
# The Islamic State and U.S. Policy

**(name redacted)**
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

**(name redacted)**
Analyst in Middle Eastern and African Affairs

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# Summary

The Islamic State (IS, aka the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL/ISIS, or the Arabic acronym *Da'esh*) is a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group that seized large areas of Iraq and Syria, has affiliates in several other countries, has attracted a network of global supporters, and disrupts international security with its campaigns of violence and terrorism. A U.S.-led coalition military campaign against the Islamic State organization in Iraq and Syria has evolved since 2014, reducing the area controlled by the group considerably and eliminating thousands of its personnel. While the Islamic State has suffered losses on the ground in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, a series of terrorist attacks attributed to the group or to individuals it has inspired have claimed hundreds of lives on four continents since November 2015, including in the United States. A number of countries, including the United States, share an interest in further weakening the group and preventing future attacks.

Members of Congress, executive branch officials, and their international counterparts continue to debate a range of proposals for extending battlefield gains made to date and preventing the Islamic State from succeeding in its stated objectives of "remaining and expanding." President Obama's goals for U.S. strategy were to "degrade and ultimately defeat" the Islamic State through U.S. direct military action and support for local partner forces. President Donald Trump has directed his Administration "to develop a comprehensive plan to defeat" the group.

The U.S. military continues to conduct operations against the group in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, while monitoring its affiliates and personnel elsewhere. Parallel U.S. diplomatic efforts have promoted political reconciliation among local factions in countries where Islamic State supporters are active. The United States also provides security assistance to partner governments in support of operations against Islamic State affiliates and to strengthen the ability of partners to deter and respond to Islamic State attacks. Evolving counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing efforts among a wider network of concerned governments seek to further limit the ability of IS supporters to carry out transnational terrorist attacks.

The interdependent nature of conflicts and political crises in Iraq, Syria, and other countries where the Islamic State operates complicates efforts to address and durably eliminate the threats posed by the group. Military operations may eliminate IS fighters and liberate IS-held territory, but underlying political disputes and development challenges that have been exploited by the Islamic State and other extremist groups may remain unaddressed or become amplified if post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction needs go unmet. Governments may continue to share fears about IS-related transnational terrorist threats, but leaders also may continue to face difficult decisions about the potential risks and rewards of military, law enforcement, surveillance, intelligence sharing, financial, border security, refugee admission, and consular countermeasures.

This report provides background on the Islamic State organization, discusses its goals, operations, and affiliates, reviews U.S. legislative and policy debates, and reviews relevant legislation from the 114th and 115th Congresses (S. 2943, H.R. 2029, and H.R. 244). For more information, see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by (name redacted); CRS In Focus IF10404, *Iraq and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) ; CRS Report R44513, *Kurds in Iraq and Syria: U.S. Partners Against the Islamic State*, coordinated by (name redacted); CRS Report R43760, *A New Authorization for Use of Military Force Against the Islamic State: Issues and Current Proposals*, by (name redacted) ; CRS In Focus IF10612, *Counterterrorism Issues: Islamic State Financing*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted); and CRS Report R44519, *Overseas Contingency Operations Funding: Background and Status*, coordinated by (name redacted) and (name redacted) .

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# The Islamic State

The Islamic State organization (IS, aka the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL/ISIS, or the Arabic acronym *Da'esh*)[1] emerged as a major international security threat amid more than a decade of conflict in Iraq and the outbreak of conflict in Syria (see **Appendix A**). The group's core membership remains in Iraq and Syria, and its efforts have been bolstered by a network of foreign fighters and affiliate groups in several countries across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (see **Appendix B**). The Islamic State's apocalyptic ideology, its revolutionary intent toward the strategically important Middle East, and its embrace of transnational terrorism have alarmed policymakers around the world and spurred global debate over strategies and policy options for defeating the group. As the area under the Islamic State's control in Iraq and Syria has shrunk, policymakers are considering how the threats it poses may evolve and how recaptured areas can best be stabilized.

## Posture and U.S. Threat Assessments

The Islamic State continues to occupy areas of northern and western Iraq and central and eastern Syria (see **Figure 1**). It has lost large amounts of territory since mid-2015, and its remaining territories have become increasingly isolated from each other in the face of operations by the U.S.-led international military coalition and a number of U.S.-backed local forces. From a military standpoint, U.S. officials argue that the Islamic State is in decline, having ceded more than 60% of the populated territory it once held in Iraq, and approximately 45% of the populated territory it once held in Syria.[2] U.S. officials estimate that tens of thousands of IS fighters have died in battle, and statements by U.S. military personnel suggest that the group's overall force strength is less than 12,000 to 15,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria, down from peak estimates tens of thousands higher.[3] U.S. officials also state that morale among IS fighters has worsened and that the group's finances, recruitment streams, communications, public outreach, and leadership have been substantially disrupted.

[1] Formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq, the group changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham in 2013. In conjunction with its summer 2014 military offensive in Iraq and its declaration of the establishment of a caliphate in areas under its control, the Islamic State organization (IS) dropped prior references to "Iraq and Al Sham" in its formal communications. On June 29, Islamic State Spokesman Abu Muhammad Al Adnani said, "the 'Iraq and Al Sham' in the name of the Islamic State is henceforth removed from all official deliberations and communications, and the official name is the Islamic State from the date of this declaration." In line with this statement, the group has since referred to itself simply as "the Islamic State," although U.S. government officials, some international media entities, and some members of the public continue to refer to the group by English-language acronyms for its previous name "the Islamic State of Iraq and Al Sham"—ISIS/ISIL. The difference in English-language acronyms stems from distinct interpretations of the geographic scope of the term *Al Sham*. Some observers insist that the term *Al Sham* refers to a broad, if imprecisely defined geographic area commonly referred to in English as "the Levant;" others insist that *Al Sham* refers specifically to Syria. Still others, including some senior U.S. officials, refer to the group by an Arabic acronym for its 2013-2014 name—*Da'esh (*often pronounced *'*da-esh', for *Dawla Islamiyya fi Iraq wal Sham).* The acronym *Da'esh* does not correspond to an Arabic word, but may be seen as derogatory by IS supporters because it does not acknowledge the group's chosen name or its ambitions.

[2] Press Conference by Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk, Baghdad, Iraq, March 12, 2017; and, Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Daniel Coats, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, May 11, 2017.

[3] On May 3, a U.S. military spokesman reported that fewer than one thousand IS fighters remain in Mosul, Iraq, and three to four thousand remain in Raqqah, Syria. In late April, a U.S. military spokesman estimated that around 700 IS fighters remained in Tabqa, Syria. An unspecified number of IS fighters also control areas around the Syrian city of Deir ez-Zour and areas of northern and western Iraq. Department of Defense Press Briefings by Col. John Dorrian, April 26, 2017 and May 3, 2017.

In particular, U.S. officials suggest that patterns of travel by IS sympathizers have evolved, with fewer foreign fighters travelling to Syria and Iraq[4] and a smaller number reportedly seeking to exploit refugee flows to Europe.[5] According to United Nations reporting, the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq and Syria "appears to have markedly slowed" and reported movements "are significantly lower than the flows towards the ISIL core in 2014 and 2015."[6] These reported changes in foreign fighter travel patterns overlie a broader and longer running phenomenon that, according to a March 2017 U.S. official estimate, has seen as many as 40,000 individuals from more than 110 countries travel to Syria and/or Iraq to engage in combat as members of various armed groups since 2012.[7] According to the ODNI, this figure includes more than 6,600 Westerners, including Europeans and some U.S. citizens.[8] Hundreds of these Western foreign fighters, including dozens of U.S. citizens, joined the ranks of the Islamic State.

Transnational terrorist attacks perpetrated by trained IS operatives or attributed to individual IS supporters have underscored the group's lethality and tempered international optimism about its potential defeat. Following IS claims of responsibility for transnational attacks, including the November 2015 assault in central Paris, then-CIA Director John Brennan publicly described the Islamic State as having embraced an "external operations agenda that it is now implementing with lethal effect."[9] In February 2016, the U.S. intelligence community described the Islamic State as the "preeminent terrorist threat" worldwide, and in May 2017, the intelligence community described the Islamic State as "an active terrorist threat to the United States" that "maintains the intent and capability to direct, enable, assist, and inspire transnational attacks."[10] Non-government analysts have similarly characterized IS forces as "on the run," while analyzing challenges that may present themselves in the wake of the group's defeat in its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, including outflows of dangerous foreign fighters and the transnational attacks.[11]

The Trump Administration has reviewed and amended U.S. plans to defeat the Islamic State in its core remaining areas of control in Iraq and Syria (**Figure 1**). Current U.S. operations there are supporting local forces in their efforts to recapture IS strongholds at Mosul, Iraq and Raqqah, Syria. Later in 2017, U.S. and partner operations focused on eastern Syria and western Iraq may intensify, with enduring IS-related insurgency and terrorism threats expected.

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[4] Ibid. and CJCS Dunford, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 28, 2016.

[5] Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet, "Tracing the path of four terrorists sent to Europe by the Islamic State," *Washington Post*, April 22, 2016.

[6] U.N. Document S/2017/35, 19th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, January 13, 2017.

[7] Remarks by Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS Brett McGurk, Baghdad, Iraq, March 12, 2017.

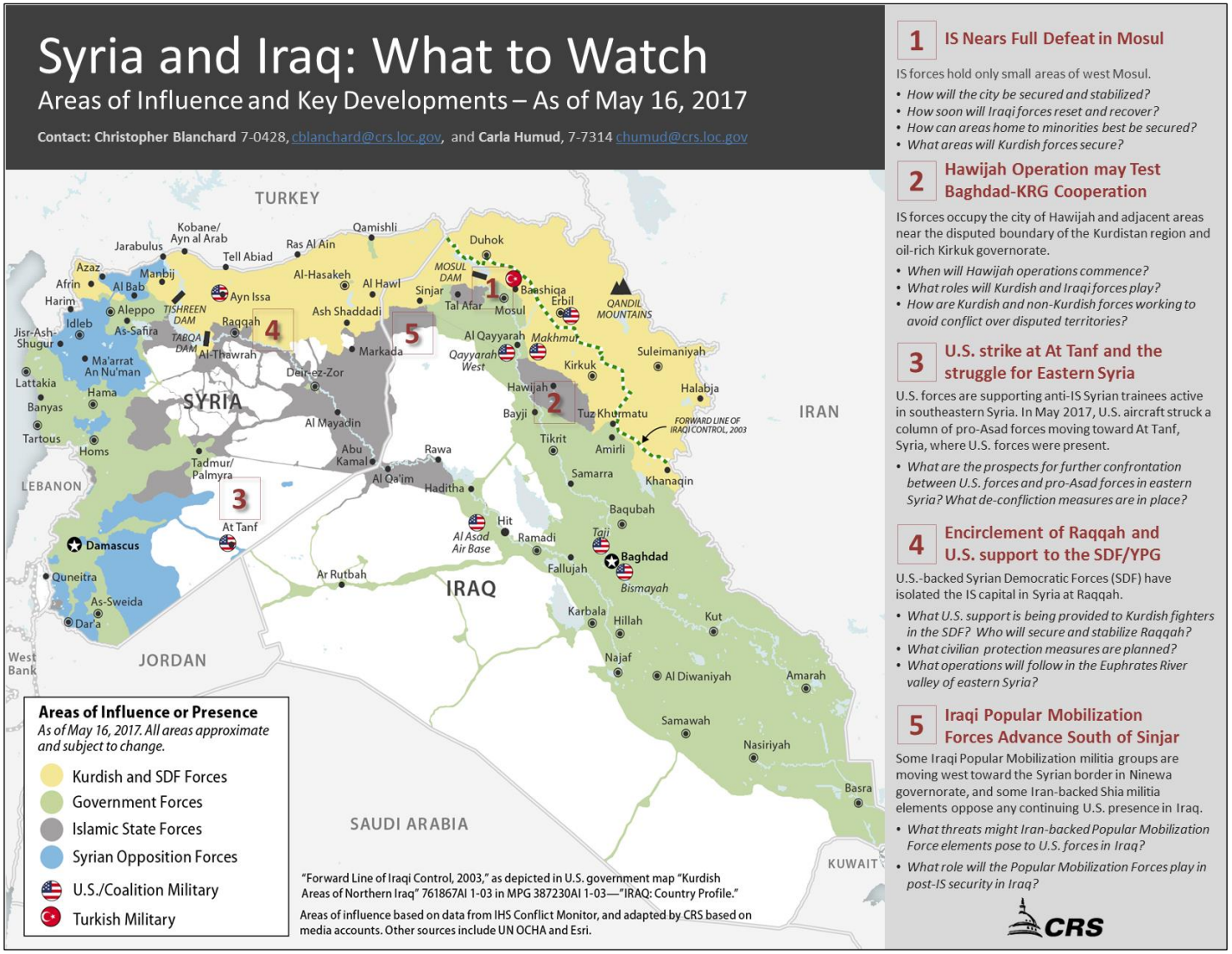
[8] DNI Clapper, Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee, February 9, 2016; and, ODNI Spokesman Brian Hale quoted in Barbara Starr, 'A few dozen Americans' in ISIS ranks,' CNN, July 15, 2015.

[9] Remarks of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Brennan before the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, November 16, 2015.

[10] DNI James Clapper, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee, February 9, 2016; and DNI Daniel Coats, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, May 11, 2017.

[11] See for example, Yaroslav Trofimov, "What Happens After ISIS Falls?," *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2016; Daniel Byman, Thinking Beyond the Defeat of the Islamic State, Lawfare (online), September 26, 2016; Bruce Hoffman, "The Global Terror Threat and Counterterrorism Challenges Facing the Next Administration," U.S. Military Academy Combatting Terrorism Center (CTC), *CTC Sentinel*, November 30, 2016; and, Robin Wright, "After the Islamic State," *New Yorker*, December 12, 2016.

**Figure 1. Syria and Iraq: Areas of Influence and Key Developments**



The Obama Administration's strategy was predicated on the principle of working "by, with, and through" U.S.-supported local partners as an alternative to large and direct applications of U.S. military force and/or large investments of U.S. personnel and resources. The Trump Administration has approved the deployment of additional U.S. military personnel to both Iraq and Syria and has approved some changes to U.S. programs to support local partner forces.

## Developments in 2016

In Syria during 2016, IS fighters lost territory in the northeast to a mixture of Kurdish and allied Arab forces backed by coalition airpower and, north of Aleppo to anti-Asad forces backed by the Turkish military. IS forces were resurgent in central Syria, where Syrian government and Russian military forces had succeeded in recapturing Palmyra but later withdrew amid pro-Asad forces' campaign against opposition-held areas of Aleppo. U.S.- and Turkish-backed local forces severed the Islamic State's remaining access to the Turkish border and evicted its fighters from much of the enclave of northwest Syria once referred to by U.S. officials as the "Manbij pocket."[12] U.S.-backed Arab and Kurdish forces also advanced southward on the east bank of the Euphrates river as part of the campaign to retake the IS-held city of Raqqah.

In Iraq during 2016, IS fighters suffered a series of losses to various Iraqi forces in Tikrit, Baiji, Sinjar, Ramadi, Hit, Haditha, Rutbah, Fallujah, and surrounding areas. Iraqi officials declared the city of Fallujah in Anbar Province liberated in late June 2016, and in October Iraqi forces, with U.S. and coalition backing, launched a campaign to retake Iraq's second largest city—Mosul. At the end of 2016, Iraqi forces had isolated Mosul and were fighting to recapture the eastern half of the city amid fierce IS resistance. In Iraq, IS forces isolated areas of Salahuddin, Ninawa, and western Anbar governorates.

## Developments in 2017

**Figure 1** presents the approximate areas of influence, presence, and control by various forces in Syria and Iraq as of May 16, 2017.

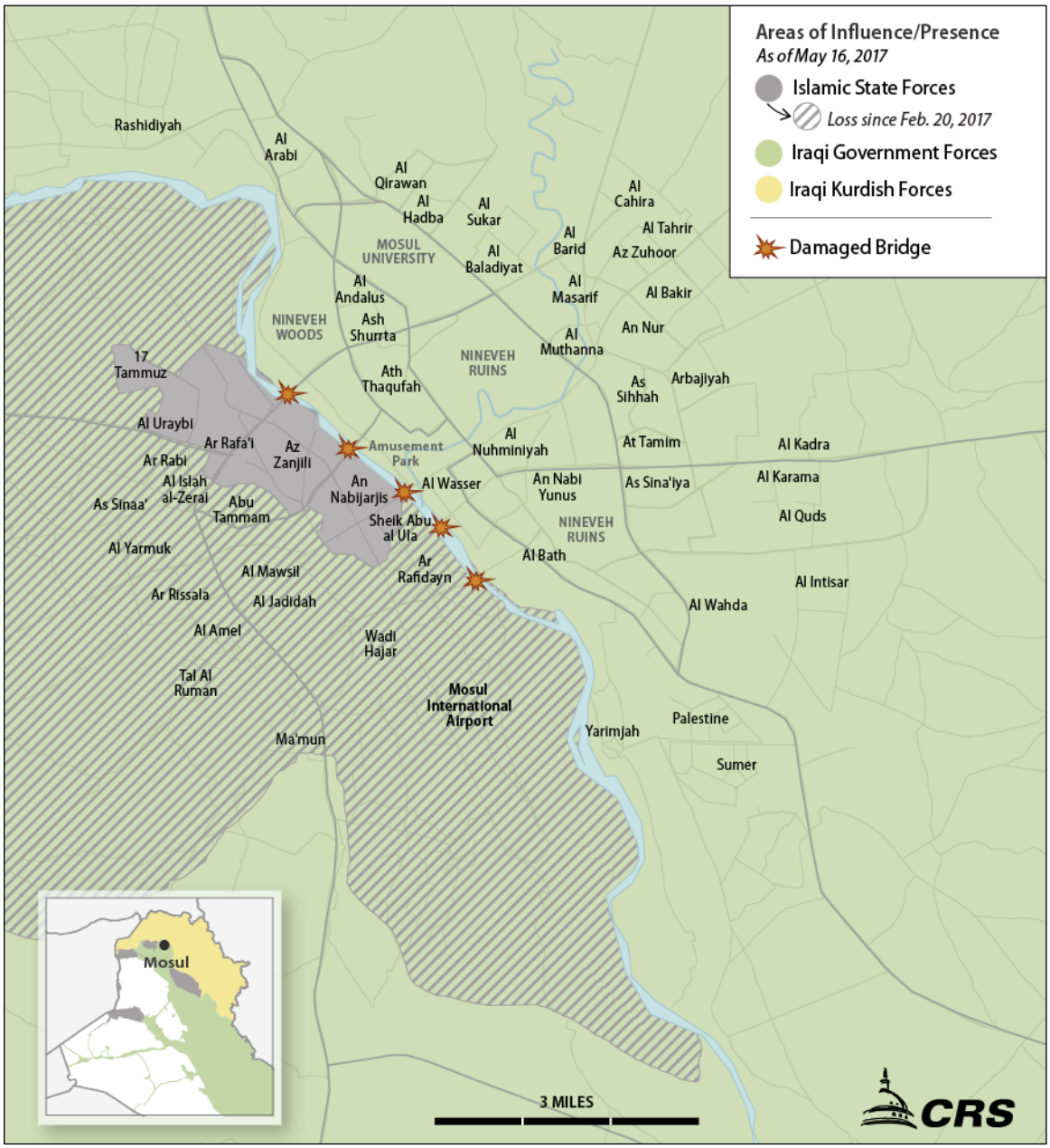
Iraqi forces retook control of eastern Mosul in January 2017, and operations to seize the more populous western half of the city commenced in February. As of early May, remaining IS fighters, believed to number in the hundreds, were contained in a handful of neighborhoods adjacent to the Tigris River (Figure 2). Iraqi and U.S. authorities expect major combat operations in Mosul to end within weeks, to be followed by operations to retake the cities of Tal Afar and Hawijah. According to the U.S. intelligence community's May 2017 worldwide threats assessment, "Faced with the eventual loss of Mosul, ISIS is preparing to regroup and continue an insurgency and terrorist campaign."

In Syria, U.S.-backed operations by the Syrian Democratic Forces—a coalition of Arab and Kurdish fighters that includes members of the Peoples Protection Units (YPG)—have isolated the city of Raqqah from the north and retaken the city and Euphrates River dam at Tabqa to the west. The Islamic State continues to hold territory in the Euphrates River valley stretching from Raqqah east to the Iraqi border, and IS forces maintain their siege of Syrian government forces and civilians in the eastern Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor. Syrian government forces have announced their intention to push east toward the Iraqi border and have warned U.S.-backed Syrian forces based near the Jordanian border not to advance northward into IS-held areas of eastern Syria.

[12] This corresponds to the area north of Aleppo bounded by the Turkish border on the north, the Euphrates River on the east, and the Azaz-Aleppo road corridor on the west.

**Figure 2. Iraq: Battle for Mosul**

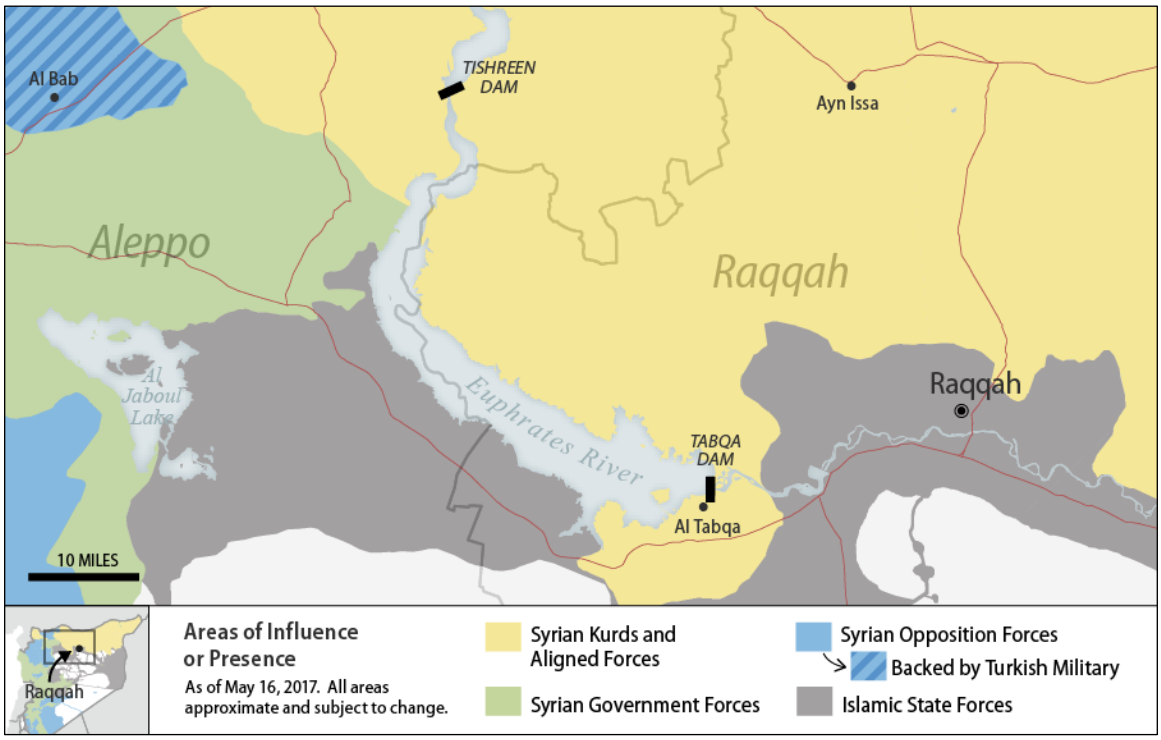
As of May 16, 2017




**Source:** All areas approximate. Areas of influence subject to change. Areas of influence based on data from IHS Conflict Monitor, adapted by CRS. Basemap and label sources include U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. State Department, and Esri.

**Figure 3. Syria: Battle for Raqqah**

As of May 16, 2017




**Source:** All areas approximate. Areas of influence subject to change. Areas of influence based on data from IHS Conflict Monitor, adapted by CRS. Basemap sources include UN OCHA and Esri.

## Outlook

The interdependent nature of the crises in Syria and Iraq and the associated lack of security and governance in large areas of those countries provided a ripe opportunity for the Islamic State organization to grow, and have complicated efforts to counter its rise. Efforts to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria have continued, although a series of failed cessation-of-hostilities agreements during 2016 were unable to generate sufficient confidence in U.N.-facilitated talks between Syria's warring parties. Iraq remains mired in political and fiscal crises, with Iraqi leaders and factions competing for advantage amid popular demands for improved security, service delivery, and an end to corruption.

While progress has been made in reducing the amount of territory held by IS fighters in Iraq and Syria, competition and discord between and among local actors in both countries continue to create some complications for U.S. officials, as does intervention by and competition among regional and extra-regional actors, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf States. These complications have become more immediate and relevant as IS forces have ceded territory, and, in some places, struggles have commenced over who will define the future of liberated areas.

The U.S. intelligence community assessed in May 2017 that the Islamic State presence in Syria would "continue to jeopardize Iraq's stability" and noted that tensions in Iraq "might persist well after major counter-ISIS combat operations cease as external actors continue to pursue their

political and strategic goals."[13] In his January 2017 confirmation hearing, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that defeating the Islamic State globally may be "extremely challenging" and said that depriving the group of its so-called caliphate in the Middle East "will not defeat ISIS once and for all, it will simply morph to its next version."[14]

## Responding to the Islamic State's Global Expansion Efforts

The Islamic State's motto—"remaining and expanding"—signals the group's defiance of efforts to destroy it and its ambition to spread its authority widely.[15] In this regard, it has hailed pledges of support from affiliated groups in far flung regions and the attraction of a global cadre of supporters as confirmations of its success. Nevertheless, the group's efforts to establish new footholds and to pursue transnational terrorist attacks may signify an acknowledgment by its leaders that the group's significant territorial losses in Syria, Iraq, and Libya have placed them at a growing disadvantage. Statements by IS leaders in 2016 acknowledged the group's loss of territory, while denying that this would sap the group's will to fight. In 2017, IS leaders have urged their supporters to persevere in the face of the multi-front assaults they face, calling for attacks elsewhere to divert and inflict revenge on the group's many enemies.[16]

A survey of regions and countries where the Islamic State has sought and gained support since 2014 suggests that while the group has demonstrated some global appeal and reach, its ambitions, tactics, ideology, and demands of obedience on its supporters have thus far limited its ability to attract a mainstream following. Specific factors that have facilitated the group's growth and appeal in different regions include the following conditions:

- conflicts based on ethnic, sectarian, and/or political disputes;
- foreign fighter recruitment and travel networks related to such conflicts;
- the weakness of state security forces and the availability of arms;
- limits to international counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation; and,
- armed groups and individuals to whom the Islamic State's specific ideology appeals or for whom IS affiliation offers potential material advantages.

Specific factors that have limited the group's growth and appeal in different regions include

- the group's extremist ideology, which has alienated most Muslim communities
- the group's targeting of civilians, including the use of violence against Muslims and religious minorities;
- its broad and uncompromising claims of religious/political authority;
- opposition from local or foreign security forces, other non-state actors, and/or rival salafi-jihadist groups;
- improvements in global counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation; and,
- the existence of competing identities, loyalties, and agendas among potential recruits.

[13] DNI Daniel Coats, Worldwide Threat Assessment, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, May 11, 2017.

[14] Secretary Rex Tillerson, Testimony before Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 11, 2017.

[15] Long a feature of IS leaders' statements, the slogan was featured on the cover of Dabiq magazine in November 2014.

[16] See, for example, Statement by IS spokesman Abu al Hasan al Muhajir, "So Patiently Persevere, For Verily the Promise of Allah is True," Al Furqan Media Establishment, April 4, 2017.

IS-related considerations influence U.S. policy toward several countries of long-standing U.S. national security interest, including Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Turkey, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Russia, and Indonesia. U.S. and partner efforts against IS-affiliated groups in some of these countries have intensified, but also have been undertaken in ways that reflect the unique prevailing circumstances in each locale.

## Responding to the Islamic State's Transnational Terrorist Attacks

Although Islamic State leaders have claimed and endorsed attacks across a widening geographic area since 2014, the role of IS leaders in planning, aiding, or directing such attacks has varied according to publicly available accounts.[17] IS leaders have repeatedly encouraged and sought to provide ideological justifications for independently organized and executed attacks by individuals who support the organization but are unable to travel to Syria or Iraq to join its ranks. Most IS claims in the wake of such attacks have described the perpetrators as its "soldiers," whether or not the individuals in question have been publicly shown to have an operational link to or history with the organization.[18] In May 2016, then-IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al Adnani urged IS supporters in Europe and the United States to carry out such attacks, and subsequently released IS propaganda material containing both encouragement and instruction on methods for improvised attacks.[19] The Defense Department confirmed Adnani was killed by a U.S. airstrike in September 2016.

As noted above, the U.S. intelligence community assessed as of May 2017 that the Islamic State "maintains the intent and capability to direct, enable, assist, and inspire transnational attacks."[20] U.S. officials and observers continue to debate the extent to which elements of the Islamic State organization based overseas have the capability to direct, support, or conduct attacks inside the United States. In April 2016, then Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said that U.S. and allied intelligence officials face challenges in monitoring and disrupting IS-related plots in part because of "very, very security conscious" IS supporters' efforts to evade detection.[21] U.S.

[17] In March 2016, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for deadly bombings in Brussels, Belgium, that involved individuals associated with the perpetrators of the November 2015 Paris attacks. According to investigators, the December 2015 San Bernardino, California terrorist attack was perpetrated by IS supporters but not directed or assisted by overseas elements of the group. In June 2016, a reported IS supporter perpetrated the most deadly mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people in Orlando, Florida.

[18] For example, President Obama described the San Bernardino shootings as an act of terrorism in his December 6, 2015, address to the nation, and IS elements overseas praised the attack but did not claim to have directed or supported it. The group's official Arabic news broadcast described the attackers as "supporters" of the Islamic State, while an English language version described them as "soldiers of the caliphate." An Arabic language pro-IS news account and the Arabic and French language versions of the official IS news broadcast for December 5 described the San Bernardino terrorists as "supporters of the Islamic State." The Arabic news broadcast used the term "ansar." The English language version described them as "soldiers of the caliphate." OSE Report TRO2015120626199441, December 5, 2015. The terrorist responsible for the June 12 Orlando attack reportedly pledged his loyalty to IS leaders, and the group's media outlets have described him as one of the group's "soldiers." OSE Report TRR2016061346270514, "Revision: Alert: Transcript of ISIL's Al-Bayan News Bulletin for 13 June, Including Orlando Attack Claim," June 13, 2016; and, OSE Report TRR2016061267145725, "Alert: Pro-ISIL A'maq News Agency Claims Perpetrator of Orlando Attack 'An Islamic State Fighter,'" June 12, 2016.

[19] OSE Report TRO2016052227212358, "ISIL Spokesman Urges 'Soldiers,' ISIL 'Supporters' To Target 'Civilians' During Ramadan," Twitter in English, Arabic, May 21, 2016.

[20] DNI James Clapper, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee, February 9, 2016; and DNI Daniel Coats, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, May 11, 2017.

[21] Remarks by DNI James Clapper, Christian Science Monitor Breakfast, April 25, 2016.

intelligence officials have described attempted attacks by IS supporters as "inevitable" and have stated that the size and scope of the global network of individuals mobilized to support the group suggests that related terrorist threats may persist for years to come. In September 2016, then-Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey warned that "hundreds of very, very dangerous people" could emerge from Syria and Iraq, forming "a terrorist diaspora sometime in the next two to five years like we've never seen before."[22]

### Transnational Terrorism as an Evolving Strategy and Tactic

The Islamic State and its predecessor groups in Iraq have threatened to attack the United States directly at least since 2012. They routinely describe the United States and its non-Muslim allies as "crusaders" and encourage Islamic State supporters to attack U.S. and allied persons, facilities, and interests by any means possible overseas and at home.[23] In the past, statements by the group's leaders seemed to suggest that they viewed such attacks as a means to provoke direct military confrontation with the United States and U.S. partners. Statements suggested that the group welcomed such confrontation and viewed it as a harbinger of apocalyptic battles described in some Islamic religious materials.[24] IS leaders challenged the United States and others to "come down and meet us on the ground," and they presumably viewed such confrontation as likely to end in the exhaustion and destruction of their enemies. A statement released in the wake of the November 2015 Paris attacks contained these types of goading sentiments, in spite of the fact that at the time, the group was already widely considered to be on the defensive on multiple fronts.[25]

Over time, IS leaders' rhetoric has evolved to suggest that they may now see transnational terrorist attacks as an instrumental tactic to wound or distract their adversaries, including the United States, from efforts to further degrade the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In April 2017, IS spokesman Abu al Hassan al Muhajir released a statement urging IS affiliates to help repel coalition assaults on IS-held territory in Iraq and Syria by escalating conflict elsewhere. He further urged IS supporters abroad to help preoccupy and divert coalition efforts with attacks. U.S. officials argue that transnational attacks give the Islamic State opportunities to signal its defiance of the campaign against it and to convince potential supporters of its viability in the face of limited progress and battlefield setbacks in Iraq and Syria since late 2014.

# U.S. Strategy, Policy Options, and Related Issues

The Trump Administration has broadly continued the implementation of the Obama Administration's partnership-based approach to the conflict with the Islamic State, but President Trump has made clear his intention and emphasis on destroying the Islamic State and has directed some changes to U.S. military operations and assistance programs. The "lines of effort" identified by the global coalition to defeat the Islamic State remain in place, and U.S. efforts can still be described as pursuing partnership with several European and Arab states: conducting direct military action, supporting Iraqi and Syrian partner ground forces, gathering and sharing intelligence, and making efforts to restrict flows of foreign fighters, disrupt the Islamic State's finances, and eliminate its leaders.[26] Shortly after taking office, President Trump directed his

[22] Testimony of FBI Director James Comey before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, September 27, 2016.

[23] For example, U.S. Government Open Source Enterprise (OSE) Report GMP20120721586002, "Islamic State of Iraq Amir Calls on Sunni Tribes to 'Repent,'" July 21, 2012; OSE Report TRR2015012657315008, January 26, 2015; and OSE Report TRR2017040503863209, April 4, 2017.

[24] OSE Report TRR2014111361251279, "ISIL Amir Al-Baghdadi Accepts Pledges of Allegiance, Announces 'Expansion' to Saudi Arabia, Yemen," Twitter, November 13, 2014.

[25] OSE Report TRO2015111451259817, "Pro-ISIL Media Establishment Praises Paris Attacks, Invites Military Escalation in Syria," Twitter, November 14, 2015.

[26] The Obama Administration's White House and State Department websites identified five "lines of effort": (1) Providing military support to our partners; (2) Impeding the flow of foreign fighters; (3) Stopping ISIL's financing and funding; (4) Addressing humanitarian crises in the region; and (5) Exposing ISIL's true nature. See archived sites at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/isil-strategy and https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/seci/index.htm.

Administration to review U.S. strategy and policy and present recommendations, and he has since ordered the deployment of additional U.S. military forces to Iraq and Syria and approved the overt provision of military equipment to Syrian Kurdish forces.

In 2016, Obama Administration officials expressed increasing confidence in the implementation of U.S. and allied military strategy in Iraq and Syria, but IS-directed and inspired terrorist attacks highlighted the dangers that the weakened Islamic State organization still poses. The U.S. intelligence community's joint unclassified assessment in May 2017 reflected these themes, noting progress against the group but warning of the long-term challenges of stabilization, the likelihood of persistent insurgent and terrorist threats from IS operatives, and the dilemmas posed by outflows of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria.

As ground has been gained against the Islamic State on multiple fronts and by various forces since 2014, observers and policymakers have more frequently discussed challenges related to the governance and reconstruction of recaptured areas. U.S. officials and some Members of Congress express their desire to consolidate gains achieved to date and avoid the emergence or renewal of other conflicts. Current U.S. intelligence estimates foresee billions of dollars in reconstruction costs in liberated areas and suggest that a host of complex, interconnected political, social, and economic challenges may rise from the Islamic State's ashes.

## Combatting the Islamic State in Complex Contexts

To date, the Islamic State organization and its regional adherents have thrived in ungoverned or under-governed areas of countries affected by conflict or political instability. These permissive environments provide resources and safe-haven for IS operations and in some cases offer recruits from among disaffected local groups. In places such as Iraq, Syria, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Nigeria, the prospects and options for undermining IS supporters have been shaped by the relative success or failure of efforts to restore security, address political grievances, boost economic growth, and promote effective governance. The Islamic State also threatens U.S. partners, such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, some of which have suffered from IS-directed or inspired attacks in 2016 and/or 2017.

In Iraq, the United States has emphasized the importance of providing support to inclusive security forces under central government command, maintained support for forces affiliated with the Kurdistan Regional Government on these terms, and sought to preserve Iraq's political and territorial unity pursuant to its constitution. In Syria, the United States has sought a negotiated settlement to the conflict that would see President Asad and some of his supporters leave office while preserving the institutions and security structures of the Syrian state. U.S. support for a predominantly Kurdish coalition of forces in northern Syria has raised some parties' concerns about relations between Arabs and Kurds in the country, relations between Syrian Kurds and Kurds in neighboring countries, and Syria's long term political and territorial integrity.

In some settings, such as Egypt and Nigeria, U.S. counterterrorism partnership with national governments and military forces may test U.S. commitments on political reform and human rights. In other settings that have lacked credible, broadly accepted governments in recent years such as Libya or Yemen, dependable partners may remain elusive and the United States and other actors may reserve the option of pursuing unilateral military action against IS affiliates and other extremist groups. Working with partners in these countries carries risks of influencing underlying political disputes in unpredictable ways or inadvertently empowering parties to local conflicts that may be hostile to U.S. security or preferences.

To the extent that U.S. and coalition strategy remains predicated on the cooperation of partner forces on the ground and the coordination of multinational efforts in the region and beyond, U.S. officials may continue to be challenged to accommodate the complimentary and competing interests of other local, regional and global actors in the pursuit of shared goals.

## U.S. Military Operations against the Islamic State

The Trump and Obama Administrations have considered groups and individuals associated with the Islamic State and participating in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners to be legitimate military targets pursuant to the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force against Al Qaeda (P.L. 107-40; 50 U.S.C. §1541 note), subject to executive branch discretion.

U.S. military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria are organized under the command of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR). As of May 24, 2017, U.S. and coalition forces had used combat aircraft, armed unmanned aerial vehicles, and sea-launched cruise missiles to conduct more than 21,663 strikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria since August 8, 2014, and September 22, 2014, respectively.[27] As of early 2017, U.S. strikes support military operations by Iraqi military and Kurdish forces in Iraq and seek to weaken the Islamic State organization's control over its remaining strongholds inside Syria. In particular, U.S. strikes and Special Forces operations support local forces in their efforts to recapture Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqah, Syria. Coalition partners had deployed more than 4,000 personnel to support operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or to train partner forces as of May 2017.

As of March 31, 2017, CJTF-OIR reported that U.S. military operations related to the Islamic State since the beginning of kinetic operations on August 8, 2014, had cost $12.5 billion. The FY2017 continuing appropriations act (Division B of P.L. 114-254, H.R. 2028) provided $4.83 billion in military personnel, operations and maintenance, procurement, and research funding "to support counterterrorism operations," including funds to meet the military's November 2016 request for an additional $1.7 billion in operations costs for Iraq and Syria.

In March 2017, the Trump Administration requested additional defense funding for operations, in-theatre support, and resupply needs associated with the fight against the Islamic State. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (P.L. 115-31) makes additional funding available for counterterrorism purposes, and Section 10005 of Division C of the act requires the President to submit a report on U.S. counter-IS strategy prior to obligating or expending certain funds.

The U.S. military assisted local militia forces in recapturing territory from the Islamic State's affiliate in Libya during 2016, where Operation ODYSSEY LIGHTNING included a campaign of airstrikes, as well as the deployment of small numbers of U.S. military personnel to gather information and build relationships with local anti-IS groups. In March 2017, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) stated that "instability in Libya and North Africa may be the most significant, near-term threat to U.S. and allies' interests" in Africa.[28]

[27] U.S. Department of Defense, Special Report: Inherent Resolve, May 24, 2017.

[28] U.S. AFRICOM – 2017 Command Posture Statement, March 2017.

# Partnership Programs

## Training, Equipping, and Advising U.S. Partners in Iraq

U.S. military personnel have deployed to Iraq to advise, assist, and train Iraqi forces, gather intelligence on the Islamic State, and secure U.S. personnel and facilities. About two thirds of deployed U.S. forces are advisers and trainers for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Kurdish peshmerga, and the rest support these forces and provide protection for U.S. personnel in country. The "force management level" for the U.S. military in Iraq was 5,262 as of December 2016, although the number of U.S. forces in Iraq may now exceed that number. As of May 2017, U.S. officials reported that more than 96,000 Iraqi personnel had received training, including Iraqi Security Forces, police, Kurdish *peshmerga*, and Sunni tribal fighters.[29]

Iraqi and U.S. officials are consulting on the scope and terms of a longer term security partnership that may see U.S. personnel stay in Iraq to help refit, advise, and train Iraqi security forces after the recapture of the Islamic State's remaining strongholds. President Trump and Prime Minister Abadi met in Washington, DC, in March 2017 and in a joint statement said that U.S. and coalition training for Iraq's security forces would continue and that bilateral "security partnership is a vital component of the national security of both the United States and Iraq."[30] The current U.S. presence in Iraq is authorized by Iraq's government through an exchange of diplomatic notes that cites the security provisions of the 2008 bilateral Strategic Framework Agreement.

## Related Appropriations and Authorities

U.S. contributions to training efforts in Iraq are made in part through the Iraq Train and Equip program, which Congress authorized in the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, Section 1236 of P.L. 113-291) and appropriated $1.6 billion for in the FY2015 appropriations act (P.L. 113-235).[31] Congress extended and revised the authority for the program in the FY2016 NDAA (P.L. 114-92) and appropriated an additional $715 million in the FY2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113). Continuing resolutions for FY2017 adopted by Congress in 2016 (H.R. 5325 and H.R. 2028) provided funding for the program and others funded as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) at FY2016 levels through April 28, 2017.[32]

The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2017 (NDAA, P.L. 114-328) extended the authorization for the Iraq training program through December 31, 2018. The FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Division C of P.L. 115-31) provides $980 million in a joint fund for the Iraq and Syria train and equip programs, and allows the obligation of additional

[29] Press Briefing by Colonel John Dorrian, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman, May 3, 2017.

[30] The White House, Joint Readout of Meeting Between President Donald J. Trump and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, March 20, 2017.

[31] Under the FY2015 NDAA, the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, is authorized to provide assistance, including training, equipment, logistics support, supplies, and services, stipends, facility and infrastructure repair and renovation, and sustainment, to military and other security forces of or associated with the Government of Iraq, including Kurdish and tribal security forces or other local security forces, with a national security mission, through December 31, 2016, for the following purposes: (1) Defending Iraq, its people, allies, and partner nations from the threat posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and groups supporting ISIL; and (2) Securing the territory of Iraq.

[32] The first CR for FY2017—H.R. 5325—provided budget authority through December 9, 2016, and was extended by H.R. 2028, the Further Continuing and Security Assistance Appropriations Act, 2017, until April 28, 2017. Both CRs provided funding for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) at the FY2016 appropriated levels.

training monies to the fund once President Trump reports to Congress on U.S. strategy to defeat the Islamic State (Section 10005 of Division C).

Congress has authorized the President to provide U.S. assistance to the Kurdish *peshmerga* and certain Sunni and other local security forces with a national security mission under certain circumstances. The Obama Administration submitted required reports to Congress in 2016 stating that the Iraqi government had taken meaningful steps toward integrating minorities into military and political structures and was governing more inclusively. In coordination with the Iraqi government, the United States has offered more than $400 million in defense funding and in-kind support to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, delivered in smaller monthly installments.

The December 2016 continuing resolution (H.R. 2028) included $289.5 million in additional FY2017 Iraq training program funds to continue support for *peshmerga* forces. Foreign Operations provisions of the FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act on Iraq (Section 7041(c) of Division J, P.L. 115-31) state that International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds "shall be made available to enhance the capacity of Kurdistan Regional Government security services and for security programs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to address requirements arising from the violence in Syria and Iraq." The explanatory statement for the act directs Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) funding to the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund, "including for programs to enhance the capacity of the Kurdistan Regional Government security services and for security programs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to further the security interest of the United States."

The Trump Administration has requested $1.269 billion for Iraq train and equip program efforts as part of its FY2018 defense appropriations request for the Counter-IS Train and Equip Fund.

**Table 1. Iraq Train and Equip Program: Appropriations and Requests**

$, thousands

| | FY2015 | FY2016 | FY2017 Requests | FY2018 Iraq-Specific Request |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iraq Train and Equip Fund | 1,618,000 | 715,000 | 630,000<br>289,500 | - |
| Additional Counter-ISIL Train and Equip Fund | | | 446,400 | 1,269,000 |
| **Total** | **1,618,000** | **715,000** | **1,365,900** | **1,269,000** |

**Source:** Executive branch appropriations requests, reprogramming notifications, and appropriations legislation.

## Efforts to Train, Equip, and Advise Syrians[33]

Congress authorized and funded a train and equip program for vetted Syrians in 2014 for select purposes, including supporting U.S. efforts to combat the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria and promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to Syria's civil war (Section 1209 of H.R. 3979, P.L. 113-291). The program's limited results as of September 2015, Russian military intervention in Syria, and support by some Members of Congress for

[33] For more information on the conflict in Syria and U.S. policy, see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by (name redacted).

broader civilian protection missions led the Obama Administration to alter the program beginning in October 2015. Obama Administration officials described their intended overall approach to the redesigned program as "transactional" and performance-based, with Syrian beneficiaries receiving U.S. support as opportunities present themselves and relative to their effectiveness on the battlefield and the alignment of their actions with U.S. interests.

The revamped train and equip program has since shifted away from training and equipping "New Syrian Force" units of vetted new recruits and toward "equipping and enabling ...a select group of vetted leaders and their units" inside Syria who are fighting the Islamic State organization. Trained and equipped individuals fight under the rubric of a Kurdish-Arab coalition force in northern Syria known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and a force known as the "New Syrian Army" (NSA) in the southeast. Equipment, including some weaponry and ammunition, has been provided to SDF and NSA forces, and U.S. special operations personnel have been deployed to Syria to advise and assist the SDF in operations against the Islamic State.

The shift from training and equipping of new vetted units toward equipping existing vetted armed groups has featured some unique risks. While equipment losses have not proven to be a major systemic concern since the change was announced, some Syrian opposition groups that reportedly have received U.S. equipment and weaponry have surrendered or lost these items to other groups, including to the Islamic State.[34] The comprehensive training approach under the program's first iteration sought to create unit cohesion, groom and support reliable leaders to serve as U.S. partners, and inculcate a spirit of nationalist motivation among fighters in the place of local, sectarian, or ideological goals. The amended approach appears to have more rapidly and effectively equipped some anti-IS forces in some areas of Syria, but may have fewer direct effects on the internal development and practices of forces, some of whom may influence security in Syria for years to come. Increased reliance on vetted group leaders may also have reduced direct U.S. visibility and influence over which individual fighters receive U.S.-origin weapons or how U.S.-origin equipment is managed and secured.

## Related Appropriations and Authorities

The underlying authority for the Department of Defense Syria train and equip program remains Section 1209 of the FY2015 defense authorization act (P.L. 113-291), as amended and extended by subsequent legislation. Congress has not appropriated funds specifically for the Syria train and equip program since the program's inception. Congress has authorized the reprogramming of funds by the Department of Defense to operations and maintenance accounts to fund program activities, subject to the prior approval of the congressional defense committees. In total, as of May 2017 Congress had reviewed and approved Defense Department requests to reprogram more than $1.25 billion in monies from other accounts for the program since 2014.[35]

Funding transfers to operations and maintenance accounts for Syria train and equip program activities remain subject to the prior approval of congressional defense and appropriations

[34] The program came under intense scrutiny in the wake of August and September 2015 reports that some of the small number of U.S. trainees that had completed the program quit and others may have turned over equipment and weaponry to Jabhat al Nusra, the Al Qaeda affiliate that controls much of Idlib Province in northwest Syria. As of October 2015, U.S. officials reported that the program had produced 124 graduates, 70 of whom had returned to Syria in September 2015. Of the other 54, U.S. CENTCOM Commander General Lloyd Austin told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "four or five" then remained "in the fight" against the Islamic State in Syria, after having come under Jabhat al Nusra attack in July 2015.

[35] Prior approval reprogramming request notifications can be reviewed on the website of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) under Budget Execution materials for corresponding fiscal years.

committees pursuant to the terms of the FY2017 NDAA (P.L. 114-328), which extended the authorization for the program through December 31, 2018. President Obama requested $250 million for the Syria train and equip program for FY2017, and in March 2017, the Trump Administration requested an additional $180 million in FY2017 funds for the program.

As noted above, the FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Division C of P.L. 115-31) provides $980 million for a Counter-ISIL Train and Equip Fund available until September 30, 2018. The act also makes available an additional $626.4 million for the fund that would provide funding requested by President Trump. These additional funds cannot be obligated or expended until 15 days after the President submits a required report "on the United States strategy for the defeat" of the Islamic State organization (Section 10005 of Division C of P.L. 115-31).

The Trump Administration has requested $500 million for Syria train and equip program efforts as part of its FY2018 defense appropriations request for the Counter-IS Train and Equip Fund.

**Table 2. Syria Train and Equip Program: Appropriations Actions and Requests**

$, thousands

| | FY2015 Approved Transfers | FY2016 Approved Transfers | FY2017 Approved Transfers | FY2017 Requests | FY2018 Syria-Specific Request |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 225,000 (O&M FY15) | 116,453 (CTPF FY15/16) | 50,000 (CTPF FY16/17) | 430,000 | 500,000 (CTEF) |
| | 220,500 (CTPF FY15/16) | 300,000 (CTPF FY16/17) | 220,000 (CTPF FY17/17) | | |
| | 279,500 (CTPF FY15/16) | - | - | | |
| | -157,408 (CTPF FY15/16) | - | - | | |
| **Net Total** | **567,592** | **416,453** | **270,000** | **430,000** | **500,000** |

**Source:** Executive branch appropriations requests and reprogramming notifications.

**Notes:** Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF). Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Train and Equip Fund (CTEF). The authority for the Syria Train and Equip Program requires the Department of Defense to submit prior approval notices to transfer funds into various service and department-wide Operations and Maintenance accounts for program activities. Funds listed were approved for transfer by the required congressional defense and appropriations committees during the fiscal years noted.

### Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS)

Section 1224 of the FY2017 NDAA provides that funds available to the Department of Defense for FY2017 may not be used to provide MANPADS to vetted Syrian opposition forces until the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State jointly submit a report on the determination and 30 days elapse after the date of the report submittal. The FY2016 defense appropriations act (Division C of P.L. 114-113) did not include a Syria-related prohibition on MANPADS procurement or transfer, but provided in Section 9013 that "none of the funds made available by this Act under the heading 'Iraq Train and Equip Fund' may be used to procure or transfer man-portable air defense systems." This prohibition was carried forward by reference in the terms of the FY2017 continuing resolutions, and the FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act states that none of the funds made available by the act for the Counter-ISIL Train and Equip Fund may be used to procure or transfer man-portable air defense systems (Section 9013 of Division C of P.L. 115-31).

# Humanitarian Funding and Post-IS Stabilization and Reconstruction

## Iraq

During his March 2017 visit to Washington, DC, Iraqi Prime Minister Hayder al Abadi reviewed progress in Iraq's campaign against the Islamic State and appealed for U.S. and international aid to help meet Iraq's short term humanitarian needs and longer term stabilization and reconstruction costs. The multilateral 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan appeal for Iraq seeks $984.6 million, of which $307.2 million or 31.2% has been funded as of May 2017.[36] According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the "full cost of the aggregate humanitarian needs of 11 million Iraqis is estimated at well over US $3 billion."[37] In March 2017, the Trump Administration announced that the United States would contribute an additional $198 million to address conflict-related humanitarian needs in Iraq, bringing total U.S. humanitarian assistance for the Iraq crisis since 2014 to more than $1.3 billion.[38]

U.S. stabilization assistance to liberated areas of Iraq is directed through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-administered Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS), which manages a Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization (FFIS); a Funding Facility for Expanded Stabilization (FFES); and Economic Reform Facilities. UNDP estimates immediate stabilization needs of $400 million for 2017, with expanded stabilization needs of $300 million.

Since mid-2016, the executive branch has notified Congress of its intent to obligate $265.3 million in assistance funding to support UNDP FFS programs.[39] Of U.S. funds for UNDP as of March 2017, $65.3 million was supporting FFIS programs and $50 million was supporting FFES programs. U.S. contributions to FFIS support stabilization activities under each of its "Four Windows": (1) light infrastructure rehabilitation, (2) livelihoods support, (3) local official capacity building, and (4) community reconciliation programs. As of April 2017, UNDP Iraq reported that the overall FFS had more than $332 million in resources and was implementing more than 500 programs across the country.

The Trump Administration requests $300 million in FY2018 Economic Support and Development Fund-OCO monies for Iraq, a portion of which would fund continued U.S. contributions to post-IS stabilization programs.

## Syria[40]

Multilateral humanitarian assistance in response to the Syria crisis includes both the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The 3RP is designed to address the impact of the conflict on Syria's neighbors, and encompasses the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, the Jordan Response Plan, and country chapters in Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt.

[36] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Iraq: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - January-December 2017, and, Financial Tracking Service data as of May 23, 2017.

[37] Ibid.

[38] For details see, USAID, Iraq - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3 Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, May 5, 2017.

[39] See USAID, FY2017 Notification #112, April 19, 2017.

[40] See CRS In Focus IF10648, *Syria's Humanitarian and Protection Crisis: Current Status*, by (name redacted) .

It includes a refugee/humanitarian response coordinated by UNHCR and a "resilience" response (stabilization-based development assistance) led by UNDP.[41]

In parallel to the 3RP, the HRP for Syria is designed to address the crisis inside the country through a focus on humanitarian assistance, civilian protection, and increasing resilience and livelihood opportunities, in part by improving access to basic services. This includes the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity) as well as the restoration of medical and education facilities and infrastructure for the production of inputs for sectors such as agriculture.[42] The 2017 3RP appeal seeks $5.6 billion, and the HRP for Syria seeks $3.4 billion. As of May 2017, the two appeals were funded at 30% and 15%, respectively.

The United States is the largest bilateral donor of humanitarian assistance to the Syria crisis. Since FY2012, it has allocated more than $6.5 billion to address the humanitarian impact of the Syria crisis using existing funding from global humanitarian accounts and some reprogrammed funding.[43]

The U.S. Syria Transition Assistance and Response Team operates from Turkey and coordinates U.S. assistance to Syria, including assistance to opposition held areas. The State Department requested more than $480 million in FY2016 and FY2017 funding to provide nonlethal support to vetted, moderate armed opposition groups, other opposition actors, and communities in opposition-held areas of Syria. Section 7041(j) of Division J of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, allows certain accounts to fund "non-lethal assistance for programs to address the needs of civilians affected by conflict in Syria" for select purposes.

The Trump Administration has requested $191.5 million in Overseas Contingency Operation funding for State Department-administered programs in Syria for FY2018, including $150 million in Economic Support and Development Fund-OCO monies.

## Related Appropriations and Authorities

The FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act provides funding to several global humanitarian accounts, including $3.058 billion to the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account and $3.811 billion to the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account, some of which will be used to respond to the Iraq and Syria crises. Division B of the FY2017 CR (P.L. 114-254) provided an additional $916 million in FY2017 supplemental funding (through MRA and IDA) for the humanitarian response in Iraq and Syria. The Trump Administration's FY2018 appropriations request seeks more than $2.5 billion in enduring and OCO funding for the IDA account, some of which will be used to respond to the Iraq and Syria crises. The Administration also seeks more than $2.7 billion for the MRA account, including $1.2 billion for MRA-funded programs in the Near East region.

Division B of the FY2017 CR also provided an additional $1.03 billion in Economic Support Fund-OCO monies to remain available through FY2018 for programs "to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, other terrorist organizations, and violent extremism, and address the

[41] For additional details, see UNDP and UNHCR, *3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2017 – 2018: In Response to the Syria Crisis: Regional Strategic Overview*, December 5, 2016.

[42] For additional details, see UNOCHA, *2017 Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Response Plan: January - December 2017*.

[43] State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Humanitarian Assistance in Response to the Syrian Crisis, April 5, 2017. See also USAID, *Syria – Complex Emergency*, Fact Sheet #4, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, April 27, 2017.

needs of populations impacted by such organizations." A $169 million Relief and Recovery Fund, established under Section 8004 of Division J of the FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act is intended to use Economic Support Fund (ESF), INCLE, Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), and FMF monies for Iraq and Syria.

The Administration's FY2018 request for Economic Support and Development Fund-OCO funding specifically references "programs to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, other terrorist organizations, and violent extremism, and address the needs of populations impacted by such organizations." As detailed above, the Administration's request seeks post-IS stabilization funding for FY2018 programs in Syria and Iraq.

# Select Issues for the 115th Congress

Members of Congress continue to debate the proper means and ends for U.S. efforts to combat the Islamic State organization while exercising oversight over U.S. military operations and a wide array of other counter-IS programs. Since 2014, Congress has authorized and appropriated billions of dollars for military operations and new types of nonlethal and lethal assistance for select groups and forces in Iraq and Syria, but has not passed a new authorization for the use of military force against the Islamic State. Key questions in ongoing executive and legislative policy debates include the following:

- How should the United States balance the use of diplomatic, military, intelligence, economic, and law enforcement tools in responding to various IS-related threats? How can the United States best undermine the appeal of the Islamic State's ideology? Should the United States prioritize the fight against the Islamic State, prioritize efforts to stabilize Syria and other countries where IS forces operate, or pursue counter-IS and stability simultaneously?
- How might military operations that recapture territory from the Islamic State affect the threat that the group poses? Which forces should carry out specific military operations against the group, and what support or direction should the U.S. government provide? If such operations succeed—what political and military arrangements would best keep extremists from returning to recaptured areas or drawing new support? What stabilization assistance might be needed? Who will provide it, for how long, and on what terms?
- Does lasting progress against the Islamic State depend on durably altering the political dynamics of Iraq, Syria, and other locations where the Islamic State has attracted supporters? How should the evolving IS threat shape overall U.S. policy toward Syria and Iraq, the provision of assistance to U.S. partners there, and U.S. policies toward displaced persons and stabilization?
- What effects might U.S. assistance for government security forces and select subnational actors in the fight against the Islamic State have on broader and longer term security and political conditions in various countries of interest?

## Debating Overall U.S. Strategy

Some critics of U.S. strategy have highlighted the Islamic State's apparent success in planning, executing, and inspiring terrorist attacks outside of Syria and Iraq and argued that the United States should more aggressively use military force to degrade the Islamic State's capabilities and

weaken its control over territory.[44] These critics have argued that, given the limited capabilities of local U.S. partners, rapidly accomplishing the stated U.S. goal of defeating the Islamic State requires greater direct military commitment than the United States and its coalition partners have expressed a willingness to provide.[45] Proposals made by such critics have tended to differ over the end states they envision, the pace and scope of operations proposed, the extent to which they prescribed post-conflict arrangements, and their views on potential U.S. partners and adversaries.

A smaller number of critics of U.S. policy have argued that the United States should state as its policy goal the "containment" of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, rather than continuing to pursue the group's outright defeat.[46] Those who have taken this view have maintained that accomplishing the stated goal of completely defeating the Islamic State is likely beyond U.S. and partner capabilities given the resources and risks that the United States and partner countries appear to be willing to bear. Prior to the string of transnational terror attacks attributed to IS supporters from 2015 through 2017, advocates for an explicit containment strategy tended to assess the linkage between the Islamic State's success or staying power in the Middle East and terrorist threats beyond the region as tenuous. Other critics of a military or security-driven approach argue that operations to degrade or destroy the Islamic State as an organization may do little to undermine the appeal of its ideology and could in some cases strengthen that appeal if they fulfill predictions made by IS leaders, result in civilian casualties, or exacerbate local political conflicts.[47]

Through late 2015, President Obama and other Administration officials argued that either drastically increasing or drastically reducing U.S. and allied military pressure on the Islamic State could serve the group's interests and do little to alter underlying political and security conditions that have helped give rise to the group. In the wake of IS-claimed terrorist attacks in several countries, President Obama restated that he did not believe the introduction of large-scale U.S. ground forces for combat operations was necessary in order to achieve U.S. objectives. Rather, he stated that U.S. efforts to reverse Islamic State gains on the ground should pair continued airstrikes and special operations missions with expanded efforts to advise and strengthen local Iraqi and Syrian partner forces.

As the Obama Administration ended its tenure, U.S. officials appeared confident that the United States and its coalition partners had succeeded in placing increased military pressure on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and they did not publicly suggest that the incoming Administration change the United States' prevailing "by, with, and through" partner-based strategy. Rather, Obama Administration officials advocated "accelerating" what they viewed as "sustainable" efforts against the Islamic State—namely those that build the capacity of partners, place targeted multi-directional military pressure on Islamic State forces, address persistent regional and local political disputes, and avoid potentially costly or counterproductive U.S. military interventions in light of wider U.S. global commitments.

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[44] See for example, James F. Jeffrey, "The U.S. Must Send Ground Forces to Eliminate the Islamic State," *Washington Post*, November 16, 2015; and, Matthew Levitt, "How to Beat ISIL without 50,000 Troops," *Politico*, November 18, 2015.

[45] See for example, "Fight against ISIS needs troops to be effective, Michael Morell says," *CBS News*, February 4, 2015.

[46] See for example, Dov Zakheim, "The Only ISIS Strategy Left for America: Containment," *The National Interest*, May 23, 2015; James Fromson and Steven Simon, "ISIS: The Dubious Paradise of Apocalypse Now," *Survival*, vol.57 no. 3, June-July 2015, pp7-56; and, Stephen Biddle and Jacob Shapiro, "Here's why we can only contain the Islamic State, not bomb it back to the Stone Age," *Washington Post*, Monkey Cage Blog, December 1, 2015.

[47] Scott Atran and Nafees Hamid, "Paris: The War ISIS Wants," *New York Review of Books*, November 16, 2015.

The Trump Administration has introduced new U.S. forces to the fight against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and reportedly has given military commanders broader authorization to conduct counterterrorism operations against IS personnel and members of other terrorist groups. As U.S. partner forces in Iraq and Syria make further gains against the Islamic State, policy debates may shift to focus on the nature and extent of enduring U.S. security partnership, the appropriate nature and extent of U.S. support for the stabilization of liberated areas, and the intersection of remaining operations against the Islamic State with wider U.S. regional priorities. In Iraq, related questions may focus on the definition of long-term training arrangements and an enduring U.S. military presence, as well as on the nature of U.S. security relations with Kurdish security forces. In Syria, the struggle to liberate the Euphrates River valley and eastern portions of the country from the Islamic State may pose thorny questions about U.S. willingness to use direct force, interaction with the Syrian government and its military backers, and U.S. relations with Syrian Kurdish forces.

Beyond U.S. efforts to restrict the Islamic State's room for maneuver in the Middle East, governments around the world continue to reassess whether and how to participate in anti-IS military efforts and how they can best counter the radicalization of members of their own populations and protect "soft targets" from terrorist attacks. In many countries, debates over counter-IS strategies are refocusing on means for countering the appeal of violent extremism (CVE) and balancing civil liberties and immigration policies with domestic security requirements.

# Outlook

U.S. military, intelligence, and diplomatic officials believe that the U.S.-led coalition and its local partners have seized the military initiative from the Islamic State on several fronts. Nonetheless, they continue to warn that the confrontation between the Islamic State organization and its adherents on the one hand and the United States and its partners on the other may nevertheless be protracted, costly, violent, and challenging. U.S. intelligence assessments and Trump Administration officials note the weakening of the group in Iraq and Syria, but portray it as a still formidable opponent. The group's transnational appeal and its supporters' violent fanaticism pose considerable threats to international security. These threats appear likely to continue to pose complex questions for policymakers in the United States and other countries regarding the use of military force, privacy and civil liberties, intelligence sharing, immigration, identity, religious liberty, diplomatic negotiation, and national strategic priorities.

The complex crises that fueled the Islamic State's rise and facilitated its spread show little sign of abating. Patterns of Russian, Iranian, Turkish, European, and Arab state involvement in Syria and Iraq significantly shape the context in which U.S. leaders consider related strategy and policy options. As U.S. diplomats have sought a negotiated settlement to the Syrian civil war, they have remained cognizant that changes in the balance of forces in Syria may provide opportunity for the Islamic State and/or Al Qaeda-affiliates to expand. Gains by the Syrian government may benefit its Russian, Iranian, Lebanese, and Iraqi supporters in ways that complicate other U.S. objectives. Similarly, divisions among or setbacks experienced by various Iraqi forces may create opportunities for the Islamic State to exploit, in spite of U.S. advocacy for a pan-sectarian, democratic and united Iraq.

The long term prospects for the Islamic State are uncertain. Its uncompromisingly stringent views, universal hostility to critics and outsiders, and promises of perpetual survival, administrative integrity, and expansion to its followers suggest that only a narrow path to success may exist for the group. The Islamic State's structure, ideology, and actions reflect its followers' uniquely uncompromising worldview, the broad scope of their ambitions, and the immediacy of

their goals. These factors place them in contrast to and, at times, at odds with other violent salafi-jihadist groups, not to mention with moderate Islamists and secular groups in most of the countries where they operate. The Islamic State's rivals challenge it from multiple ideological perspectives and include groups with similar but opposing religiously-informed views. Competing local, regional, religious, and ethnic identities limit the group's mass appeal and may bolster the appeal of rivals.

Compared to the numbers of military and security forces that could potentially be arrayed against them, the Islamic State's forces are numerically small and have suffered considerable attrition since 2014. While the Islamic State organization has demonstrated its ability to seize and hold territory in some places, the military capabilities of its enemies vastly outweigh its own. Political and strategic limits on cooperation among the Islamic State's adversaries may contribute to the group's survival, but such limits may also erode, particularly if the group shifts further in the direction of sponsoring transnational terrorist attacks. Aversion among opponents of the Islamic State to the use of military force against the group's strongholds may decline if the group regains its offensive strength or if it carries out further high-profile attacks outside its core areas.

In the short to medium term, if the Islamic State fails to restore its momentum in core areas of operation or continues to suffer military setbacks at the hands of coalition and allied local forces, it may have difficulty in fulfilling its promises to supporters and attracting new recruits. Many observers are now debating how the organization may react if its momentum in the Iraq-Syria theatre of operations remains relatively blunted or if its territorial holdings are further reversed under expanded coalition pressure. Some observers, including U.S. intelligence officials, have suggested the group could continue to seek to conduct high-profile attacks in neighboring countries and beyond as a means of demonstrating viability and success to its followers/recruits and drawing outside forces deeper into battle. Judging by the course of the international community's struggle against the Al Qaeda organization, IS terrorist attacks may restore a sense of pride and accomplishment among its members but also may galvanize new patterns of multilateral cooperation against the group that could ultimately threaten its survival, if not that of its ideology and apocalyptic vision.

Over the longer term, at least three durable challenges confront the international community as a result of the insurgent and terrorist campaigns launched by the Islamic State.

First, the mobilization of armed groups to combat the Islamic State may complicate efforts to resolve political disputes over the governance of areas recently regained or now under the Islamic State's control in various countries. Such disputes may provoke future conflicts among groups now nominally joined in opposition to the Islamic State and may provide opportunities for the Islamic State or successor organizations to exploit.

Second, the displacement and damage caused by the fight against the group will have long term human and economic consequences and impose considerable costs on politically fragile societies. Attendant demands on U.S. humanitarian and stabilization resources may remain considerable for years.

Lastly, the international community must consider how it will respond to security and social challenges posed by the thousands of individuals who have travelled to various battlefields in support of the Islamic State and other extremist groups in recent years. If the patterns established by participants in prior transnational conflicts such as those in Afghanistan and the Balkans are repeated, it could take decades to resolve the threats posed by the global network of individuals that the Islamic State has already inspired and mobilized.

# Appendix A. Emergence and Organizational Development

## Roots in Iraq and Syria

The Islamic State's direct ideological and organizational roots lie in the forces built and led by the late Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq from 2002 through 2006—*Tawhid wal Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad) and Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers (aka Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQ-I). Zarqawi took advantage of Sunni animosity toward U.S. forces and feelings of disenfranchisement at the hands of Iraq's Shia and Kurds to advance a uniquely sectarian agenda that differed from Al Qaeda's in important ways. Some experts attribute Sunni resentment to the use by some Shia of the democratic political process to monopolize political power in Iraq. Following Zarqawi's death at the hands of U.S. forces in June 2006, AQ-I leaders repackaged the group as a coalition called the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). ISI lost its two top leaders in 2010 and was weakened, but not eliminated, by the time of the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. The precise nature of ISI's relationship to Al Qaeda leaders from 2006 onward is unclear.

Under the leadership of former U.S. detainees Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al Badri al Samarra'i (aka Abu Bakr al Baghdadi), Taha Subhi Falaha (aka Abu Mohammed al Adnani), and others, the Islamic State of Iraq rebuilt its capabilities from 2010 onward. By early 2013, the group was conducting dozens of deadly attacks a month inside Iraq and had begun operations in neighboring Syria. In April 2013, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced his intent to merge his forces in Iraq and Syria with those of the Syria-based, Al Qaeda affiliated group *Jabhat al Nusra* (Support Front), under the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS). Jabhat al Nusra and Al Qaeda leaders rejected the merger, underscoring growing tensions among Sunni extremists.

Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri sought to remind IS leaders of previous pledges of loyalty to Al Qaeda made by deceased IS figures, but IS leaders rejected his claims. Al Qaeda's general command issued a statement disavowing the Islamic State in early 2014. Islamic State leaders declared that their group "is not and has never been an offshoot of Al Qaeda,"[48] and said that since they viewed themselves as a sovereign political entity, they had given leaders of the Al Qaeda organization deference over time rather than full pledges of obedience.

## Declaration of Caliphate

In June 2014, Islamic State leaders declared their reestablishment of the caliphate (*khilafa*, lit. succession to the prophet Mohammed), dropped references to Iraq and the Levant in their name, demanded the support of believing Muslims, and named Abu Bakr al Baghdadi as caliph and imam (leader of the world's Muslims).[49] IS leaders have highlighted Baghdadi's reported descent from the Quraysh tribe—the same tribe as the Prophet Muhammad—as well as his religious training, as qualifications for his position as caliph. Islamic State spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani describes Baghdadi as, "the mujahid shaykh, the learned, the active, and the devout, the

[48] OSC Report TRN2014051234500562, "Al-Furqan Releases ISIL Al-Adnani's Message Criticizing Al-Zawahiri, Refusing to Leave Syria," Twitter, May 11-12, 2014.

[49] Scholar of medieval Islam Wilferd Madelung describes historical Sunni doctrines for the declaration of the imamate in "Imāma." Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd Ed., Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, Brill Online, 2015.

warrior and the renewer, the descendant of the Prophet's house."[50] The group cites its implementation of several of the historical requirements of the caliphate/imamate as further grounds for the religious legitimacy of its actions.

U.S. officials suggest that the concept of reviving or renewing the caliphate has attracted some followers to the Islamic State organization, Baghdadi's self-appointment as caliph has been rejected by many Islamic scholars and has yet to inspire mass political support. In one open letter to Baghdadi, a group of prominent Muslim scholars questioned the legitimacy of his appointment, asking "Who gave you authority over the *ummah* (community of believers)? Was it your group? If this is the case, then a group of no more than several thousand has appointed itself the ruler of over a billion and a half Muslims."[51] Rather than debate Baghdadi's credentials, most Muslim critics simply reject the entire premise of an Islamic State-led caliphate. In particular, they condemn the group's unilateral announcement of a caliphate without consultation or consensus in the broader Muslim community.[52]

Some jihadist groups, including Al Qaeda, also have rejected Baghdadi's appointment as caliph, arguing that he is simply another military commander and is owed no special loyalty. Al Qaeda leaders Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri viewed the late Taliban leader Mullah Omar as the rightful leader of faithful Muslims and pledged loyalty (*bay'a*) to him, although their views about the wisdom and legitimacy of declaring a caliphate under his leadership or Al Qaeda's differ from those of the Islamic State. In the wake of Mullah Omar's death, Zawahiri has pledged loyalty to his successors, first to the late Mullah Akhtar Mansoor and then to Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada, urging other Muslims to do so.[53] The apparently limited appeal of Al Qaeda and Islamic State demands for leadership recognition suggests that their violent agenda remains popular only among a relatively small, if dangerous, minority of the world's Sunni Muslims.

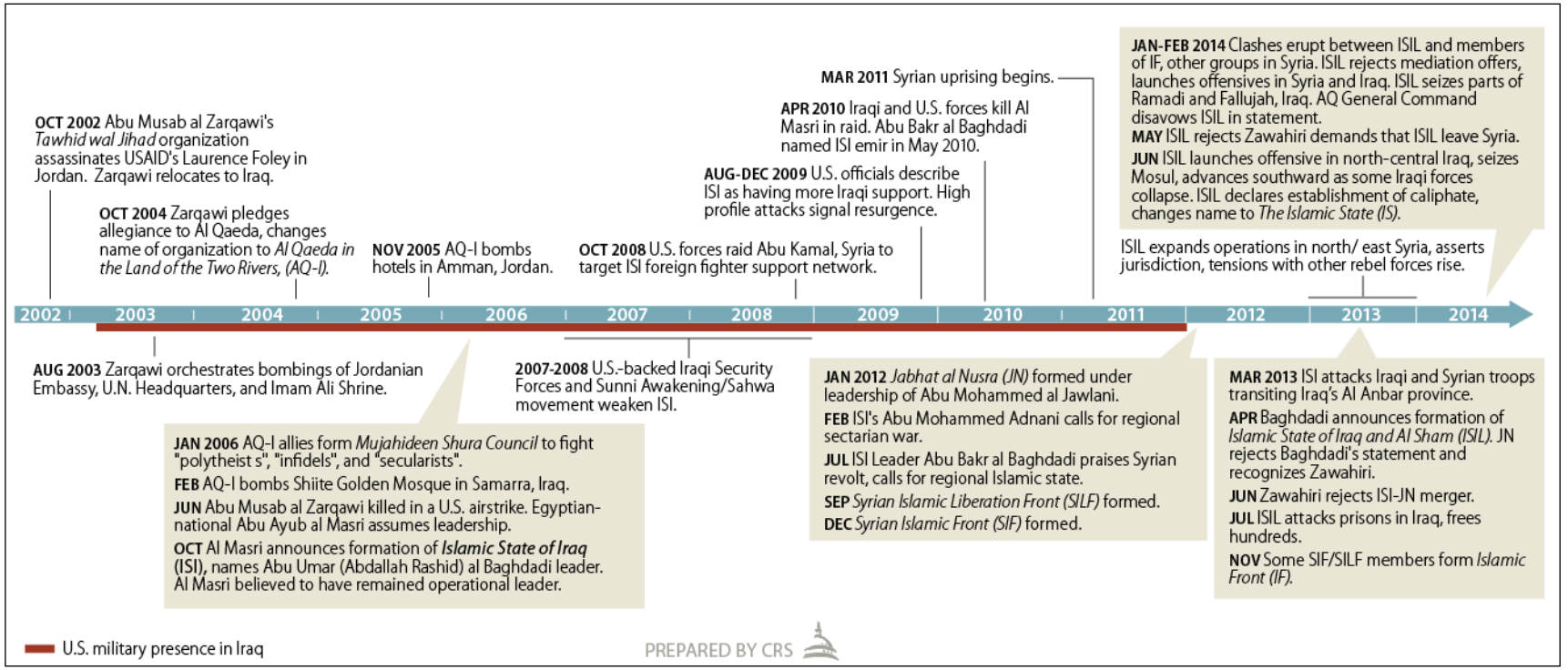
[50] OSE Report TRR2014062966139093, Abu Muhammad al Adnani, "This is the Promise of God," June 29, 2014.

[51] "Open Letter to Dr. Ibrahim Awwad Al-Badri, alias 'Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi,' and to the fighters and followers of the self-declared 'Islamic State," September 19, 2014. Available at http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/.

[52] Ibid. The same critics argued: "If you recognize the billion and a half people who consider themselves Muslims, how can you not consult them regarding your so-called caliphate? Thus you face one of two conclusions: either you concur that they are Muslims and they did not appoint you caliph over them—in which case you are not the caliph—or, the other conclusion is that you do not accept them as Muslims, in which case Muslims are a small group not in need of a caliph, so why use the word 'caliph' at all? In truth, the caliphate must emerge from a consensus of Muslim countries, organizations of Islamic scholars and Muslims across the globe."

[53] OSC Report TRR2015081353744980, "Al-Qa'ida Amir Ayman al-Zawahiri Swears Allegiance to New Taliban Leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor," August 13, 2015.

## Figure A-1. Timeline: The Roots of the Islamic State




**Source:** Prepared by CRS using U.S. Government Open Source Center reporting and other open sources.

# Appendix B. IS Affiliates and Adherents

Since 2014, some armed groups have recognized the Islamic State caliphate and pledged loyalty to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Groups in Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Afghanistan, and Nigeria have used the Arabic word "*wilayah*" (state/province) to describe themselves as constituent members of a broader IS-led caliphate. The implications of such pledges of loyalty to the Islamic State on groups' objectives, tactics, and leadership structures appear to vary and may evolve. The Trump and Obama Administrations have considered groups and individuals associated with the Islamic State and participating in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners to be legitimate military targets pursuant to the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force against Al Qaeda, subject to executive branch discretion.

As of 2017, experts consider the following IS adherents to be the most significant and capable:

## The Islamic State in Egypt (Sinai Province, SP, Wilayah Sinai)[54]

The Islamic State's local affiliate in the northern Sinai Peninsula was formerly known as *Ansar Bayt al Maqdis* (Supporters of the Holy House or Partisans of Jerusalem). It emerged after the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and affiliated with the Islamic State in 2014. Estimates of its membership range from 500 to 1,000, and it is comprised of radicalized indigenous Bedouin Arabs, foreign fighters, and Palestinian militants. It has claimed credit for destroying Metrojet Flight 9268, which exploded in mid-air over the Sinai Peninsula on October 31, 2015, killing all 224 passengers aboard. In June 2016, CIA Director John Brennan estimated the group's size at "several hundreds if not over a thousand hard-core fighters" and described the group as "the most active and capable terrorist group in all of Egypt."

In December 2016, a 22-year-old student named Mahmoud Shafik (aka Abu Abdallah al Masri) detonated a bomb inside the St Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, killing 28 people, mostly women and children. Instead of using the Sinai Province "brand" in taking responsibility for the attack, SP referred to itself as "Islamic State Egypt," signaling its intent to broaden its terrorist attacks to all of Egypt, Israel, and beyond—not just the Sinai. In 2017, the Islamic State-affiliated Sinai Province (SP) has murdered several Coptic Christians living in the northern Sinai town of Al Arish, forcing hundreds of families to flee the city. In the same month, the group also fired rockets from the Sinai into Israel. The rockets were either intercepted by Israel or landed in empty areas. The group is designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C §1189) and is listed as a Specially Designated National (SDN) by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

## The Islamic State in Saudi Arabia (Wilayah Najd/Hijaz/Haramayn)[55]

IS leaders have threatened the kingdom's rulers and state clerics directly and called on the group's supporters there to attack Shia Muslims, Saudi security forces, and foreigners.[56] IS supporters

[54] Prepared by Jeremy Sharp and Christopher Blanchard, Specialists in Middle Eastern Affairs.

[55] Prepared by Christopher Blanchard, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs. For more information, see CRS Report RL33533, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted) .

[56] OSC Report TRR2014111361251279, "ISIL Amir Al-Baghdadi Accepts Pledges of Allegiance, Announces 'Expansion' to Saudi Arabia, Yemen," Twitter in English, Arabic, November 13, 2014.

have claimed responsibility for several attacks in the kingdom since 2014, including suicide bombing attacks on Shia mosques in different parts of the country and attacks targeting Saudi security forces. In June 2015, an IS-affiliated Saudi suicide bomber blew himself up in a Kuwaiti mosque, killing more than two dozen people and wounding hundreds.[57] Saudi officials have arrested more than 1,600 suspected IS supporters and claim to have foiled several planned attacks.[58] U.S. diplomatic facilities closed temporarily in March 2015 in connection with threat information, and in 2016 an IS suicide bomber attacked the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah. U.S. officials continue to warn of the potential for attacks on U.S. persons and facilities in the kingdom, along with other Western and Saudi targets. Islamic State affiliates in Saudi Arabia are listed as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

The Islamic State arguably poses a unique political threat to Saudi Arabia in addition to the tangible security threats demonstrated by a series of deadly attacks inside the kingdom since late 2014. IS leaders claim to have established a caliphate to which all pious Sunni Muslims owe allegiance, directly challenging the legitimacy of Saudi leaders who have long claimed a unique role as Sunni leaders and supporters of particular Salafist interpretations of Sunni Islam. IS critiques of Saudi leaders may have resonance among some Saudis who have volunteered to fight for or contributed on behalf of Muslims in several conflicts involving other Muslims over the last three decades. Saudi leaders argue that it is the Islamic State that lacks legitimacy, and some Saudi observers compare the group's ideology to that of other violent, deviant groups from the past and present.[59]

## The Islamic State in Libya (Wilayah Tarabalus/Barqa/Fezzan)[60]

Supporters of the Islamic State (IS) in Libya announced three affiliated wilayah (provinces) corresponding to the country's three historic regions—*Wilayah Tarabalus* in the west, *Wilayah Barqa* in the east, and *Wilayah Fezzan* in the southwest. Nevertheless, the group does not appear to have created corresponding organizational infrastructure to back its claims. U.S. military officials estimated the number of IS supporters at approximately 3,500 fighters in late 2015, but later estimated that figure had grown to as many as 6,000, among a much larger community of Libyan Salafi-jihadist activists and militia members. In February 2016, the U.S. intelligence community described the IS presence in Libya as "one of its most developed branches outside of Syria and Iraq," and said the group was "well positioned to expand territory under its control in 2016."[61]

Such expansion was prevented after the group's stronghold in the central coastal city of Sirte came under siege in May and June 2016 by fighters from the nearby city of Misrata and neighboring towns. IS losses in and around Sirte during the latter half of 2016 were facilitated by a U.S. military campaign (Operation ODYSSEY LIGHTNING). The elimination and scattering of

[57] Ahmed Al Omran, "Saudi Brothers Suspected of Links to Kuwait Mosque Bombing Arrested," *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2015.

[58] Ahmed Al Omran, "Saudi Arabia Arrests 431 People With Suspected Islamic State Links," *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2015; and, Isa al Shamani, "Forty-Six Saudi Women are with DA'ISH in Syria; 1,375 Individuals Accused of being Members of the Organization," *Al Hayah* (London), September 3, 2015.

[59] See Nawaf Obaid and Saud Al-Sarhan, "The Saudis Can Crush ISIS," *New York Times*, September 8, 2014.

[60] Prepared by Christopher Blanchard, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs. For more information, see CRS Report RL33142, *Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) .

[61] DNI Clapper, Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee, February 9, 2016.

this main concentration of the group's personnel has raised questions about current estimates of its strength and its future in Libya. IS members in Sirte had previous tried and failed to impose their control on the eastern city of Darnah, but were met with resistance from other armed Islamist groups. Reports of potential ties between Libya and the May 2017 terrorist attack in Manchester, United Kingdom are under investigation.

In November 2015, the U.S. military conducted an airstrike thought to have killed the Iraqi leader of IS operations in Libya, the first such U.S. strike on IS operatives outside of Syria and Iraq. A February 2016 U.S. strike on the western Libyan town of Sabratha targeted an IS-camp and killed dozens of IS fighters, including many from Tunisia. Islamic State supporters in Libya are designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C §1189) and are listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

## The Islamic State in Nigeria (West Africa Province, Wilayah Gharb Afriqiyya)[62]

This northeast Nigeria-based Sunni insurgent terrorist group widely known by the name *Boko Haram* ("western education is forbidden") and formerly known as *Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa wa-al Jihad* ("People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad") pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015. The Islamic State replaced the group's leader Abubakar Shekau and recognized Abu Musab al Barnawi as its new head in August 2016, highlighting a rift in the movement and apparent disapproval of Shekau's leadership (Shekau has rejected the decision). More than 15,800 deaths have been attributed to the group since 2011 (more than 6,500 in 2015 alone), and more than two million people have been displaced by related violence, which spread into neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger (an area collectively known as the Lake Chad Basin) in 2015. The group threatens civilian, state and international targets, including Western citizens, in the region; in 2011 it bombed the United Nations building in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. The State Department designated Boko Haram and a splinter faction, Ansaru, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C §1189) in 2013. Counterterrorism cooperation with Nigeria has been constrained by various factors. U.S. counterterrorism assistance to the Lake Chad Basin countries has grown substantially since 2014, and the region has been a priority for U.S. Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) programs.

## The Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP, Wilayah Khorasan)[63]

The Islamic State has increased its influence in Afghanistan since mid-2014, acting under the name of Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP, often also referred to as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, ISIL-K), named after an area that once included parts of what is now Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The group is designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C §1189) and is listed as a

[62] Prepared by (name redacted) , Specialist in African Affairs. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10173, *Boko Haram (The Islamic State's West Africa Province)*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted) .

[63] Prepared by (n ame redacted), Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs. For more information, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) and (name re dacted) .

Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

The group's presence in Afghanistan has crystallized from several small Afghan Taliban and other militant factions—such as Da Fidayano Mahaz and Tora Bora Mahaz—that announced affiliation with the organization in early 2013. The Islamic State presence grew further as additional Taliban factions broke with the Taliban and declared allegiance to the group, including capturing some small areas primarily in eastern Afghanistan. In late 2015, press reports indicated that Afghan affiliates of the Islamic State have begun receiving financial assistance from the core organization located in the self-declared "caliphate" in parts of Iraq and Syria.[64]

U.S. commanders estimated in late 2015 that there were 1,000-3,000 ISKP fighters in Afghanistan[65] and now claim that U.S. and Afghan military efforts have reduced ISKP fighting strength to roughly 700 personnel as of March 2017.[66] U.S. operations killed ISKP's leader Hafiz Saeed Khan in July 2016 and his successor, Abdul Hasib, in April 2017.

U.S. officials say ISKP fighters are concentrated in Nangarhar province, but the group's goal in Afghanistan is likely to expand its presence further in the northeast as well as in areas east of Qandahar. To address the threat from ISKP, President Obama authorized U.S. commanders to combat ISKP fighters by affiliation, i.e., whether or not these fighters pose an immediate threat to U.S. forces, partners, or the Afghanistan National Defense Forces. In October 2016, U.S. Brigadier General Charles Cleveland said that the United States had conducted "about 240" counter-terrorism strikes from January-October 2016, of which about "two thirds to three quarters" were targeted against ISKP.[67]

## The Islamic State in Yemen (Wilayah Yemen/Sanaa/Al Bayda/Aden-Abyan/ Shabwah/Hadramout)[68]

In Yemen, militants who claim allegiance to the Islamic State have taken advantage of ongoing war to repeatedly bomb mosques known for attracting worshippers of Zaydi Islam, an offshoot of Shia Islam (with legal traditions and religious practices which are similar to Sunni Islam). Islamic State terrorists have targeted supporters of the Houthi Movement, a predominately Zaydi armed militia and political group that aims to rule wide swaths of northern Yemen and restore the "Imamate," or Zaydi-led monarchical rule that intermittently governed northern Yemen from 893 AD to 1962. The Houthis are currently at war with a coalition of predominately Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic State may see this war as an opportunity to increase sectarian hatred in Yemen. Though wracked by war, Yemen has not traditionally had the same kind of sectarian animosity as other Arab states such Iraq and Lebanon. Leadership and tactical disputes appear to have limited the Yemen-based IS affiliates' success to date, as has competition from rivals in the larger and more deeply rooted Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula organization. The

[64] Michael Gordon. "Islamic State Building 'Nests' in Afghanistan, U.S. Says." *New York Times*, December 19, 2015.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Press briefing by Resolute Support Mission Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland, March 1, 2017, cited in Ayaz Gul, "US Military: Number of IS Members in Afghanistan Reduced to 700," Voice of America, March 1, 2017.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Prepared by Jeremy Sharp and Christopher Blanchard, Specialists in Middle Eastern Affairs.

group is listed as a Specially Designated National (SDN) by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

## The Islamic State in the Caucasus (Wilayah Kawkaz)[69]

The Islamic State recognized Wilayah Kawkaz in June 2015 after IS supporters purportedly drawn from several predominantly Muslim Russian republics in the Caucasus pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Reports suggest that commanders once affiliated with the Al Qaeda-aligned Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus, established in 2007 and declared a terrorist organization by the United States in 2011, make up the leadership of the IS affiliated organization. Russian officials claimed to have killed the emir of Wilayah Kawkaz in December 2016. Foreign fighters from Russia reportedly make up an influential component of the Islamic State's fighting force in Iraq and Syria, and late IS leader Abu Omar al Shishani may have helped cultivate deeper ties between IS forces and individuals in the North Caucasus.

[69] Prepared by Christopher Blanchard, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

# Appendix C. Ideology and Operations

The ideology of the Islamic State organization can be described as a uniquely hardline version of violent jihadist-Salafism—the group and its supporters are willing to use violence in an armed struggle to establish what they view as an ideal society based on their understanding of Sunni Islam. Their vision is based on their specific understanding of the life of the prophet Mohammed, the example of his earliest followers, and select events in Islamic history.[70] The group's beliefs are a particularly activist, violent, and uncompromising expression of broader ideological trends that have developed over a period of centuries and have fueled extremism and conflict across the Sunni Muslim world for much of the last 40 years.[71] While IS supporters may share some of the views of nonviolent Salafist Sunnis, Islamic State adherents differ from of them, from most non-Salafist Sunnis, and even from other violent jihadist-Salafists in two key respects. One is their chosen creed (*aqidah*)—their perspectives on the requirements of true Islamic faith—and the other is their chosen approach (*manhaj*, lit. path*)*—their method for interpreting and applying their view of Islamic religious tenets. Islamic State figures describe their organization as the successor to and defender of the prophet Mohammed's approach, a view that many other Sunni Muslims reject. The Islamic State's supporters further hold an apocalyptic vision of their organization and its role in instigating a broad clash between true Muslims and all those they consider non-believers.

## Creed and Approach

Like other Salafists, the Islamic State organization seeks the elimination from Islam of what it views as idolatry, the promotion of strict monotheism, and the protection of those it views as true Muslim believers from threats posed by idolaters, apostates, and other non-believers.[72] IS leaders argue that many individuals who would describe themselves as Sunni Muslims have strayed from the creed and path defined by the prophet Mohammed and his companions. The Islamic State rejects criticism from other Sunnis who argue that the group too easily or broadly declares the infidelity of other Muslims (an act referred to as *takfir*), arguing instead that the Islamic State only attacks those whose infidelity can be demonstrated.[73] Nevertheless, IS ideologues dictate

[70] For background on Salafism, see Roel Meijer (ed.), Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement, Oxford University Press, 2009; and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29, pp. 207–239, 2006. According to Meijer's volume, Salafism "refers to the movement that believes that Muslims should emulate the first three generations of lslam referred to as the pious forefathers (*al salaf al salih*) as much as possible in all areas of life."

[71] In the words of one observer, the Islamic State's ideology can be seen as an "acutely severe" and "unforgiving" example of violent jihadist-Salafism, a broader movement which itself "is predicated on an extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognized cadre of religious authorities." See Cole Bunzel, From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State, The Brookings Institution Center for Middle East Policy Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper No. 19, March 2015.

[72] Terms frequently used in IS members' explanations of their ideology include Arabic words for idolatry (*shirk*); monotheism (*tawhid*); believers (*muaminin*); non-believers (*kuffar*); idolaters (*mushrikin*); apostates (*murtadd*); faith (*iman*); and disbelief (*kufr*).

[73] For example, in the midst of jihadist infighting in northern Syria in early 2014, Islamic State religious official Mohammed Sammuh al Rashid (aka Abu Ubadah al Maghribi) released a statement saying "nobody should issue *takfiri* [declaring the non-belief of Muslims] rulings" against other Muslim groups, because "declaring their non-belief for the sake of fighting them is closer to the opinion of the Kharijites whom we hate." OSC Report TRR2014012180009989, "Syria: Islamic State of Iraq, Levant Sharia Official Calls Factions to Stop Infighting," January 21, 2014. Abu Mohammed Al Adnani rejected similar criticism from a Jabhat al Nusra official in a March 2014 audio statement entitled "Then Let Us Earnestly Pray, and Invoke the Curse of Allah on Those Who Lie."

strict conditions for determining whether other Muslims have nullified their faith through certain acts, and they describe a wide range of groups and individuals as idolaters (i.e., those who worship other gods or associate others with god) or apostates (believers who reject or stray from Islam).

For example, the group considers individuals that support democratic governance and participate in elections, including Sunni Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to be idolaters for elevating man-made law and political order alongside or above religious law prescribed by God. The group is especially uncompromising in its condemnation of and violence toward Shia and Alawites, whom it considers irredeemable apostates subject to punishment by death for their veneration of the prophet Mohammed's family and for other beliefs and practices.[74]

**Figure C-1. "The Extinction of the Gray Zone"**

Cover of IS English Language Magazine, February 2015


**Source:** U.S. Government Open Source Center (OSC).

IS materials welcome the so called "extinction of the gray zone" (see **Figure C-1**) in a black and white struggle between faith and disbelief; they often use these and other stark terms to describe what they see as binary tests of Muslim faith created by conflicts in Syria and Iraq and other world events, including IS terrorist attacks and actions taken by others to counter the group.

The Islamic State's methods for deriving these views and applying them through action place the group at odds with other self-identified Sunni Muslims, including some other violent jihadist-Salafists such as various prominent ideologues and members of Al Qaeda. In contrast to most traditional schools of Sunni religious opinion and consensus, the group defines itself and justifies its actions through selective reference to certain Sunni Islamic religious texts, including passages from the Qur'an, the attributed sayings and practices (*hadith/Sunna*) of the prophet Mohammed and his companions, and some subsequent religious scholarship. The group's dogma disregards some historical events and elides some authoritative Islamic sources that contradict its extreme views.[75]

[74] Islamic State propaganda regularly refers to Shia derogatorily as rejectionists (*rawafid*) and *Safavids*, a reference to the 16th-18th century Persian dynasty that ruled large parts of modern day Iraq. Alawites are referred to derogatorily as *Nusayris*, or followers of a key 9th century figure in the sect's history, Mohammed ibn Nusayr.

[75] For example, the group's materials selectively cite parts of *Surah al Tawbah* from the Quran, emphasizing verse 5's call to fight and kill polytheists wherever they are found and ignoring calls in immediately adjacent verses 6 and 7 to grant asylum and conversion to those who seek it and to respect treaties with non-Muslims as long as non-Muslims respect treaties with the faithful (*Al Tawbah*, 9:5-7). Similarly, the group ignores the injunction in *Surah Al Anfal* to prepare for war but to favor peace with those who favor peace (*Al Anfal*, 8:61). More broadly the group rejects (continued...)

Bernard Haykel, an expert on Salafism at Princeton University, argues that the Islamic State's approach amounts to "denying the legal complexity of the [Islamic] legal tradition over a thousand years."[76] Haykel describes the group's view of Islam as "ahistorical" and links its extreme views to the group's "very particular reading of that tradition and those texts."

Nevertheless, statements and public outreach materials suggest that Islamic State leaders seek to convince other Muslims that the group's actions and views are consistent with historic Islamic practices and are supported by Islamic religious texts and jurisprudence. In this regard, IS figures make frequent reference to other minority, hardline Sunni perspectives on the complex history of Islamic faith and practice, especially the works of the 14th century scholar and polemicist Taqi Ad-din Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah, the 18th century leader of the Arabian Salafist revival movement Mohammed ibn Abd al Wahhab, and their supporters. Some of their rivals label IS members as Kharijites, a reference to a violent movement from Islam's first century that rejected Mohammed successors and declared other Muslims to be apostates.

The extent to which commitment to the group's professed ideology consistently permeates the group's membership is debatable. Senior leaders and ideologues appear highly committed, but their public statements may mask opportunism or insecurities. Similarly, many lower ranking operatives in the group profess deep commitment to the group's ideology, but it is unlikely that such commitment is universal among the complex combination of foreign and local forces in the Islamic State's ranks. Some local supporters appear to have made pragmatic calculations of survival in pledging fealty to the group or have sought to settle local scores with rivals opposed to the Islamic State's rise.

To date, controversy surrounding the strategy and tactics of the Islamic State have divided jihadist-Salafists and prevented the group from drawing support from what might be a much larger population of prospective adherents. In late 2006 and early 2007, the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq and the outlining of its ideology by then-leader Abu Umar al Baghdadi provoked serious controversy in jihadist-Salafist circles, with some groups and figures rejecting the group's calls for attacks on Sunni security force personnel and describing the establishment of the state premature.[77]

Similar controversy has raged since 2013, when the group rejected Al Qaeda's demands that it withdraw from Syria and declared the establishment of its caliphate. As circumstances evolve, future IS actions may lead to additional controversy and internal divisions that might weaken the group or contribute to its defeat. The group's embrace of transnational terrorism against civilians is one such development. Alternatively, the group's staying power might be bolstered by the firm convictions of its core members that they constitute an elite vanguard of believers tasked with a unique religious and historical mission. Islamic State leaders show disregard for popular opinion

(...continued)

traditional Islamic legal approaches that have sought to explain these and other apparently contradictory impulses in the Qur'an and the hadith through analysis of their chronological development, chains of transmission, and applicability outside their original historical context.

[76] Haykel quoted in Jack Jenkins, "What The Atlantic Left Out About ISIS According To Their Own Expert," ThinkProgress Online, February 20, 2015.

[77] At the time, the Islamic Army of Iraq and other Sunni Islamist insurgents criticized ISI's views, and Saudi scholars intervened to urge unity over insistence on divisive doctrines. Kuwaiti Salafist cleric Hamid al Ali called for ISI to rescind its declaration of an Islamic state.

and do not shy away from controversy with their critics, including disputes with fellow Sunni Muslims and other leading jihadists, like Al Qaeda.[78]

### Is the "Islamic State" Islamic?

Interest in the roots and ideas of the Islamic State organization has prompted debates over the group's relationship to the Islamic faith and over the merits of different ways of describing the group, its beliefs, and its goals in public policy discourse. Participants in these debates may approach the question—"Is the 'Islamic State' Islamic?"—from different perspectives and draw different conclusions.

Those who understand the question "Is the Islamic State Islamic?" to focus on whether or not the group's members view themselves as Muslims or whether they make reference to Islam as a religion and Islamic history in describing their goals might answer the question affirmatively—e.g.—*"Yes, the 'Islamic State' is 'Islamic' because it defines itself through references to Islam and because it seeks a series of goals linked directly to its views of the requirements of Islam as a religion."*

Those who understand the question "Is the Islamic State Islamic?" to focus on whether or not the group's members and actions are authentically Islamic in the sense of reflecting the religion's core tenets or representing how most other Muslims would define their faith might answer the question negatively—e.g.—*"No, the 'Islamic State' is not 'Islamic' because it selectively draws from Islamic texts and traditions, because its actions are predicated on its rejection of what it sees as the wayward beliefs of other Muslims, and because its views on faith, theology, and violence are at odds with those that many other Muslims would describe as 'Islamic.'"*

Those who are critical of statements such as "The Islamic State is not Islamic" or "The Islamic State has nothing to do with Islam" may reject what they view as a failure to acknowledge religious aspects of the group's identity, ideology, and goals. These critics may fear that deemphasizing or misunderstanding the group's religious beliefs could lead to mistakes in policy.

At the same time, those who argue that "The Islamic State is not Islamic" or "The Islamic State has nothing to do with Islam" may be seeking to signal to Muslim and non-Muslim audiences that they do not view the beliefs and actions of the Islamic State as authoritatively or authentically Islamic or that opponents of the Islamic State are not at war with Muslims writ large. They may further be seeking to signal that they do not see the Islamic State organization as representative of most Muslims.

William McCants, director of the Brookings Institution Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World and author of an in-depth profile of the Islamic State and its ideology, argues that "Ultimately, it's for Muslims to decide whether the Islamic State is being faithful to scripture. For the nonbelievers, it's enough to recognize that Islamic scripture is contradictory when it comes to violence and to rejoice that most Muslims makes sense of these contradictions in a very different way than ISIS."[79]

[78] For example, in April 2014, Abu Mohammed al Adnani said

> Al-Qa'ida has become a follower of the majority, whom it calls the *ummah* [community of believers], flattering them at the expense of religion. The tyrants of the [Muslim] Brotherhood [MB], who fight the *mujahideen* and do not rule by the sharia of the Merciful, have become an entity being promoted for and being worthy of leniency. They [the MB] are described as the hope of the *ummah* and one of its heroes. We have no idea about which *ummah* they are talking about, or what bitter harvest they are seeking. [They say] 'The Christians, who are fighting the *ummah*, and the people of the idols such as the Hindus, Sikh, and others, have become partners in the homeland, in which it has become mandatory to coexist with them in peace and stability.' No, by God this had never been the belief of the ISIL for one day and it will never be. The ISIL cannot go along with the people: If they do right, it does the same, and conversely if they do wrong, it does the same. The methodology of the ISIL will continue to be the disbelief in tyranny, disavowal from it and its people, and waging jihad against them with the sword, arrowheads, argument, and evidence. Subsequently, The ISIL will welcome those who agree with it and shall ignore those who disagree with it, even if they called themselves 'the *ummah*.' This will certainly be the case, even if that means that the ISIL is alone on one side and the entire world is on the other. O Muslims, this is our methodology that, God willing, we will never depart from, even if Al-Qa'ida is going to fight us over it, and even if we were annihilated, but for one person who will follow it."

Abu Mohammed al Adnani—This is Not and Will Never Be Our Path, OSC Report TRN2014041833830660, "Iraq: ISIL Spokesman's Audio Attacks Al-Qa'ida's Ideology, Calls For Establishing Islamic Caliphate," April 17, 2014.

[79] Will McCants, "After the Paris attacks, here's how to think about the relationship between ISIS and Islam," *Washington Post*, November 14, 2015.

## Treatment of Religious Minorities, Jews, Christians, and Shia

Religious minority communities living in Islamic State territory have faced expulsion, the destruction or seizure of their property, forced conversion, kidnapping, assault, sexual slavery, and death. The United Nations has stated that "the targeting of ethnic and religious communities by the Islamic State appears to be part of a deliberate and systematic policy that aims to suppress, permanently cleanse or expel, or in some instances destroy those communities within areas of its control."[80] This approach has been justified by IS leaders based on the designations of groups and individuals as polytheists or apostates as outlined above ("Creed and Approach").

The Islamic State makes selective reference to the Qur'an and Islamic legal traditions to justify its treatment of non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians who as groups are afforded unique status under Islamic law.[81] In general terms, the Islamic State views Jews and Christians as having violated terms of agreement with Muslims that would require their protection.[82] Like Al Qaeda leaders and other jihadist-Salafist ideologues, IS leaders often refer to their enemies as part of a Jewish and Crusader-led conspiracy against Islam. In classifying Jews and Christians as hostile parties, the Islamic State seeks to justify violence against them. In basic terms, the Islamic State offers Jewish and Christian enemies three choices—conversion, the payment of a protection tax known as *jizyah*, or death.[83]

[80] Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July–10 September 2014, published jointly by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

[81] According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, "the term *dhimma* is used for the obligation of Muslims in general and of Muslim rulers in particular to grant protection to non-Muslims living under their rule. The religious communities granted this protection were designated "protected people" (*ahl al-dhimma*, or dhimmīs). In most periods of Islamic history, dhimmīs were allowed to continue practising their religion on the condition that they paid a special tax (*jizya*), recognised the exaltedness of Islam, and lived according to the Islamic laws pertaining to them. The subject is usually discussed as part of a general consideration of the treatment of minorities, but non-Muslims under Muslim rule were not always a minority: because the process of conversion to Islam proceeded slowly after the conquests, the Middle East remained a Christian-majority area for at least five hundred years, and the laws concerning dhimmīs developed during a period when a Muslim elite ruled a largely non-Muslim population. ... Most non-Muslims living under Islamic rule in the early Muslim centuries thus came to be considered dhimmīs, although the rules concerning Jews and Christians [the *ahl al-kitāb*, or People of the Book] differed from those concerning Zoroastrians and non-Arab polytheists. The *ahl al-kitāb* are not identical to the *ahl al-dhimma*. The term ahl al-kitāb refers to Judaism and Christianity as religions possessing divine books, whereas the term ahl al-dhimma refers to the relationship between the Muslim government and its non-Muslim subjects." Yohanan, Friedmann, "Dhimma." Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE. Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, Brill Online, 2016.

[82] In 2007, then Islamic State of Iraq leader Abu Umar al Baghdadi said, "We consider that the people of the book [Christians and Jews] and others among the non-believers within the Islamic State today are enemies with no rights as *dhimmis* [rights guaranteed to non-Muslims according to Islamic law under Muslim government]. They have violated the pact with them on countless occasions and if they wish to have safety and security they must renew the pact with the Islamic State according to the Umari conditions they violated [conditions attributed to the second caliph Umar]." OSC Report FEA20070314102073, "New Al-Baghdadi Statement Warns U.S. Against Agreements With Other Jihad Groups, March 13, 2007.

[83] In March 2015, IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani said, "O Jews and Crusaders, if you want to protect yourselves, save your money, and live a secure life away from our swords, you have only two options: either you join Islam and declare God as the only god and no other, and thus live a good life in this world, gain the next one, and be doubly rewarded, [and] this is what we are calling on you to do and advising you to accept ... The other option would be for you to contently pay us the *jizyah* [capitation tax collected from non-Muslims in states ruled by Islamic law], after you depart from the Arabian Peninsula of Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon him, as well as Jerusalem and all the nations of Muslims. The *jizyah* you will be paying us is one tenth of the tenth of what you are currently paying to fund your failing war. So save your money, and lift our swords from your [own] throats. If you choose the third option, and insist on your arrogance, pride, and stubbornness, you will deeply regret it soon, God willing."

After taking control of the Iraqi city of Mosul in 2014, the Islamic State demanded that Christians and other minorities there convert to Islam or leave the city but did not offer them the opportunity to remain after paying *jizyah*. Most members of minority communities fled, but some who did not were detained. The Islamic State reportedly bulldozed or otherwise destroyed remaining Christian churches and shrines in Mosul.[84] Similar actions have been reported in Syrian Christian communities seized by IS fighters. These actions have been criticized by some Islamic scholars, who argue that, "these Christians are not combatants against Islam or transgressors against it, indeed they are friends, neighbors and co-citizens. From the legal perspective of *shari'ah* they all fall under ancient agreements that are around 1400 years old, and the rulings of *jihad* do not apply to them."[85]

Baghdadi's and Adnani's statements regarding the elimination of groups considered apostates also focus on fighting Shia Muslims. As part of its campaign to depose the Shia-led government in Baghdad, the Islamic State has supplemented its conventional military offensive with repeated bombings of Shia gathering places in Baghdad and some other majority Shia cities, killing numerous Shia civilians. While the Islamic State justifies the targeting of Shia through a selective and extremist reading of religious texts, its actions are likely also influenced by the sectarian political context out of which the group emerged. The group and its supporters describe years of repression and injustice against Sunnis perpetrated by Iraq's U.S.-backed, Shia-led government.[86]

As they seek to motivate their followers, Islamic State leaders intone both religious references and allusions to historical incidents of perceived Sunni disenfranchisement. Assessing which parts of the group's message resonate most with individual IS followers is extremely challenging. In addition to religious convictions and individuals' sense of identity, the appeal of taking decisive action, a desire for adventure or glory, financial expediency, or violent personality disorders also may come into play in some cases.

## Threatening U.S. Partners and Allies

Like Al Qaeda, the Islamic State identifies a range of U.S. partners in the Middle East and Europe as hostile targets and considers them agents in a broad U.S.-led conspiracy against Sunni Muslims. As a matter of priority, Al Qaeda leaders have largely focused their efforts on targeting the United States, its interests, and its allies in Europe, viewing insurgent campaigns against U.S. partners in the Middle East such as the governments of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt as potentially harmful or counterproductive distractions that could alienate potential Muslim

[84] "ISIS forces last Iraqi Christians to flee Mosul," *New York Times*, July 18, 2014.

[85] "Open Letter to Dr. Ibrahim Awwad Al-Badri, alias 'Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi,' and to the fighters and followers of the self-declared 'Islamic State," September 19, 2014. Available at http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/.

[86] In his announcement of the creation of the Islamic State caliphate in June 2014, IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani declared, "the time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect—the time has come for them to rise." OSE Report TRR2014062966139093, June 29, 2014. In March 2015, Adnani called on Sunnis to rise up in similar terms, citing a long list of grievances: "O Sunni people, the rejectionists have come to take your homes, your money, and your land. They have come to kill your men and imprison your women. The Iranians have come demanding revenge from the Iraqis for the 1980s. The rejectionists have come to exact revenge from the Sunni people for Hussayn, may God the Glorified be satisfied with him, whom they killed and then mourned and for whom they have flagellated themselves for hundreds of years. So wake up, O Muslims. …O *ummah* of Muhammad, blessings and peace be upon him, we warned you before and we warn you again that this war is a Crusader-Safavid war against Islam, monotheism, and the Sunni people." OSC Report TRR2015031285993616, "ISIL Spokesman Celebrates Boko Haram Allegiance, Issues Ultimatum, Threatens Attacks on West," Twitter, March 12, 2015.

supporters. In contrast, the Islamic State organization has primarily sought to eliminate local and regional opposition to its existence, including among fellow Muslims, in the service of its broader hostility toward the United States, Europe, and others. By seeking to consolidate control over territory in Iraq and Syria and declaring itself a sovereign political-religious authority to which Sunni Muslims owe allegiance, the Islamic State has defined itself to date as a more direct and fundamental challenge to regional governments than Al Qaeda has historically done. Its attacks outside its strongholds reflect its long-held hostility to the West, but are a new development in its approach.

IS leaders continue to urge their supporters to attack and undermine governments supporting U.S. and coalition operations. European partners receive particular attention, as does the government of Saudi Arabia among Middle Eastern states. As noted above, IS supporters have carried out several terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia since 2014, and Saudi authorities have arrested hundreds of suspected supporters of the Islamic State and other terrorist groups. The Islamic State's capture and graphic murder of Jordanian Air Force pilot Muath al Kassasbeh in early 2015 and ongoing IS affiliate operations against the Egyptian government in Sinai demonstrate the group's broader hostility to regional governments that it rejects.

The Islamic State's anti-Israel rhetoric also is noteworthy. In late 2015, IS subgroups across the globe issued missives encouraging Palestinians and others to attack Jews generally and Israelis specifically in conjunction with a wave of violence driven by non-IS related disputes in Israel and the West Bank—largely concentrated on Jewish-Muslim tensions over Jerusalem's holy sites. Although the Islamic State has not directly attacked targets in Israel or territories it controls, possible IS-inspired attacks in Europe over the past two years against Jewish targets have killed some Israeli citizens. Israeli officials have routinely expressed concern about potential IS-inspired or -directed threats.

## Author Contact Information

(name redacted)
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
[redacted]@crs.loc.gov , 7-....

(name redacted)
Analyst in Middle Eastern and African Affairs
[redacted]@crs.loc.gov , 7-....