

# ISIS

## Party Portrait

ISIS is a violent extremist organization that has claimed statehood by capturing large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria. A successor to al-Qaeda in Iraq and proclaiming itself a caliphate, it catapulted onto the global stage with military victories in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, the group has been characterized by its particular brutality, and the pledges of allegiance it has received from jihadist groups across the world, from Nigeria to the Philippines. Battles against Iraqi, US, Syrian, Russian and Turkish forces, among others, continue across Iraq and Syria.

### Key Interests

- Uphold the caliphate, and continuing to spread across the Middle East and Africa through allegiances with other jihadist groups;
- Conquer, maintain, and regain territory, particularly throughout Syria and Iraq; and
- Destabilize states across the MENA region and the West through terror attacks and the establishment of franchises.

### Sources of Leverage

**Military** – By building on the lessons al-Qaeda learned during the Iraqi insurgency and building a sophisticated military campaign.

**Financial** – Their revenue comes from cash looted from major cities, oil and gas black markets, kidnapping and ransoms, taxes within their territory, and an unspecified amount of donations.

**Manpower** - ISIS can be broken up into key groups: (i) its leadership; (ii) foreign fighters; (iii) Syrian and Iraqi fighters; and (iv) populations under its control.

**Intelligence** - Drawing on former Ba’athist leaders’ experience in Saddam Hussein’s military and intelligence agencies, ISIS’ success is rooted in its ability to quell internal dissent and coerce local leaders to put up minimal resistance.

**Propaganda** - Invoke messages of brutality, mercy, victimhood, and belonging through professional-quality propaganda efforts.

## Regional Strategy

Focus on territorial conquest using foreign fighters in Syria and Sunni tribesmen in Iraq; utilize suicide and car bombings to destabilize regional enemies; leverage its extensive recruitment networks across Europe, North Africa, and Asia to bring in additional foreign fighters; and inspire both cells of trained attackers and lone wolf attacks to terrorize states across the West and the Middle East and North Africa.

### Powerful Individuals

“Caliph Ibrahim” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi continues to provide the strategic leadership of ISIS; many of their military commanders in Syria and Iraq are former Ba’athist officials; though deceased, Hajji Bakr was key in building the intelligence apparatus and managing the alliance between Ba’athists and violent extremist elements; though deceased, Abu al-Amri managed brigades of foreign fighters and developed their online presence as a Syrian fighter

### Potential Negotiation Moves

**Negotiate with Assad** - Continue side negotiations with the Assad regime – or elements close to the regime – to exchange oil and natural gas for electricity, or with regards to ransoms.

**Economic/Political Negotiations** - Though ISIS has demonstrated a limited willingness to negotiate for its economic interests (i.e. with regards to oil), it has to date shown no instance of making any political concessions through negotiation.

### Internal Conflicts

ISIS is a factionalized alliance between violent extremists, former Ba’athist military and intelligence officials of Saddam Hussein’s regime, Sunni Iraqi tribal leaders, local Syrian and Iraqi fighters, and foreign fighters. Overall, ISIS’ previous grouping of fighters by country or language of origin has strengthened rivalries between the different factions, and as they have lost territory, disputes over the allocation of resources and goals have emerged.

### Memberships

ISIS does not recognize any authority besides its own. Therefore, it does not participate in established governance mechanisms or organizations, nor does it adhere to international resolutions or norms.

### Allies

The Islamic State in Libya, The Islamic State in Sinai (formerly Ansar Bait al-Maqdis), Boko Haram, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Abu Sayyaf

### Partners

N/A

### Rivals

Al-Qaeda, SYRIA Jebhat Fatah al-Sham

### Adversaries

N/A

### Active Armed Opponents

SYRIA Government, SYRIA Ahrar al-Sham, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, KURDS OF IRAQ, TURKEY, USA, RUSSIA, International Coalition against the Islamic State,

### Proxy

ISIS presumably receive funding from donors, some of which may be in the Gulf.

### External Sponsor

N/A

### Aid Recipient

N/A

### Aid Donor

N/A