IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY for readers unaccustomed to Arabic names, I use simplified spelling and inconsistent—but hopefully intuitive—conventions to identify various characters on the second use of their names. For example, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi is referred to as “Zarqawi,” but Sayf al-Adl is called “al-Adl.” Some individuals are even called by their “first names.” Abu Anas al-Shami, for example, appears as “Abu Anas.” In all cases, people are identified by the name they were most commonly known by. In rare cases, I have used similar conveniences in reference to the names of jihadi organizations.

The original sources for this book, collected over more than a decade of research on the Islamic State and its predecessors, were all unclassified and publicly available.

Many of the primary sources in this document were captured by U.S. forces on the battlefield and subsequently declassified. Most were drawn from the Department of Defense’s Harmony Database, declassified, and made publicly available through the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (www.ctc.usma.edu). Many other documents were declassified for use as evidence in criminal trials. By far the most useful of these court releases was the massive collection of documents declassified for the prosecution of Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi at a military tribunal at Guantanamo Bay (www.mc.mil/CASES/military Commissions.aspx).
Finally, the Central Intelligence Agency has released many documents collected during the raid on Osama bin Laden’s safehouse in Abbottabad, Pakistan. These documents are referenced as part of “Bin Laden’s Bookshelf” (www.dni.gov/index.php/resources/bin-laden-bookshelf). The work done by the Conflict Records Research Center, before it was defunded, was also invaluable.

Over a decade of research on the Islamic State and its predecessors, I have benefitted from repositories of open-source data as well. This archival work is generally thankless, but it is vital. I am particularly grateful to Aaron Zelin at Jihadology (www.jihadology.net), Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi (www.aymennjawad.org), Pieter Van Ostaeyen (www.pietervanostaeyen.com), the excellent rotating cast of characters at Jihadica (www.jihadica.com), and the talented folks at the Open Source Center.

A number of the sources in this book were collected on private jihadi web forums, many of which are no longer publicly available. In some cases, I archived these years ago before they were taken down; in other instances, I accessed them through the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine.