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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE



NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL

May 2020

NIE 2020-02

[REDACTED] ISIS Core Rebuilding, Poised To Grow Globally Through 2021

(U) *This National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for Transnational Threats. It was drafted by the National Intelligence Council* [REDACTED]

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(U) Key Takeaway

██████████ ISIS has regrouped since its territorial defeat in Iraq and Syria, and it is organizing for a prolonged insurgency while rebuilding many key capabilities that are likely to expand its global reach and the threat it poses to US and Western interests through 2021. ISIS almost certainly will continue to inspire attacks globally, albeit at a reduced pace from 2016-17; inspired attacks very likely will remain the primary ISIS threat to the US homeland. If the United States and our partners pull back or withdraw further from areas where ISIS is active, the group's trajectory will increasingly depend on local governments' will and capability to fill the resulting security voids. Local governments and international partners will face challenges sustaining pressure against ISIS because of competing priorities and resource constraints—including for COVID-19 response—as well as waning public support for a long-term fight against a less visible enemy postcaliphate. Efforts to address the underlying governance and social issues that provide ISIS with operating space continue to lag.

██████████ **Key Judgment 1: ISIS is rebuilding many key capabilities in Iraq and Syria, which probably will allow it to increasingly threaten US interests through 2021.** ISIS probably will expand its operating space in Iraq and Syria during the period of this Estimate, but the group is unlikely to openly control or govern territory.

██████████ **Key Judgment 2: ISIS's global branches and networks ██████████** ██████████ are likely to increase the group's capability to conduct attacks in many regions of the world, including the West. Inspired attacks by ISIS supporters very likely will remain the primary ISIS threat to the US homeland, rather than plots directed or operationally supported by ISIS.

██████████ **Key Judgment 3: ISIS's ideology very likely will endure, but it will appeal to a narrower audience because of the group's territorial losses and degraded multilingual media capabilities, bolstered by enhanced government and private-sector efforts to limit access to online pro-ISIS content.** ISIS will continue to inspire attacks, but the group's weakened ability to attract recruits and supporters is a strategic vulnerability.

██████████ **Key Judgment 4: The level of counterterrorism (CT) and counterinsurgency pressure applied by local actors and international partners—particularly if the US and Western partners' role diminishes—as well as local governments' effectiveness in dealing with vulnerable Sunni populations, almost certainly will shape the scale of ISIS's resurgence in Iraq and Syria and its expansion worldwide.** The functional governance and political will necessary to confront ISIS very likely will remain fragile or nonexistent in key areas where ISIS is poised for growth through 2021.

ISIS Key Measures of Strength: Past, Present, and Projected

ISIS's strength has varied over time and across key functional areas. The scores below reflect ISIS's assessed strength in each functional area relative to previous periods in its history. The group's strength across most categories peaked in 2014-15 when it acquired many state-like capabilities. As of early 2020, ISIS had rebounded in several areas relative to its low point marked by the loss of the physical caliphate in

Iraq and Syria in late 2018 and early 2019. Even at its low point, however, ISIS's capabilities exceeded those of most of its Sunni jihadist contemporaries as well as al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) at its peak in 2006-07. The categories below are not mutually exclusive; leadership and command and control, for example, affect all elements of the organization.

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(U) This table is

	2006-07 ^a	2009-11	2014-15	2018	2020	2021
	AQI		ISIS			
	Peak	Nadir	Peak	Nadir	Present	Projected
Leadership and Command and Control						
Insurgency in Iraq and Syria						
External Operations						
ISIS Threat Inside United States ^b	N/A	N/A				
Global Enterprise ^c	N/A	N/A				
Appeal of Ideology/ Media and Messaging ^d						

a. Scores for 2006-07 and 2009-11 are for ISIS's predecessor group, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI).

b. Includes the threat of ISIS directed, enabled, and inspired attacks. Inspired attacks very likely will remain the primary ISIS threat to the US homeland.

c. ISIS's global enterprise encompasses its branches and networks

outside of Iraq and Syria. We assess that the overall strength of the global enterprise has been relatively consistent during the past several years, with the continued expansion of new branches and networks offsetting losses in countries such as Algeria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia.

d. Appeal to ISIS's intended audience of core supporters and the broader Muslim community.