the possibility that Washington and Tehran might co-ordinate military operations in Iraq.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki had announced the Iraqi government would arm and equip civilians who volunteer to fight, and so far thousands have signed up.

'AN OASIS OF GREEN TRANQUILITY': UK TO REOPEN IRANIAN EMBASSY AS WEST SEEKS HELP FROM TEHRAN TO CURB ESCALATING IRAQ CRISIS... BUT PRESIDENT ROUHANI SEEMS TO HAVE MORE PRESSING THINGS ON HIS MIND

William Hague has announced that Britain's embassy in Iran will be reopened as the West looks to Tehran to help ease the crisis in neighbouring Iraq.

The Foreign Secretary said the 'circumstances are right' to restore the diplomatic base after a significant thawing in relations over recent months.

'Our two primary concerns when considering whether to reopen our embassy in Tehran have been assurance that our staff would be safe and secure and confidence that they would be able to carry out their functions without hindrance,' Mr Hague told MPs in a written statement.



Hassan Rouhani @HassanRouhani · 12h

Proud of our boys who secured our first point—hopefully the first of many more to come. #WorldCup2014 #TeamMelli pic.twitter.com/9pzyT1Dr3f

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Crisis? What crisis? Iranian President Hassan Rouhani watches Iran secure their first point in the World Cup in last night's match against Nigeria

'There has never been any doubt in my mind that we should have an embassy in Tehran if the circumstances allowed.

'Iran is an important country in a volatile region, and maintaining embassies around the world, even under difficult conditions, is a central pillar of the UK's global diplomatic approach.

'I have therefore now decided the circumstances are right to reopen our embassy in Tehran.'

The embassy in Iran, which closed in 2011 after hard-liners overran the building and ransacked it, was once described as 'an oasis of green tranquility in the dusty centre of the teeming Iranian capital'.

Despite the apparent warming of relations, the Foreign Office has advised against travelling to Iran.



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A Iraqi young boy and tribesmen hold up their weapons in the capital Baghdad today as they prepare for an ISIS attack



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A pictured posted on social media shows Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant militants executing members of the Iraqi forces on the Iraqi-Syrian border

Militants attacked and took control of parts of the central Iraq city of Baqubah, but security forces eventually repelled the assault today killing 30 ISIS fighters, army and police officers said.

The overnight attack took place in the centre of Baquba, capital of Diyala province just 50 miles from Baghdad, and according to the officers, saw militants temporarily occupying several neighbourhoods.

The Sunni militants have also captured a key northern Iraqi town along the highway to Syria, compounding the woes of the Shiite-led government a week after it lost a vast swathe of territory to the insurgents in the country's north.

They have vowed to attack Baghdad but their advance to the south seems to have stalled in recent days.

Mr Obama notified Congress that up to 275 troops would be sent to Iraq to provide support and security for U.S. personnel and the American Embassy in Baghdad.

The soldiers - 170 of which have already arrived in Iraq - were armed for combat, though Obama has insisted he does not intend for U.S. forces to be engaged in direct fighting.

About 100 additional forces are being put on standby, most likely in Kuwait, and could be used for airfield management, security and logistics support, officials said.

The aircraft carrier George HW Bush and five others warships are also now in the Persian Gulf.

MID EAST ON BRINK OF SECTARIAN WAR, WARNS UN AS VIDEO SHOWS ISIS JIHADIS EXECUTING SYRIAN PRISONERS

The Middle East appears on the brink of wider sectarian war engulfing Iraq and Syria with radical Islamist insurgents wantonly kidnapping, torturing and killing civilians and security forces, U.N. human rights investigators said today.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he is deeply concerned about Iraq's rapidly deteriorating stability, including reports of mass summary executions.

Those atrocities and terrorist attacks are taking place as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIS, an Al Qaeda-inspired Sunni Muslim militant group, looks to link areas under its control on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border.

It came as video emerged reportedly showing ISIS militants carrying out the systematic execution of dozens of prisoners in Syria.



© YouTube/Syria On Line

Taking no prisoners: Footage posted on YouTube appears to show ISIS militants carrying out summary executions on dozens of captured soldiers in Syria

The U.N. said forces allied with ISIL had almost certainly committed war crimes by executing hundreds of non-combatant men in Iraq over the past five days.

ISIS seeks a caliphate ruled on medieval Sunni Muslim precepts in Iraq and Syria, fighting against both Iraq's Maliki and Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

It considers Shi'ites heretics as deserving of death and has boasted of massacring hundreds of Iraqi troops who surrendered to it last week.

'There is a real risk of further sectarian violence on a massive scale, within Iraq and beyond its borders,' Ban told reporters.

He said all Iraqi leaders - political, military, religious and community - must 'ensure that their followers avoid acts of reprisal' and together head off more conflict.



© YouTube/Syria On Line

He said he has been urging Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shiite-led government to take a more inclusive approach.

'The Iraqi government should have one state. Whether it is Sunni, Shiite or Kurds, they should be able to harmoniously live together,' Ban said.

'I hope that with the strong support of regional countries and the international community in a broader sense, we will be able to help the Iraq government first of all to restore peace and stability in their country.'

Ban said governments that allow human right rights abuses become 'breeding grounds for extremism and terrorism.'



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Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced the Iraqi government would arm and equip civilians who volunteer to fight, and thousands have signed up



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Shiite tribal fighters raise their weapons and chant slogans against the al-Qaida-inspired Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, 340 miles south-east of Baghdad



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Lightning offensive: ISIS militants have moved towards Baqubah, the last major city before Baghdad, as they seize control of vast swathes of northern Iraq

Separately, three U.S. officials said the White House was considering sending a contingent of special forces soldiers to Iraq.

Their limited mission - which has not yet been approved - would focus on training and advising beleaguered Iraqi troops, many of whom have fled their posts across the nation's north and west as the Al Qaeda-inspired insurgency has advanced in the worst threat to the country since American troops left in 2011.

Taken together, the developments suggest a willingness by Obama to send Americans into a collapsing security situation in order to quell the brutal fighting in Iraq before it morphs into outright war.

As the West seeks to court Iran in an attempt to battle militants in Iraq, Foreign Secretary William Hague is due to give a statement on Iran at 1030 GMT on Tuesday.



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Displaced Iraqis queue to register at a camp set up to shelter people fleeing the violence in Aski kalak, 40kms west of the Kurdish autonomous region's capital Arbil



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A displaced Iraqi woman walks past tents at a temporary camp set up to shelter Iraqis fleeing violence as militants pushed towards Baghdad

The BBC reported that Hague's plan would lead to the re-opening of the British mission in Tehran although this would not happen immediately.

Britain closed its embassy in Tehran in late 2011 after an mob ransacked the mission but revived diplomatic relations with Iran last November, appointing a non-resident charge d'affairs.

Hague has ruled out any military involvement in Iraq by Britain but said a British 'operational liaison and reconnaissance team' arrived in Baghdad at the weekend and he has said that Britain will provide humanitarian assistance as needed.

Iraq's dwindling but ancient Christian community is also fleeing the country following frequent attacks by Sunni Muslim militants targeting them and their churches, it was reported today.

Iraq was estimated to have more than one million Christians before the 2003 invasion and toppling of Saddam Hussein. Now church officials estimate only 450,000 remain within Iraq borders. Militants have targeted Christians in repeated waves in Baghdad and the north.

'I'm not going back,' said Lina, who fled Mosul with her family as the militants swept in and came to Alqosh, about 31 miles to the north. 'Each day we went to bed in fear,' the 57-year-old woman said.

JORDAN RELEASES AL QAEDA CHIEF'S MENTOR AFTER THREE-YEAR SENTENCE FOR RECRUITING TALIBAN FIGHTERS

Jordan released a leading jihadist ideologist who was once mentor Al Qaeda's infamous Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi after he completed a jail sentence for recruiting fighters for the Taliban, his lawyer said.

Issam Barqawi, known as Abu Mohammed al-Maqdessi, 'was released from jail today and he is with his family now,' lawyer Majed Leftawi told AFP.

One of Maqdessi's brothers said he had 'just arrived home'.

Maqdessi was jailed in 2011 for 'recruiting people in Jordan to join the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as terrorist organisations.'



© Getty Images

Jihadist Abu Mohammed al-Maqdessi is embraced by guests at his home in Yajuz, Jordan, after serving his sentence for recruiting fighters for the Taliban

He was also found guilty of 'collecting funds for terrorist groups to carry out acts that would harm Jordan and its ties with other countries.'

Maqdessi was a spiritual mentor to Zarqawi before the two men fell out.

Zarqawi achieved notoriety for a spate of videotaped executions of Western hostages in Iraq before his death in a U.S. air strike northeast of Baghdad in 2006.



© Getty Images

Terror chief: Abu Mohammed al-Maqdessi (pictured, right, talking to son of radical cleric Abu Qatada), once mentored Al Qaeda's infamous Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

In 1992, Jordanian-born Zarqawi met Maqdessi and later joined his Sunni militant group Jaish Mohammed (Mohammed's Army).

The pair was detained in Jordan for five years for membership of an outlawed Islamist organisation but freed as part of a general amnesty in 1999.

The two later fell out over 'ideological differences' and aides said Maqdessi repeatedly denounced Zarqawi.

Maqdessi was arrested again in Jordan in 2005 after remarks he made to Al-Jazeera television, but was released in 2008 for 'humanitarian reasons' after going on hunger strike.



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Tribal fighters as well as political movements like the Iraqi Turkmen Front also showed their determination to bring the fight to ISIS

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ISIS has vowed to attack Baghdad but its advance to the south seems to have stalled in recent days

It came as graphic and sickening footage emerged of captured Iraqi soldiers being taunted, made to repeat extremist slogans then ruthlessly executed by ISIS insurgents.

The video, uploaded to the internet, shows a man - believed to be a fighter for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) - marching up and down a row of prisoners. He addresses each in turn and has them repeat the word 'baqiya' - which is believed to be an ISIS slogan meaning 'ISIS will endure'.

Making much of the military badges on their clothes, he moves from man to man, grabbing and slapping the faces of those who do not immediately co-operate.

After the exchange one prisoner - who seemed resistant to repeating the slogan - is laid down and shot dead off camera, while an official document - seemingly a passport - fills the camera's screen.

The latest footage follows previous still images uploaded to extremist websites, apparently showing mass executions of Iraqis dressed in civilian clothes.

Some were herded along by riflemen as they were hunched over, while another picture appeared to show a gunman marching along a line of face-down prisoners systematically killing them with an AK-47.

The gruesome images have prompted a tide of outrage from around the world - including from the Secretary General of the UN. They also appear to be increasing the likelihood of U.S. military intervention.

U.S. foreign secretary John Kerry today said that air strikes 'may well be' part of America's response, saying that the pictured murders and massacres 'have to stop'.

He said airstrikes are 'not the whole answer, but they may well be one of the options that are important.

'When you have people murdering, assassinating in these mass massacres, you have to stop that,' he said.



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Taunting: The figure on the left, thought to be an ISIS leader, taunts captured Iraqi soldiers and appears to force them to repeat a jihadist slogan. One man, centre, appears to resist the instructions, and is later turned over, shot and left for dead in the dirt







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Humiliating: The ISIS fighter marches up and down a line of captives, slapping them and grabbing their clothes as he tries to make them repeat an Islamist slogan

HOW ISIS MILITANTS AMASSED \$2BILLION TO FUND THEIR LIGHTNING CAMPAIGN THROUGH IRAQ

Official in Iraq and the U.S. were astonished to find that ISIS has assets worth as much as \$2.3billion after its astonishing military success in the last week, intelligence sources say.

Their recent capture of Mosul almost doubled their total amount of cash, which has been steadily growing thanks to oil money from Syria, a U.S. official told the [Guardian](#).

ISIS are also sophisticated smugglers and plunderers, who keep immaculate records of all the spoils they gather - including ancient antiques.

The unnamed official said: 'Before Mosul, their total cash and assets were \$875m [£515m]. Afterwards, with the money they robbed from banks and the value of the military supplies they looted, they could add another \$1.5bn to that.'

Details of the true extent of their funding came from a cache of computerised flash drives, which also contained identities of ISIS leaders, it was claimed.

The source said: 'Before this, the western officials had been asking us where they had gotten some of their money from, \$50,000 here, or \$20,000 there. It was peanuts. Now they know and we know. They had done this all themselves.'

'And you do what you need to do if you need to try to stop it from the air or otherwise.'

He also said the U.S. would be open to working alongside Iran to beat ISIS.

Trita Parsi, founder of the National Iranian American Council, told Radio 4's Today programme: 'The enmity between them (America and Iran) has been overtaken by events.

'Right now there is potential to change this because of the success of the nuclear negotiations and because of the rise of ISIS in Iraq.

'They have realised they have a strong common interest to explore.

'In the short term they will work together because it benefits both sides'.

The footage emerged after another Iraqi town fell to ISIS militants this morning, solidifying their hold in the north of the country.

Tal Afar, close to the Syrian border, was taken before dawn, the town's mayor said. It is due west of Mosul, Iraq's second city, which fell last Wednesday.

Mayor Abdulal Abdoul said that his town, 260 miles north-west of Baghdad, was taken just before dawn. Residents confirmed the occupation.

Tal Afar, which has a population of 200,000, contains a mixture of Shiite and Sunni Muslims. It is also just miles from an Iraqi airbase.

Last night, Iraqi officials were reporting that Tal Afar was under fire from rockets seized from nearby military depots. Inside the town the local army garrison was said to have suffered heavy casualties, which overwhelmed the local hospital. No numbers were provided.

Later today the town of Saqlawiyah, further to the south and just 50 miles west of Baghdad, was also overrun by ISIS.

The militants captured six Humvees and two tanks, adding to their arsenal of seized weapons originally given to Iraq by the U.S.

An eyewitness, who said Iraqi army helicopters were circling during the fighting, said: 'It was a crazy battle and dozens were killed from both sides. It is impossible to reach the town and evacuate the bodies'.

As Iraq suffered at the hands of ISIS, Foreign Secretary William Hague affirmed the likelihood that hundreds of British radicals would be among those involved in the killings.

Mr Hague said Britons who have gone to Syria for the country's bloody civil war would 'inevitably' be caught up in Iraq's unrest. He said the majority of ISIS's members were Iraqi or Syrian but that 'it also includes a significant number of foreign fighters among its ranks'.

Despite identifying ISIS as the 'most violent and brutal militant group in the Middle East', the Foreign Secretary repeated that there is no prospect of British military intervention.

But he said counter-terrorism support could be offered to the government in Baghdad, and that a Ministry of Defence (MoD) team had been sent to the country to assist embassy staff in contingency planning.

The United States has also stepped up its military presence in the region. A ship carrying 550 marines - the USS Mesa Verde - was dispatched to the Gulf today.

It joins the USS George H.W. Bush aircraft carrier, and two missile ships. President Barack Obama has not ruled out military action of some kind, but said there will be no 'boots on the ground'.



Line-up: Isis militants with captured Iraqi soldiers wearing plain clothes after taking over a base in Tikrit, Iraq



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Merciless: Clouds of dust appear to rise around the bound bodies of Iraqi prisoners as a militant walks down a line holding a rifle. This image, which could not be verified, was uploaded to an extremist website



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Brutal: Another masked gunman stands over a row of bodies, with the black flag of ISIS visible in the top-left of the shot, The image is thought to originate in the Salahadden area, north of Baghdad





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U.S. firepower: The USS Mesa Verde (left) - holding 550 marines - has been dispatched to the Gulf, where it will join aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (right)

ISIS is a Sunni-dominated insurgency, which has captured swathes of territory from the Shiite forces of the Iraq government, who remain dominant in the south.

The new gains will allow The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) to consolidate its hold over Iraqi territory near the Syrian border. It came as worldwide outrage intensified after horrific images of an apparent mass execution emerged.

Pictures posted on a militant website appear to show masked fighters forcing captives to lie down in a shallow ditch. Further images seem to show the bodies of the men soaked in blood after being shot.



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Driven to their deaths: Further images emerged this morning showing crammed truckloads of prisoners allegedly being driven by ISIS soldiers to the site of their execution



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Convoy: Another truck can be seen carrying the prisoners, watched over by a rifle-wielding fighter standing on top of the vehicle



Piled up: An extremist gestures towards massed bodies seconds before they are killed. The UN has roundly condemned ISIS's actions



Firing squad: Amassed jihadists appear to be just about to open fire on the bodies, who are arranged in a shallow ditch

FORMER GUANTANAMO PRISONER AMONG TEN ISIS 'RECRUITERS' ARRESTED BY SPANISH POLICE AS JIHADISTS SPREAD INFLUENCE ACROSS EUROPE

Spanish police are holding 10 people including a former Guantanamo Bay detainee for allegedly recruiting jihadi militants to fight abroad, mainly in Iraq and Syria.

The National Court said Tuesday they would appear before a judge soon.

An Interior Ministry statement said eight of the suspects were Moroccans or men born in Morocco.

An Argentine and a Bulgarian were also detained in Monday's raids.



The ministry identified one of those arrested, Moroccan Lahcen Ikassrien, as the suspected leader of the cell which had sent nine militants to fight for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.

Ikassrien had been arrested in Afghanistan in 2001 and held at Guantanamo Bay.

He was extradited to Spain in 2005, but was acquitted for lack of evidence a year later.

Anti-terror officers moved in at 4.30am local time yesterday, raiding and searching twelve premises in the Spanish capital.



A 30-year-old Frenchman was also taken into custody and stands accused of 'supporting a terrorist organisation' after travelling to Syria to fight.

He is also thought to have appeared in ISIS propaganda videos.

Police in Spain believe 50 Spaniards are fighting with ISIS and other jihadist groups in Syria and others in Iraq. They also hinted that other arrests are possible.

Most of the soldiers who appear in the pictures are in civilian clothes. Some are shown wearing military uniforms underneath, indicating they may have hastily disguised themselves as civilians to try to escape.

'This is the fate of the Shi'ites which Nuri (al-Maliki, Iraq's president) brought to fight the Sunnis,' a caption to one of the pictures reads.

Other scenes show men purportedly moments before their executions, as they are herded into large trucks and driven to their deaths.

They huddled and cowered in the overfilled vehicles, some covering their faces as they awaited their fate. The shocking pictures drew worldwide condemnation, led by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who called them 'deeply disturbing'.

He warned against sectarian rhetoric in Iraq that could inflame the conflict and carry grave implications for the entire region.

Iraq's chief military spokesman, Lt. Gen. Qassim al-Moussawi, yesterday confirmed the photos' authenticity and said he was aware of cases of mass murder of captured Iraqi soldiers in areas held by ISIS.

'Reports of mass summary executions by ISIL are deeply disturbing and underscore the urgency of bringing the perpetrators of such crimes to justice,' Ban said.

He also called on all Iraqi leaders across the spectrum of political, military, religious and community posts to ensure that their followers avoid acts of reprisal.

He urged the international community to unite in showing solidarity with Iraq as it confronts 'this serious security challenge' and called for full respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law in efforts to counter terrorism and violence in Iraq.

Fighting between ISIS and the Iraqi army, bolstered by thousands of recruits who answered a religious call to arms over the weekend, continues north of Baghdad, where fears of invasion are still present.

Yesterday the U.S. embassy in Baghdad announced that it was evacuating some of its 5,000 staff to safer areas of the country, and had back-up plans to airlift out the rest should the city fall under threats.

The UK embassy said it would not comment publicly on its security arrangements, but that it was aware of the U.S. plans and was keeping the situation under 'constant review'.

The tightened security comes as former Prime Minister Tony Blair - an architect of the 2003 Iraq invasion which overthrew dictator Saddam Hussein - was on the receiving end of a tide of criticism after trying to dodge the blame for the situation in the Middle East. He even called for fresh military intervention in the war-torn region.

'We have to liberate ourselves from the notion that "we" have caused this,' the former Prime Minister wrote in an extraordinary essay. 'We haven't.'

The former Labour leader - now a Middle East peace envoy - said failure to act now could lead to a terror attack in the UK. His comments led to an avalanche of criticisms.

Former deputy PM John Prescott accused Mr Blair of trying to take the West 'back to the Crusades'.

And Clare Short, who also served in Mr Blair's Cabinet, branded him a 'complete American neocon', adding: 'More bombing will not solve it, it will just exacerbate it.'

Miss Short, who resigned over the decision to go to war, said Mr Blair had been 'absolutely, consistently wrong, wrong, wrong' on the issue of Iraq.

Mr Prescott, Mr Blair's deputy at the time of the war, accused his political ally of trying to take the West 'back to the Crusades'.

'He says he's disappointed with what has happened in Iraq... but he wants to invade somewhere else now,' he told Sky News.

Despite resistance from Iraqi forces, ISIS has vowed to take the battle to Baghdad and cities farther south - home to revered Shiite shrines.

Although the government bolstered defenses around Baghdad, a series of explosions inside the capital killed at least 19 people and wounded more than 40, police and hospital officials said.

Security at the U.S. Embassy was strengthened and some staff members sent elsewhere in Iraq and to neighboring Jordan, the U.S. State Department said. A military official said about 150 Marines have been sent to Baghdad to help with embassy security.

While the city of seven million is not in any immediate danger of falling to the militants, food prices have risen - twofold in some cases - because of transportation disruptions on the main road heading north from the capital. The city is under a nighttime curfew that begins at 10pm.

The second city, Mosul, continues to be under ISIS control, and is a focal point of international condemnation on account of 49 Turks - including embassy staff and children - who remain in captivity almost a week after the city fell.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has called for the staff's immediate release of Turkish diplomatic and security staff held by insurgents in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

He said: 'We follow the dangerous developments in Iraq with great concern. I condemn the unacceptable attack on the consulate general in Mosul,' Rasmussen said during a visit to Ankara, standing beside Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

The diplomats and soldiers trapped inside the Mosul consulate had no option but to surrender after hundreds of heavily armed Islamist militants surrounded the building, the Foreign Ministry said on Saturday.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has said the hostages are unharmed and that all efforts are being made to secure their release, as well as a second group of 31 Turkish truck drivers also captured by ISIS last week.

INTERNET BAN DESCENDS ON IRAQ AS AUTHORITIES TRY TO LIMIT SHARING OF MILITANT PROPAGANDA

Iraqis are increasingly turning to a social media app that allows them to post their stories of the insurgency anonymously after a crackdown by the government.

Iraqi authorities appear to be trying to limit online sharing of brutal images, videos and other militant propaganda being shared online.

Martin Frank, the CEO of IQ Networks, an Internet service provider in Iraq, revealed that the authorities have ordered multiple social media sites, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, to be blocked.

But the editor-in-chief of anonymous app Whisper, Neetzan Zimmerman told CNN that usage in Iraq had doubled between June 12 and June 15.

One user posted: 'Waiting our miserable destiny while ISIS progressing towards Baghdad!!!!'

On Sunday, Iraqi authorities tightened restrictions further by telling network operators to halt traffic for virtual private networks, which allow users to bypass Internet filters.

As well as trying to prevent citizens from seeing the material, it is hoped the web blackout will hinder militants' ability to upload it in the first place. Internet traffic in several areas overrun by militants, including Mosul and Tikrit, was reportedly cut off altogether - with no time frame for bringing it back.



Confident: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi issued a veiled threat about coming to America as he was released from a U.S.-run prison, it has emerged

The feared and mysterious leader, of ISIS Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said 'I'll see you guys in New York' as he was released from U.S. captivity in 2009, a military figure has revealed.

al-Baghdadi - who has been dubbed 'more violent and anti-American than Osama bin Laden' - made the unlikely threat as he was releasing from Camp Bucca in Iraq in 2009, according to Colonel Kenneth King, who was the camp's commander.

He said the words were directed at U.S. soldiers whom al-Baghdadi knew came from New York.

Colonel King also revealed his surprise at the jihadist's success, given that he was not an obvious leader during his years of incarceration.

Speaking to the [Daily Beast](#), he said: 'I'm not surprised that it was someone who spent time in Bucca but I'm a little surprised it was him,' King says. "He was a bad dude, but he wasn't the worst of the worst.

'The worst of the worst were kept in one area- 'I don't recall him being in that group.' But another officer added: 'A lot of times, the really bad guys tended to operate behind the scenes because they wanted to be invisible'.

The ISIS leader, who was born in 1971 in Baghdad, is touted as a battlefield commander and tactician. Baghdadi, who has a degrees in Islamic studies, apparently joined the insurgency that erupted in Iraq soon after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

He is known as 'The Ghost' to members of the pro-Assad Lebanese Shi-ite militia Hizballah. 'Only a few people know the face of Baghdadi,' Sheik Ahmad, the Hizballah official in charge of investigating ISIS in Syria, told TIME last year.

The secretive Baghdadi talks with a scarf covering his face even when dealing with close allies, according to militants who worked with him in Iraq. He addresses his ISIS followers through audio recordings posted to the internet, rather than in public places. In October 2005, American forces said they believed they had killed him in a strike on the Iraq-Syria border

In October 2011, the U.S. Treasury designated him as a 'terrorist' in a notice that said he was born in the Iraqi city of Samarra in 1971.