

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1148
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 5 - Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
Udgivet:	01. november 2019
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	19. december 2019

Document #2019440

USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 5 - Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

Aka al-Qa’ida in Iraq; al-Qa’ida Group of Jihad in Iraq; al-Qa’ida Group of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers; al-Qa’ida in Mesopotamia; al-Qa’ida in the Land of the Two Rivers; al-Qa’ida of Jihad in Iraq; al-Qa’ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers; al-Qa’ida of the Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers; al-Tawhid; Jam’at al-Tawhid Wa’al-Jihad; Tanzeem Qa’idat al Jihad/Bilad al Raafidaini; Tanzim Qa’idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn; the Monotheism and Jihad Group; the Organization Base of Jihad/Country of the Two Rivers; the Organization Base of Jihad/Mesopotamia; the Organization of al-Jihad’s Base in Iraq; the Organization of al-Jihad’s Base in the Land of the Two Rivers; the Organization of al-Jihad’s Base of Operations in Iraq; the Organization of al-Jihad’s Base of Operations in the Land of the Two Rivers; the Organization of Jihad’s Base in the Country of the Two Rivers; al-Zarqawi Network; Islamic State in Iraq; Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham; Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; ad-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-’Iraq wa-sh-Sham; Daesh; Dawla al Islamiya; Al-Furqan Establishment for Media Production; Islamic State; ISIL; ISIS.

Description: Al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) was designated as a FTO on December 17, 2004. In the 1990s, Jordanian militant Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi organized a terrorist group called al-Tawhid wal-Jihad to oppose the presence of U.S. and western military forces in the Middle East and the West’s support for, and the existence of, Israel. In late 2004, he joined al-Qa’ida (AQ) and pledged allegiance to Usama bin Laden. At that time, his group became known as al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI). Zarqawi led the group in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom to fight against U.S. and Coalition Forces until his death in June 2006.

In October 2006, AQI publicly renamed itself the Islamic State in Iraq. In 2013, it adopted the moniker ISIS to express its regional ambitions as it expanded operations to include the Syrian conflict. ISIS is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who declared an Islamic caliphate in June 2014. In October 2017, the U.S. military fighting with local Syrian allies announced the liberation of Raqqa, the self-declared capital of ISIS’s so-called “caliphate.” In December 2017, then Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announced the territorial defeat of ISIS in Iraq. In September 2018, the Syrian Democratic Forces, with support from the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS began a final push to oust ISIS fighters from the town of Hajin and its surrounding areas that constitute the last area under the group’s control in Syria.

Activities: As AQI, ISIS conducted numerous high-profile attacks, including IED attacks against U.S. military personnel and Iraqi infrastructure, videotaped beheadings of U.S. citizens, suicide bombings against both military and civilian targets, and rocket attacks. ISIS perpetrated these attacks using foreign and Iraqi operatives. In 2014, ISIS was responsible for most of the 12,000 Iraqi civilian deaths that year. ISIS is heavily involved in the fighting in Syria, and has participated in numerous kidnappings of civilians, including aid workers and journalists. In 2015 and 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for several large-scale attacks in Iraq and Syria. For example, in mid-May 2016, ISIS conducted a series of attacks in and around Baghdad, including suicide bombings and a car bombing at a crowded market in Sadr City that killed at least 88 people – most of them women and children. In July 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for a car bombing at a popular shopping center in Baghdad that killed nearly 300 people, making it the single deadliest bombing in Iraq’s capital city since 2003. In October, it was revealed that ISIS was using hundreds to thousands of Iraqi civilians as human shields when fighting Iraqi forces.

ISIS continued its attacks throughout 2017. In February, ISIS killed 48 people in a car bombing in Baghdad, and another four attacks around Baghdad killed an additional eight people on the same day. In early April, the group killed 33 Syrians in eastern Syria, and on the same day, killed another 22 people in Tikrit, Iraq, when ISIS gunmen opened fire on police and civilians before detonating explosives they were wearing. In June, ISIS gunmen and suicide bombers killed more than a dozen people in two separate attacks in Tehran, including an attack inside the Parliament building. In September, ISIS killed over 80 people at a checkpoint and restaurant in Nasiriyah, Iraq, an area frequented by Shia Muslims on pilgrimage. In November, a car bombing in a predominantly Shia area of Salah ad Din province killed at least 36 people, including 11 Iraqi Security Forces personnel.

Since at least 2015, the group has integrated local children and children of FTFs into its forces and used them as executioners and suicide attackers. ISIS has systematically prepared child soldiers in Iraq and Syria using its education and religious infrastructure as part of its training and recruitment of members. Further, since 2015, ISIS abducted, raped, and abused thousands of women and children, some as young as eight years old. Women and children were sold and enslaved, distributed to ISIS fighters as spoils of war, forced into marriage and domestic servitude, or subjected to physical and sexual abuse. For further information, refer to the *2018 Trafficking in Persons Report* (<https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2018/index.htm>).

ISIS also directs, enables, and inspires individuals to conduct attacks on behalf of the group around the world, including in the United States and Europe. In November 2015, ISIS carried out a series of coordinated attacks in Paris, France, including at a rock concert at the Bataclan concert hall, killing about 130 people and injuring more than 350 others; 23-year-old U.S. citizen Nohemi Gonzalez was among the dead. In March 2016, ISIS directed two simultaneous attacks in Brussels, Belgium – one at the Zaventem Airport and the other at a metro station. The attacks killed 32 people, including four U.S. citizens, and injured more than 250 people. In June 2016, a gunman who pledged allegiance to ISIS killed 49 individuals and injured 53 others at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. In July 2016, ISIS claimed an attack in which a terrorist driving a cargo

truck attacked a crowd in Nice, France, during Bastille Day celebrations, resulting in 86 deaths, including three U.S. citizens. In December 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for a truck attack on a crowded Christmas market in Berlin, Germany, that killed 12 people and injured 48 others.

In March 2017, ISIS claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack on London’s Westminster Bridge when a man drove his car into pedestrians and stabbed others, killing five people. In early April 2017, a man who claimed to be a member of ISIS drove a truck into a crowded shopping center in Stockholm, Sweden, killing five and injuring many more. In May 2017, ISIS claimed a suicide bombing in Manchester, England, that killed 22 people outside of a live concert.

In April 2018, ISIS claimed responsibility for targeting an Iraqi Turkman politician in the northern province of Kirkuk. In July 2018, ISIS attacked the city of Suweida and nearby towns and villages in southwestern Syria, conducting multiple suicide bombings and simultaneous raids in a brutal offensive, killing more than 200 people.

Strength: Estimates suggest ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria number between 14,000 and 18,000, including up to 3,000 FTFs. This number was likely reduced during 2018 military operations.

Location/Area of Operation: ISIS’s operations are predominately in Iraq and Syria, but the group has created external ISIS branches and networks around the world. In addition, supporters and associates worldwide inspired by the group’s ideology may be operating without direction from ISIS central leadership.

Funding and External Aid: ISIS received most of its funding from a variety of businesses and criminal activities within areas it controls in Iraq and Syria. Criminal activities included smuggling oil, looting and selling antiquities and other goods, as well as extortion, human trafficking, and kidnapping-for-ransom. ISIS continues to use “hawalas” – a system of couriers who maintain an informal international banking system that functions by word of mouth and is difficult to uncover and interdict – to transport money in support of ISIS operations. Before ISIS’s territorial defeat, targeted counterterrorism operations and airstrikes served to sever critical financial networks and reduce ISIS’s ability to exploit local resources such as oil. In 2018, the further reduction in ISIS’s control of territory significantly reduced ISIS’s ability to generate, hold, and transfer revenue. Despite this, ISIS continues to generate revenue from criminal activities and provides financial support to its network of global branches and affiliates.

ecoi.net summary:

Brief description of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Excerpt of chapter 5 of the country report on terrorism 2018)



Countries:

Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State </en/source/11558.html>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

1 November 2019

Document ID:

2019440

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

