



GLOBAL THREAT FORECAST

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Abstract:

Three significant developments will characterize the global threat landscape in 2017. First, it is likely that the so-called Islamic State (IS) will transform itself from a caliphate-building entity into a global terrorist movement in a similar manner as Al Qaeda (AQ). Second, the death of either the IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi or AQ leader Ayman al Zawahiri, may lead to collaboration or possible unification of the most powerful terrorist groups. IS, AQ and their associates will compensate for their losses in the physical space by expanding further into cyber space

Keywords: Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Global terrorism, Foreign Fighters, Cyber space

Título en Castellano: Un Pronóstico sobre el Terrorismo Global

Resumen:

La amenaza global en 2017 viene caracterizada por tres desarrollos significativos. El primero, es probable que el Estado Islámico(EI) se transforme de ser una entidad que constructora de un Callifato a un movimiento terrorista global, lo mismo que Al Qaeda (AQ). En segundo lugar, la muerte ya del líder del EI Abu Bakr al Baghdadi o el líder de AQ Ayman al Zawahiri puede conducir a la colaboración o a la posible unificación de los grupos terroristas más poderosos. EI y AQ y sus asociados compensarán sus pérdidas en el espacio físico expandiéndose en el ciberespacio.

Palabras clave: Estado Islámico, Al Qaeda, Terrorismo global, Luchadores extranjeros, Ciberespacio.

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1. Introduction

Three significant developments will characterize the global threat landscape in 2017. First, it is likely that the so-called Islamic State (IS) will transform from a caliphate-building entity into a global terrorist movement. In a manner similar to Al Qaeda (AQ) that had dispersed from its Afghanistan-Pakistan core in 2001-2002 to conflict zones worldwide, IS will refocus on consolidating the distant *wilayats* (provinces) to serve as bastions of its power. Second, the death of either the IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi or AQ leader Ayman al Zawahiri, may lead to collaboration or possible unification of the most powerful terrorist groups. In this regard, the discord between IS and AQ is a leadership dispute and not an ideological in nature. Third, IS, AQ and their associates will compensate for their losses in the physical space by expanding further into cyber space. Despite government and technology firms collaborating to monitor the cyber space, the battle-space of threat groups in the virtual communities will continue to operate and grow. The rise of far-right, ethno-nationalist, anti-Islamist populist movements, particularly in the US and Europe is a pertinent development. The response of governments and their societies to these movements within their countries and ethno-nationalist challenges in the Middle East and elsewhere will determine the threat levels in the future.

2. The Context

Insurgency, terrorism and extremism will continue to characterize the international security landscape in 2017. In the backdrop of intermittent threats and attacks, the new US leader Donald Trump is seeking to expand the coalition to include other partners to dismantle IS and AQ and decapitate their leaders². Trump's target-centric approach of eliminating the enemy and its infrastructure will replace Obama's population-centric approach of engaging and empowering communities whilst adopting militarized responses. In the scenario that Trump and Vladimir Putin collaborate, the threat groups will suffer further loss of territory and operational capabilities. However, the growing pool of supporters and sympathizers will replenish the losses allowing groups such as IS to fight back and recover.

IS will transform into an operation-based movement with the renewed global focus to destroy its infrastructure in Iraq and Syria, The goal of forming a caliphate will linger and live on in the cyber space and resonate among IS followers³. Some will hark back at its brief history and others will strive to recreate it. Contrary to popular opinion, IS will remain a threat as long as its ideology lives on in the cyber and physical space. IS will also continue to supplant AQ's influence operationally and ideologically. IS, AQ and their associated groups are likely to remain potent global actors in the domain of violence and extremism. The groups will frame the fight as a response to attacks against Islam and Muslims with their apocalyptic vision in mind.

3. Background

The genesis of IS can be traced to Afghanistan where the patronage of AQ enabled the formation and sustenance of a group of fighters from the classical Levant. After the US intervention in 2001 the group relocated to Iraq in 2002 and after the US invasion of Iraq in

² Gaouette, Nicole: "Obama has degraded ISIS. Can Trump finish the job?" *CNN News*. 15 December 2016.

³ Katz, Rita: "The complexity of eradicating Isis propaganda online", *International Business Times*, 13 December 2016



2003, the group eclipsed its mother ship, AQ. The influence of IS supplanted AQ and steadfastly grew among a segment of Muslims, diaspora communities and inspired converts after its declaration of a caliphate in June 2014⁴. IS violent ideology crystallised in the form of personalities, operational cells and facilitation networks willing to work with IS central through its control over of the cyber space. With a cautious Zawahiri in the background, IS managed to aggressively exploit the opportunity of co-opting AQ groups and their remnant networks that had been disrupted by authorities. With the IS spokesperson, Abu Mohamed al Adnani (now dead), calling for attacks since 2015, the threat steadily escalated⁵.

The broader coordinated strategy developed by IS from 2015 to 2016 was to direct and inspire its operatives and supporters to mount attacks worldwide. Handpicked foreign and local fighters with communication skills and commitment were trained and co-located in Syria and Iraq, to advocate and enable attacks in their homelands by providing technical and financial support. Presently, with the disruption of oil infrastructure controlled by IS in 2015 and the weakening of its financial infrastructure in Turkey in 2016, IS external operations wing is investing in other sources of revenue in its target countries⁶. Like AQ, IS also remains engaged in credit card, bank, and cheque fraud, bank robberies, and kidnapping for ransom or execution operations as sources of finance (CAT 2015).

During the last three years, IS Central trained between 50,000 to 60,000 local and foreign fighters with access to skills, networks and resources. Considering their relocation to their home countries in the global north and south, they present a real threat to national security. Although a third of these fighters have been killed, maimed or are disillusioned, the threat from indoctrinated operatives and supporters continues to grow. Here, in addition to IS operatives who travelled using legitimate travel routes, IS also dispatched a tiny percentage of operatives through refugee routes. A small percentage of combat-hardened fighters use forged, adapted and fraudulently-obtained genuine documents to travel home to conduct attacks.

As various IS-controlled towns and cities in Iraq and Syria come under attack over the last two years, IS is directing its operators and supporters to mount attacks worldwide. This is evident in the IS-directed or -inspired attacks in Paris, Brussels, Nice, Istanbul and elsewhere. In addition to its suicide attackers and storming units, IS encouraged immersing fighters deep into the enemy frontlines where the inghimasi fights until their death. IS also intends to replicate these battlefield capabilities in off-the-battlefield arenas indicating a shift in the theatre of operations from the deserts to the cities. Moreover, IS has also expressed interest in using biological agents, after experimenting with radiological devices and using chemical weapons in the battlefield⁷

The dispersal of thousands of ideologues, financiers, combat tacticians, operations managers, and explosives experts (with the knowledge to build large devices) will heighten this threat in the foreseeable future.

⁴ Bradley, Matt: "ISIS Declares New Islamist Caliphate", *Wall Street Journal*, 29 June 2014

⁵ Schmitt, Eric and Barnard, Anne.: "Senior ISIS Strategist and Spokesman Is Reported Killed in Syria", *New York Times*, 30 August 2016.

⁶ Hughes, Chris: "ISIS 'isolated and in decline' after losing territory and vital financial sources, report claims", *Mirror.co.uk*. 16 March, 2016.

⁷ Bloom, Dan: "ISIS are trying to buy chemical and biological weapons warns David Cameron's Defence Review", *Mirror.co.uk.*, 23 November 2015.



4. Decentralizaion of Threat

IS will compensate for the loss of territory by expanding horizontally and strengthening its existing wilayats (provinces) while declaring new ones. The wilayats are considered the "Pillars of the Caliphate" by the self-declared caliph Baghdadi and he referred to Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Yemen, the Philippines, Somalia and West Africa as some of the wilayats in November 2016.⁸ The distant wilayats will serve as bastions of IS power and future launching pads to attack enemies. However, the regional wilayats in Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan support the neighbouring IS structures. The shifting focus of IS towards its wilayats became evident when Baghdadi urged supporters of the caliphate to migrate to Libya instead of traveling to Iraq and Syria.⁹ However, the group has now been defeated and ousted from Sirte in Libya as well.¹⁰ In a further demonstration of the emerging decentralized threat, his message was preceded by his associates urging supporters of the caliphate to migrate to IS wilayats and enclaves. For Southeast Asian fighters, the regional hub is in Mindanao in southern Philippines¹¹ The global pool of foreign fighters with expertise and experience are likely to gravitate to wilayats, home countries and other countries with familial links. In addition to the persistent IS threat in Muslim minority and majority countries, the dispersal of the IS core will threaten coalitions fighting IS. Directly and through proxies, IS will target coalition equities in the Iraqi and Syrian theatre and other countries.

In 2015 to 2016, multiple coalitions targeting IS contributed to the group's loss of territory. As such, with Russian airstrikes, Syrian ground forces took Palmyra in March 2016 and US-supported Kurdish and Arab groups attacked Raqqa, the de facto capital of IS in November 2016.¹² US-supported Iraqi and Kurdish forces attacked Mosul in October 2016. Both Raqqa and Mosul were used by the external operations wing of IS to plan, prepare and execute attacks. Contrary to assessments by some, IS will survive as long as the civil war persist in Syria and will remain a relevant threat to the west and other countries confronting IS. In his speech in November 2016, Baghdadi called for "attack after attack" in Saudi Arabia; he also urged his fighters and supporters to "unleash the fire of their anger" towards Turkey¹³. The bomb blast and suicide bombing outside a soccer stadium in December 2016 in Istanbul that killed 29 and injured 166 is a forecast of what IS will unleash in Istanbul and elsewhere. The overall threat landscape is unlikely to change as the ground situation in Syria will not alter dramatically in the short term.

5. IS Strategy

It is evident that the IS threat grew with coalition intervention beyond Iraq and Syria in 2015. However, it is imperative that one of the first important attacks abroad was in May 2014,

⁸ Rahmani, Bardia and Tanco, Andrea: "ISIS's Growing Caliphate: Profiles of Affiliate", *Wilson Center*, 19 February, 2016.

⁹ Walsh, Nick P.: "ISIS on Europe's doorstep: How terror is infiltrating the migrant route", *CNN News*, 26 May 2016.

¹⁰ Wintour, Patrick: "ISIS loses control of Libyan city of Sirte", *The Guardian*, 6 December 2016.

¹¹ Liljas, Per: "ISIS Is Making Inroads in the Southern Philippines and the Implications for Asia Are Alarming", *Time*, 14 April 2016.

¹² Korybko, Andrew: "The Implications of the ISIS-Daesh Palmyra Offensive", *Centre for Research on Globalization (Oriental Review)*, 12 December 2016.

¹³ "ISIS leader says confident of victory in Mosul in first message after start of US-backed operation", *The Straits Times*, 3 November 2016.



when a French national of Algerian heritage Mehdi Nemmouche, 29, killed four at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels on 24 May 2014 was the first IS operative to strike Europe.¹⁴

The battlefield is expanding to the West with the low cost high impact attacks in countries such as Canada, US, France, Belgium, Germany and Denmark. Moreover, the shift from “Dabiq” to “Rumiyah” (Rome), visually appealing magazines, for consumption by supporters, demonstrates the evolving IS strategy¹⁵. The content within these magazines urges attackers trained both in the heartland and target countries to strike. The world is at an early stage of those who travelled and developed relations with IS central directing or facilitating attacks in their homelands and in third countries. Through their propaganda, AQ and IS legitimized inflicting mass fatality and mass casualty attacks at general gatherings. The Belgian citizen of Moroccan heritage, Oussama Ahmad Atar, masterminded the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the Brussels attacks in March 2016 killing 162 people¹⁶. While Atar directed the attack from Syria, both Europeans and Iraqis trained in Syria participated in the attack.

In addition, while battlefield targets are both hard and soft, off-the-battlefield attacks are mostly soft targets. It is apparent based on the target selection in successful, aborted and disrupted attacks, that the future likely targets are bars, clubs, restaurants, hotels, malls, sports stadiums, schools, places of religious worship, hospitals, and transport hubs. This category of soft targets permit easy access and are too vast and numerous to protect. As such, IS will stage attacks and glamorise their horrific acts to threaten their enemies and deter the international community against continued intervention. The twin threats are from the motivated and trained returnees and from those radicalised online especially those who were prevented from traveling or were otherwise unable to do so. In one case, the Canadian citizen of Bangladeshi heritage, Tamim Chowdhury, travelled to Syria and masterminded the Dhaka attack that was conducted in July 2016, killing 22¹⁷. Tamim, the IS Bangladesh leader, also recruited Major Syed Mohammad Ziaul Haque as a trainer for local Bangladeshis to stage the attack. In order to engage the returnees who are radicalized at home or in Iraq and Syria, governments lacked the legal frameworks, comprehensive programs and targeted interventions for custodial and community rehabilitation and reintegration. While half of the fighters are likely to return home, those wanted by the authorities are likely to relocate to third countries. At the same time, it is possible that the returnees are unlikely to engage in violence, unless they are hailed as heroes and re-recruited as mentors by the next generation.

Most IS-directed complex attacks will take place in conflict zones. IS will stage attacks off the battlefield when the group is strong numerically and possesses access to weaponry. Due to the challenges of transporting fighters from theatre to target location, most IS-inspired attacks beyond the conflict zones use basic weapons. In one such case in August 2015, high speed train from Amsterdam to Paris carrying 554 passengers was attacked by Ayoub Khazzani armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, 270 rounds of ammunition, a Luger

¹⁴ Rawlinson, Kevin: “Jewish museum shooting suspect ‘is Islamic State torturer’”. *The Guardian*. 6 September 2014.

¹⁵ McKernan, Bethan: “ISIS’ new magazine Rumiyah shows the terror group is ‘struggling to adjust to losses’”. *Independent*. 6 September 2016.

¹⁶ Samuel, Henry: “Paris and Brussels terror attacks were coordinated by Syria-based jihadist called Oussama Atar, French and Belgian intelligence believe”, *The Telegraph*. 8 November 2016.

¹⁷ Dearden, Lizzie: “ISIS Bangladesh attack ‘mastermind’ identified as former student from Canada killed in police raid”, *Independent*, 27 August 2016.



pistol, a bottle of petrol, a box-cutter and a hammer¹⁸. Passengers disrupted the attack preventing a large-scale impact and casualties. In addition, in the case of Paris, IS dispatched trained attackers and strike teams from its heartland of Iraq and Syria to target countries that are a part of the coalition. In countries where access to weapons is relatively easy, such as US and continental Europe, terrorists including ‘lone wolves’ will use both firearms and commercial and homemade explosives to conduct attacks.

6. The Future

Worldwide IS operatives and supporters possess the intent and capability to mount attacks. In the future, it is likely that these threat groups will recruit serving security forces personnel, private security guards, airport personnel and others who have either access to target and weapons storage facilities. As such, IS will conduct both large-scale complex and basic attacks in 2017. However, in the past IS has conducted complex attacks in the battlefield and basic weapon attacks off-the-battlefield where access to weapons is difficult. The use of motor vehicles, knives, poison and items for conducting basic attacks has been practiced by AQ in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and IS. These attacks will continue to gain momentum and will remain an effective tactic. IS has attempted to conduct at least a dozen attacks or attempts to run down pedestrians since 2013 after AQAP introduced the tactic in its English language magazine “Inspire” in October 2010. After the July 2016 attack in Promenade des Anglais in Nice that killed 87 and injured 434 others an article in “Inspire 2” titled “The Ultimate Mowing Machine” discussed the idea of attaching a camouflaged wide sharp blade to the front of the vehicle to increase deaths and injuries¹⁹.

With the international coalitions stepping up operations against IS in Iraq and Syria and in its backup bases in Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan-Pakistan and elsewhere, IS operational focus will continue to shift. Instead of inviting men, women and children to its heartland in Iraq and Syria, IS will urge its operatives and supporters to attack coalition countries including security forces personnel and government leaders in their home countries. IS will direct its supporters to target Shia and non-Muslim symbols and communities in order to disrupt harmonious relations between communities. In addition, other prominent IS religious targets include Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs and their places of worship along with religious gatherings.

Moreover, it is possible that IS and AQ may infiltrate peaceful rallies, demonstrations and protests to conduct violence, as demonstrated during the Arab Springs in the past. In order to instill a culture of hatred between the state and the Muslim communities, terrorists will narrow in on special religious events on landmark dates as likely targets. This remains a possibility because IS will continue to seek global media attention, as it did with attacks such as in the one in Nice when an attacker careened two kilometres through a crowd gathered to celebrate the French National Day in July 2016. Similarly, IS declared a “Ramadan jihad”²⁰ in 2016 precipitating 17 attacks in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Bangladesh, Israel, Iraq, US, France, Egypt, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Turkey and Indonesia. Thus, IS will also step up attacks during the religious month of Ramadan in the upcoming year as well.

¹⁸ McGuinness, Romina: “Paris train terror suspect Ayoub El Khazzani to speak at hearing after months of silence”, *Express.co.uk*, 14 December 2016.

¹⁹ Richter, Greg: “Jihadist Magazine Called For Using Trucks to Kill in 2010”, *News Max*. 14 July 2016.

²⁰ “ISIS warns: More attacks to come; Dhaka only the start”, *The Straits Times*, 7 July 2016.



In countries where the security apparatus and infrastructure is weak, both IS, AQ and their associates will compete to strike attractive targets. A few of such attacks conducted in the past include the downing of the Russian Metrojet originating from Egypt in October 2015, which killed 217 passengers and seven crew members. In addition, an Al Shabab suicide bomber, Abdullahi Abdisalam Borle, exploded an IED laden laptop on Daallo Airlines flight DL3159 from Mogadishu to Djibouti in February 2016, piercing the fuselage, killing himself and injuring two others. Although there is no operational cooperation between IS and Al Shabab, there is considerable exchange of ideas and competition between both, due to the latter's links with AQ²¹. For instance both IS and Al Shabab competed to attack targets in East Africa. Al Shabab also attacked the Beach View Cafe in Mogadishu on January 2016. In April 2016, IS detonated a car bomb targeting forces belonging to the African Union peacekeepers on the outskirts of the capital Mogadishu.

7. State and Societal Responses

As an active and strong insurgent and a terrorist group, IS managed to change the global threat landscape dramatically. However, like other threat groups, IS is not invincible. IS support can be isolated by containing its membership and eliminating the core with the right resources, coordinated and collaborative action, and innovative leadership. As such, it is crucial to forge and sustain a partnership between the government, private sector and community to prevent attacks, protect targets and pursue terrorists. If the European experience is observed, it is evident that only half of the IS attacks could be disrupted. This is testimony to the fact that governments should work with partners to anticipate likely attack scenarios and develop contingency and crisis management plans in the event of a successful attack. Other lessons learned in this case, include the necessity of increased security and police visibility preventing attacks.

In the battlefield, international coalitions in Syria and Iraq should raise national capabilities - both general purpose forces and special operations forces - to fight back. Coalition forces should continue to target high profile leaders, prolific advocates, facilitators and directing figures of attacks worldwide using drones and airstrikes. The kinetic or militarized phase should be followed by a stabilization phase and post-conflict peace building phase where areas recovered from insurgent and terrorist control should be stabilized to achieve an extent of normalcy.

The terrorists conducting attacks make use of communications security, both private messaging and encrypted computer applications. As such, due to the use of end-to-end encryption and the limited coverage of threat groups in planning attacks, only some of the attacks will be disrupted. Governments should simulate attack scenarios and conduct exercises to prepare both emergency services and public. It is pertinent that the attacks are developing in terms of their complexity and the response strategies of most governments are not in sync with the IS attack methodology. IS focuses on the following strategies in conducting attacks:

- (a) herd the victims and achieve mass casualties;
- (b) take the remaining hostages, prolong response and gain maximum publicity;

²¹ Laing, Aislinn: "How al-Qaeda and Islamic State are competing for al-Shabaab in Somalia", *The Telegraph*, 12 January 2016.



(c) invite the security forces for a showdown where the attacker(s) fight to death with the belief of "attaining martyrdom".

In certain situations counter terrorism tactical teams are unable to reach the target zone fast enough to stop the attack during the herding phase. In order to facilitate quick reaction response, the main intervention units should rise from within local police units and first responders. Through decentralization of the response, the probability of disrupting an attack increases. As such, the attacks in Bataclan, Dhaka, and Orlando offer a template for future targets and possible responses. In June 2016, Omar Mateen attacked the Pulse Nightclub and killed 50 and injured 53 others in Orlando, Florida. US did not take into account the incident in Paris as a warning. The US intervention units claimed that the American Muslims were better integrated, threat was low, and did not prepare for a Bataclan-type scenario. In addition, before the advent of IS, the early examples of no surrender attacks are Mumbai (2002) and Westgate Mall in Kenya (2013).

In light of the reduced flow of foreign fighters to the heartland, the timing is right for governments and their community partners to develop strategic capabilities in rehabilitation and community engagement. In this case, the approaches of rehabilitation are religious, educational, vocational, social and family, creative arts, recreational, and psychological. Engagement strategies to build relationships and integrate individuals over ideology and psychotherapy are powerful tools in transforming IS fighters. Moreover, in designing strategies to reduce and manage the foreign fighter threat, governments and partners should also consider the threat posed by both IS and non-IS fighters. In addition to rehabilitating those surrendered and captives of Jabhat Fateh Al Sham (JFS, previously Al Nusra; the AQ branch in Syria), governments should create platforms to engage Iran's militias, Shia fighters, and Hezbollah along with Sunni opposition groups. The Shia fighters are estimated to be in the thousands and the potential threat of Shias has to be managed carefully²². JFS poses a long-term threat, along with other ideologically indoctrinated and battle hardened groups that should not be underestimated.

Rehabilitating and reintegrating fighters and supporters should be a priority. However, in parallel, there should be a robust community engagement strategy to counter extremism and promote moderation. In order to prevent radicalisation, governments and their partners should focus on the physical and cyber space as well. The online and offline community engagement initiatives should address extremism both within and outside the Muslim community. This should also include right wing and anti-Islamic groups, which is on the rise. The emergence of right-wing anti-Islamist populist movements coupled with hate crimes and Islamophobia will only worsen the situation and play into the hands of IS and AQ. These groups want to see inter-communal discord and mayhem, which permits them to gain new recruits. In this regard, such over-reactions will justify IS war narrative against the West and non-Muslims. Particularly, there is need to temper and rein in the animus in more constructive efforts such as inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogues, peace movements and goodwill groups .

The complex and fluid threat environment is strengthened by the growth of IS virtual communities collaborating across regions sharing information. Like AQ, IS too misinterpreted and misrepresented Islam to advance a political project. It is imperative to highlight that both these groups killed, maimed and injured more Muslims than any other government. In addition to influencing the human terrain, engaging the media, the education and religious

²² Nader, Zahra: "Iran covertly recruits Afghan Shias to fight in Syria", *The Guardian*, 30 June 2016.



sectors are vital. For instance, the immense suffering of Muslims both in the battlefield and in off the battlefield attacks has not been adequately portrayed. The media was unable to shed adequate light on the fact that the third of those killed by Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel were Muslims. Overall, to manage the IS threat, the response should be multi-pronged, multi-agency, multi-dimensional and multi-national.

8. Conclusion

With IS struggling to survive in its heartland, a heightened security environment will prevail throughout 2017. In August 2016, according to the Pentagon, the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq and Syria diminished from 2000 to 200 in early 2015. Similarly, West Point's Combating Terrorism Centre reported that IS official online postings dropping from 700 in August 2015 to 200 a year later. As such, through sustained military action, IS operational threat is likely to diminish in the short-term (1-2 years) and ideological threat will possibly reduce in mid-term (5 years).

The greatest impact of IS is the damage it inflicted to communal harmony - Muslim-non-Muslim relations. As was evident following the Paris and Charlie Hebdo attacks, the relationship between the French Muslims and non-Muslims suffered. In the long term (10 years), governments working with community organizations will be able to reduce the suspicion, prejudice, anger and hatred precipitated by IS. However, in the meantime visionary and steadfast counter insurgency and terrorism leadership is essential to fight and defeat IS.

In the coming year, IS, AQ and their associates will gravitate to permissive environments and flourish. In the case of IS, the core is the strongest followed by its associates or wilayats worldwide. The wilayats are situated from West Africa to North Africa and East Africa, throughout the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, and in parts of Asia. In the case of AQ, its associates in Syria (JFS), Yemen (AQAP), Sahel (AQIM) and Somalia (al Shabab) are significant. As such, there is a resurgence of threat from AQ and their associated groups. With governments worldwide planning to step up their campaign against terrorism, the probability that both IS and AQ will work together is high. The dispute between AQ and IS is a leadership conflict and not an ideological conflict. If Ayman al Zawahiri dies or is killed, AQ and its associates - at least some of them - are likely to unite with IS.

As the reach of IS is global, the potential for IS and AQ to remain dormant in one region and re-emerge in another is likely. In addition, the capacity of IS to replicate through re-organization and re-recruitment is high. Unlike AQ and their associates that recruited discretely, IS recruited both openly and covertly. Moreover, unlike AQ, IS has developed expertise of social media and can reach out to millions generating thousands of supporters and sympathisers. The reliable and fledgling support networks enhance the endurance and sustenance of IS. Although IS presents the most dominant threat, the threat by AQ should not be neglected. Presenting a graver long term threat, AQ demonstrated patience and persistence and is likely to avoid open conflict with IS. However, while on the run, making use of their communications platforms IS, AQ and their associates will provide ideological inspiration and practical guidance to supporters to mount attacks.

Overall, the terrorist threat will endure in the year ahead despite progress on the military front, greater cooperation and collaboration among countries, and counter-ideology efforts. Raising and expanding specialist counter-insurgency (COIN), counter-terrorism (CT)



and counter violent extremism (CVE) capabilities are central to defeat IS. The international community should be prepared should IS take on new forms as it did from 2004 (AQI) to 2014 (IS) or turn present wilayats and enclaves into new 'Iraqs', 'Syrias' and 'Libyas'. Lastly, at the heart of winning the fight against IS is enlightened political leadership willing to work in partnership with countries that have majority Muslim populations and global political will to fight this threat.

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