

A Globally Integrated Islamic State

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Articles & Testimony

Tracking and accurately assessing the shifts in the group’s activities and command structure over the past five years is crucial to containing the evolved threat.

The Islamic State looks different than it did five years ago and is far more integrated now as an organization amongst its global network than al-Qaeda ever was. However, with the group back in the news due to an increasing external operations capacity (with attacks in Iran, Turkey, and Russia this year as well as **numerous broken up plots (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/islamicstateinteractivemap/#home>)** in Europe), there is a fundamental misunderstanding of how it operates today. In many ways, it is incorrectly viewed through the lens of how al-Qaeda operates (a decentralized branch network), or how the Islamic State itself operated during its prior zenith. These changes are crucial for policymakers to understand because the way the threat presents itself today will look different from how policymakers dealt with it last decade when much of the focus was on the group’s territorial control in Iraq and Syria. The most important body for understanding the Islamic State today is its General Directorate of Provinces. This body has previously been based in Syria, but new information suggests that at least at the highest levels, it might now have centrality in Somalia...

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