

IS Expansion and Global Antiterrorism

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Once closely linked to al Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, established the Islamic State headed by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi in June of 2014. Today, IS militants are in control of northeastern Syria as well as contiguous areas in northern and western Iraq. It has captured strategic towns on either side of the border between Syria and Iraq, effectively erasing the border and establishing a foundation for its new Islamic nation. It has set up administrative and intelligence systems to manage the territories now under its control.

Strengths and weaknesses of IS

IS armed forces are actually an international coalition. Most IS commanders and other leaders hail from Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, while combatants are from Libya and Iraq. IS also hires a great number of foreign fighters, primarily from Chechen, the United States, Europe, Southeast Asia, and China.

IS has become the richest terrorist organization in the world. Its primary financial sources include oil fields “liberated” by it in Syria and Iraq as well as funding provided by Persian Gulf nations and individuals joining its ranks as jihadists. IS’ largest windfall came in the form of US\$429 million it seized from Mosul’s central bank. Other banks in Mosul and other areas under IS control have also been looted. IS has used these funds to purchase arms and ammunition from private suppliers and on the Iraqi black market. IS has also netted a great deal of US-made military

equipment as it has expanded its reach and might even have in its possession short-range ballistic missiles.

Of particular interest is the fact that IS is in the process of transforming itself from an armed antigovernment organization into a state. It has formed an administrative system around al-Baghdadi with highly centralized power and clear division of responsibilities. Al-Baghdadi set up a cabinet into which he has appointed a number of deputies. For example, Abu Abdul-Rahman al-Bilawi al-Anbari, who once served in Saddam Hussein’s military, is responsible for activities in IS-occupied Syria. Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, once in Iraqi intelligence and Special Forces, is in charge of activities in IS-occupied Iraq. IS has also set up provincial governorships, courts, police stations, and a spokesperson system.

Al-Baghdadi has also appointed a member of his organization who goes by the pseudonym Salahuddin Shishani to serve as IS Finance Minister. The IS cabinet also has individuals specifically responsible for managing military stores, planning roadside bombings, as well as comforting and compensating the bereaved families of jihadists and individuals “martyred” for the cause. All leaders and members of the organization have specific work objectives and jurisdictional areas and receive monthly pay based on position and rank. IS also understands marketing. It employs innovative propaganda techniques and uses social media, such as

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to recruit young believers to its cause.

IS, however, lacks an effective united force. IS members come from a number of nations and from many factions, in addition to the Syrian Sunnis. If IS is to enhance its combat effectiveness, it needs to integrate the various ethnic groups and religious factions. Participants from other countries have agendas of their own that differ from that of the Syrians. Known for spreading terror, IS is not satisfied with just political control. In some areas, it has destroyed Islamic holy places, torn down Islamic graven images, and blown up Shiite mosques. Due to its small numbers, IS cannot effectively control the territory it occupies.

The geographical expansion of neo-terrorism

IS has surpassed al Qaeda to become the terrorist organization posing the largest threat to the world. Westerners who have joined IS now have battlefield experience. Having been indoctrinated by the organization's extremism, they could launch terrorist attacks of their own when they return to their home countries in the future. IS, which has inherited al Qaeda's views and methods, has succeeded in employing global jihadism as its trumpet call to the Islamic world, accepting non-Syrians and non-Iraqis into its ranks.

In terms of ideology, IS appears to rigorously implement Islamic sharia law, but has been unable to impose it completely in the lands it occupies. Some IS-occupied territories do not compel the practice of the IS version of sharia. The IS' hawkish interpretation of "caliph" is more of a tool for recruiting volunteers from other countries to advance its cause to establish an

Islamic state that transcends national borders, as demonstrated in the declaration of allegiance by the North Caucasus' Caucasus Emirate and Boko Haram, the extremist organization in Nigeria. IS ideas, methods, propaganda, and recruitment have directly challenged the antiterrorism and national security policies of the West. **BT**

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