

The Return of ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East

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The U.S., its European allies, and its Strategic Partners in the Middle East achieved a significant victory in breaking up the ISIS protostate – or “caliphate” – in Syria and Iraq. This break up has sharply reduced the fighting against ISIS in Iraq, and in Eastern Syria.

The U.S.-led Coalition did not, however, fully defeat ISIS in either Iraq or Syria or eliminate ISIS and other forms of extremism as serious threats. It did not bring lasting stability to Iraq or end the Syrian civil war, and it did not eliminate the threat from ISIS and other extremist groups in the rest of the MENA area.

This analysis covers two important aspects of the crisis in Iraq and Syria since the break of the “caliphate.” First, it summarizes key official reporting on the resurgence of ISIS as a serious threat in both Syria and Iraq. Second, it puts ISIS in perspective – showing that it did not dominate the violence and levels of terrorism in Syria even at its peak, and noting that ISIS is only one of the major threats to stability in Iraq.

The Resurgence of ISIS

Recent Department of Defense and UN reporting has shown that ISIS has reorganized and recovered to a significant degree in both Iraq and Syria since the final battles against its “caliphate” as well as continued its operations in other countries. Other reporting by Rand indicates that ISIS faces serious financial constraints but is still able to fund significant operations.

Data compiled by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an NGO that collects, analyzes, and maps conflicts around the world, shows that the defeat of ISIS in these battles did sharply reduce the level of violence ISIS has caused in Iraq and Syria since the breakup of the “caliphate.”

The graphs in **Figure One** show the trends in two sub-categories that ACLED classifies as “violence against civilians”—*attacks* and *fatalities*. In both cases, ISIS is not attacking nor killing at the rate it did before the defeat of its “Caliphate.”

These data do not mean, however, that ISIS has been defeated in Iraq and Syria, or that its influence has not expanded outside both states. It is also important to note that while ACLED tries to be conservative in its estimates of fatalities, it advises caution in using all fatality numbers as they are often the most biased and least accurate elements of conflict reports.

More broadly, the decline in the level of ISIS-caused violence does not mean that the U.S.-led counter-terrorism coalition has reduced the overall threat of extremism, or brought unity and stability to Iraq, Syria, or any of the other states affected by ISIS and other extremist movements.

Defeating the ISIS “Caliphate” has treated a key symptom of terrorism and extremism but has not addressed most of its major causes. Reporting by the World Bank, IMF, CIA, and UN indicate that the political, governance, economic, and broader security problems that breed and sustain extremism have grown worse in Iraq, Syria, and other states since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab upheavals began in 2011.

Media reporting makes ISIS's resurgence all too clear on a day-to-day basis. More importantly, two key official sources provide additional data that highlight the continuing risks that ISIS poses. Both sources have exceptional access to the official and intelligence data on this reemerging threat and provide a clear picture of the ways in which ISIS is reorganizing its terrorist activities that take advantage of declassified intelligence and access to official sources.

- One is the *Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve | Quarterly Report to the United States Congress | April 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019* (https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/06/2002167167/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019_LEADIG_OIR_REPORT.PDF)
- The other is the *Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team*, which the UN issued on July 15, 2019. (S/2019/570). (<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/monitoring-team/reports>)

Another source, which relies primarily on open-source information, has gathered extensive data which argues that ISIS still possesses the means to gather its resources and reestablish itself as a consolidated actor. This source is a RAND Report, entitled "Return and Expand? The Finances and Prospects of the Islamic State After the Caliphate", issued August 8, 2019. (https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3046.html)

All three sources deserve special attention and reinforce media and outside expert warnings of the seriousness of the continuing threat. The excerpts from each report that follow, and that focus on the threat in Syria and Iraq, clearly show that ISIS is remerging as both a direct threat under its own name and as part of a broader extremism effort. It should be noted, however, that the UN report also covers the global efforts of ISIS/ISIL, and the measures that UN countries are taking to counter these threats.

In addition, work by Dr. Abdullah Toukan has developed more detailed assessments of the patterns in violence revealed in ACLED database using a new computer model he has developed called the SIRA Model. These assessments show the levels of attack and fatalities in Syria and Iraq, and map their location, during the peak periods of fighting that broke up the "Caliphate." They then show the levels of attacks and casualties in the first half of 2019, and the extent to which ISIS has recovered its capability to pose a threat in both countries.

These data also show that any effort to bring security and stability to Syria, Iraq, and the region must look far beyond a single movement like ISIS. Syria is a classic case example Not only did many other non-state actors shape the patterns of violence in the Syrian civil war, the ACLED data show that the primary source of terrorism was state terrorism by the Assad regime, not terrorism by ISIS.

It is also important to note that a wide range of reporting by the UN's Regional Bureau for Arab States, the World Bank and IMF — and other sources — show that the material causes of extremism have gotten substantially worse in Syria, Iraq, and many other MENA countries since 2001— and particularly since 2011. Governance, corruption, weak economic development, critical employment problems, and major economic, ethnic, and sectarian inequities all remain key forces that can create and sustain extremist movements and internal conflict. So far, the situations in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and other similar cases, all continue to deteriorate.

The Burke Chair at CSIS has prepared a summary of the key excerpts from the LIG and UN reports, and of the ACLED data with the help of Dr. Toukan. It is entitled **The Return of ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East**, and is available on the CSIS web site under the Burke Chair program.

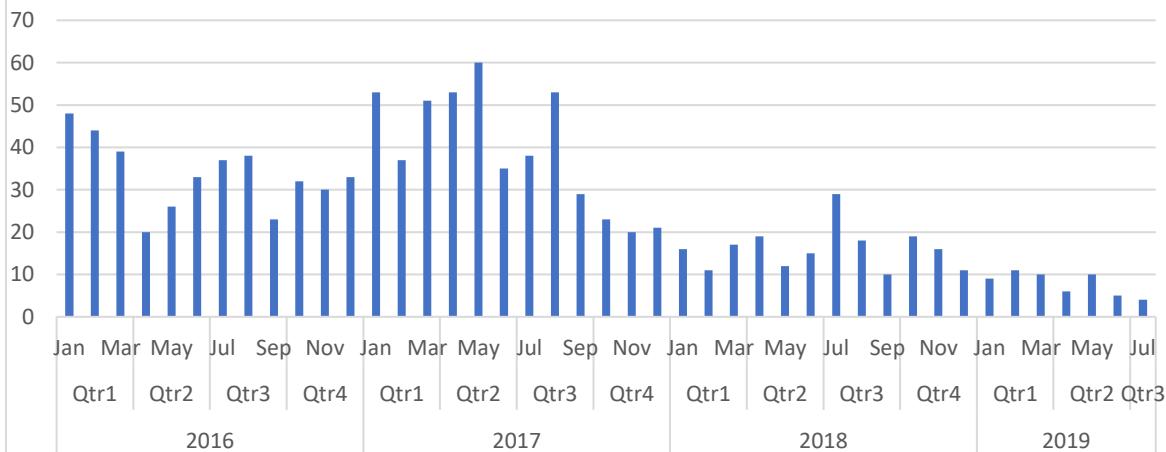
Table of Contents

THE RESURGENCE OF ISIS.....	1
<i>Figure One: ACLED Estimates of ISIS-Caused Violence Towards Civilians in Iraq and Syria</i>	5
I. ISIS/ISIL STRATEGY	6
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	6
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	7
II. ISIS/ISIL' TACTICS.....	8
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	8
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	9
RAND REPORT	9
<i>Figure Two: ISIS Operating Areas as of April 16, 2019.....</i>	10
III. ISIS/ISIL CROP BURNING	10
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	10
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	11
IV. ISIS/ISIL FORCE STRENGTH, ORGANIZATION, AND LEADERSHIP.....	11
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	11
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	12
RAND REPORT	12
V. ISIS/ISIL RECRUITMENT EFFORTS	13
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	13
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	13
RAND REPORT	13
VI. ISIS/ISIL FINANCING AND REVENUE GENERATION	14
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	14
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	14
RAND REPORT	16
VII. COUNTERTERRORISM PARTNER FORCES.....	18
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	18
UN: NINTH REPORT FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL	19
RAND REPORT	19
VIII. FIGHTER DETAINMENT, REPATRIATION, AND SENTENCES.....	20
LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL: LIG	20
UN: TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE ISIL & AL-QAIDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MONITORING TEAM.....	21
RAND REPORT	22
<i>Figure Three: ISIS Fighters Move Out of the MERV</i>	23

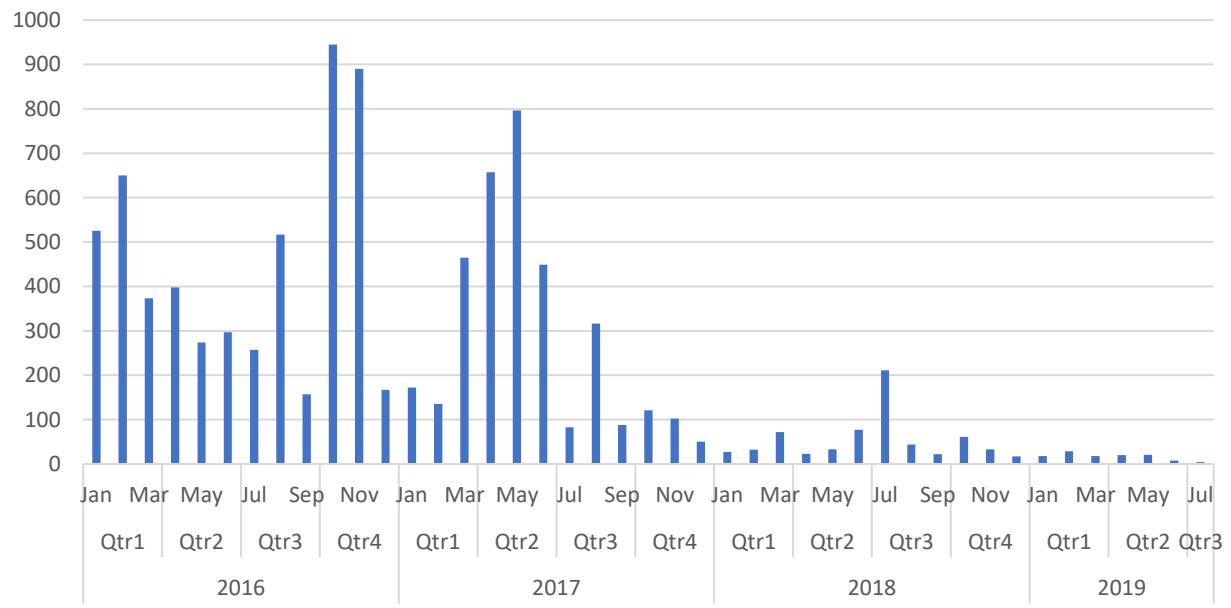
IX. MAPPING THE TRENDS IN VIOLENCE USING THE ARMED CONFLICT LOCATION & EVENT DATA PROJECT (ACLED).....	23
FIGURE FOUR: THE GLOBAL PATTERNS IN ISIS ACTIVITY IN 2019.....	24
<i>Figure Four: Countries ACLED Reports as Having Islamic State Terrorist Attacks in 2019, up to July 27.</i>	25
FIGURE FIVE: THE ROLE OF ISIS IN SYRIAN VIOLENCE: 2017-2019.....	26
<i>Figure 5 — Part One: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2017.</i>	28
<i>Figure 5 — Part Two: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2018.</i>	30
<i>Figure 5 — Part Three: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2019 to July 27, 2019</i>	32
<i>Figure 5 — Part Four: Patterns in Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to July 27, 2019....</i>	34
<i>Figure 5 — Part Five: Patterns in Attacks, and Facilities by ISIS vs. Other Non-State Actors in Syria in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to July 27, 2019</i>	35
FIGURE SIX: THE ROLE OF ISIS IN IRAQ VIOLENCE: 2017-2019	36
<i>Figure Six — Part One: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Iraq in 2017</i>	37
<i>Figure Six — Part Two: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Iraq in 2018</i>	39
<i>Figure Six — Part Three: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Iraq in 2019, through July 27, 2019.....</i>	41
FIGURE SEVEN: THE RISE, COLLAPSE AND RETURN OF ISIS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ: 2016-2019.....	43
FIGURE EIGHT: COMPARISONS OF VIOLENCE BY ISIS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ: 2016-JULY 27, 2019	43
<i>Figure Seven — Part One: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq (2016-2019 July 27).....</i>	44
<i>In 2016</i>	44
<i>Figure Seven — Part Two: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq (2016-2019 July 27)</i>	45
<i>Figure Seven — Part Three: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq (2016-2019 July 27)</i>	46
<i>Figure Seven — Part Four: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq (2016-2019 July 27)</i>	47
<i>Figure Eight: Islamic State Iraq vs Syria Attacks and Fatalities through 2016-2019 July 27</i>	48

Figure One: ACLED Estimates of ISIS-Caused Violence Towards Civilians in Iraq and Syria

Attacks by Islamic State, Iraq & Syria, January 2016 - Present,
ACLED Database



Fatalities from Islamic State Activities, Iraq & Syria, January 2016 - Present, ACLED Database



Source: Adapted by Max Molot from the publicly available ACLED Database, <https://www.acleddata.com/>

I. ISIS/ISIL Strategy

It is important to preface any analysis dealing with ISIS by stressing that it is only one of many terrorist and extremist movements controlled by non-state actors, that many states in the Middle East and Asia are repressive or violent to the point where their governments routinely commit acts of state terrorism.

Islamic extremism is also only one cause of terrorism and civil violence., and that sectarian, ethnic, tribal, and regional violence all can have an extremist or terrorist character. Focusing on one movement because it represents the most urgent threat at any given time may be a tactical necessity. It is a fundamentally flawed approach to strategy, and almost ensures a failure to achieve lasting grand strategic outcome and benefits.

The post “caliphate” changes in ISIS strategy, tactics, and forces illustrate this point. They show the extent to which a movement can change and adapt as long as the fundamental causes of terrorism and extremism remain. It is also important to note that ISIS to some extent rose out of the earlier defeat of Al Qaida and other extremist movements in Iraq, and that the history of political extremism and terrorism is often one of changes in the name and leadership of movements which learn and adapt, and grow more dangerous and violent in the process.

The following excerpts from the reports cited earlier highlight the evolving ISIS strategy in Iraq and Syria, and make it clear that ISIS is not defeated:

Lead Inspector General: LIG

USCENTCOM and CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS’s strategy in both countries is to create turmoil in territory it has lost and prevent the ISF or SDF from establishing effective control and maintaining civil order. USCENTCOM reported that ISIS, by maintaining a high operational tempo with multiple attacks taking place over a wide area, “likely aims to show it is everywhere, and can strike with impunity where it pleases.” At the same time, targeted assassinations by ISIS are “likely intended to demonstrate ISIS’s ability to identify its enemies and eliminate them without apparent hindrance,” USCENTCOM said. The DoS said that ISIS attacks were also intended to weaken public support for local governance and security institutions. (Page 15)

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS refers to its overarching strategy as “sahara” (desert), “sahwat” (a derogatory term for Sunnis who fight against ISIS), and “sawlat” (hit-and-run operations) for its desert-based insurgency. As part of this strategy, CJTF-OIR said that in Iraq, ISIS attempted to expand its influence this quarter and carried out attacks in the Sunni-majority provinces where ISIS captured territory in 2014, including Anbar, Ninewa, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din provinces. In Syria, USCENTCOM said that ISIS carried out attacks mainly in Raqqah, Hasakah, and Dayr az Zawr provinces. (Page 15)

USCENTCOM said that in the Kurdish-controlled province of Hasakah, ISIS attacks against the SDF were intended to limit SDF movement and produce casualties. In Raqqah, ISIS targeted local elites and conducted terrorist attacks and assassinations intended to prevent the establishment of capable security and governance structures. (Page 20)

USCENTCOM said that elsewhere in Syria, ISIS has been successful in exploiting tension between local Arab residents and the Kurdish-led SDF by portraying the SDF as an occupying force, particularly in Dayr az Zawr province, where Arab residents have protested against SDF fighters operating there. USCENTCOM and the DoS said that ISIS’s goal is to prevent the SDF

and its civil counterparts from establishing effective security and governance in the area. (Page 20)

CJTF-OIR and open-source analysts said that ISIS's strategy is intended to foment distrust of the Iraqi government for its inability to secure its citizens. The targeted killings, particularly of village mayors, coupled with the destruction of crops, has caused mass civilian displacement, sometimes of entire villages in provinces north of Baghdad, analysts said. CJTF-OIR reported that it expects ISIS to continue such assassinations as well as bombings and other "asymmetric attacks" to destabilize the security environment and increase tension between Iraq's Shia and Sunni communities. (Page 42)

UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

ISIL is adapting, consolidating and creating conditions for eventual resurgence in its Iraqi and Syrian heartlands. This process is more advanced in Iraq, where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and most of the ISIL leadership are now based. Others are elsewhere in the former "caliphate" area and parts of the immediate neighborhood. This dispersal and the difficult security conditions make communication difficult, and authority is increasingly delegated. Meanwhile, for survival purposes, ISIL has prioritized the continued functioning of its leadership figures and of Syrian and Iraqi fighters. Most foreign terrorist fighters are seen as dispensable and are left to fend for themselves. (Page 5)

Although militarily defeated, ISIL still has large numbers of fighters and other supporters in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and is able to operate freely in many locations and mount regular attacks to show its potency and undermine public confidence in the local authorities. An example of this is the burning of crops in northern Iraq, which is part of an ISIL strategy to prevent reconciliation, stabilization and recovery in areas that were part of the "caliphate". Their hope is that the local populations will become impatient, blame the authorities and grow nostalgic for the time when ISIL was in control. Several Member States expressed concern that the eventual resurgence of ISIL in these areas is a possibility. (Page 5)

Member States assess that the group will not be content to rely on its media profile and propaganda to generate attacks, as such attacks are often disrupted and usually low-impact when they do succeed. ISIL will reinvest in the capacity to direct and facilitate complex international attacks when it has the secure space and time to do so. The current abatement of such attacks, therefore, may not last long, possibly not even until the end of 2019; meanwhile, more ISIL-inspired attacks will occur, possibly in unexpected locations. (Page 5-6)

ISIL is reported to be moving towards a hub-and-spoke network in its remote provinces, a logical extension of the dispersed, delegated leadership approach. Better established affiliates are taking on elements of responsibility for lesser ones, channeling funds and assisting with propaganda. Over time, this may have the effect of regionalizing the agendas of these networks. This has already happened in the case of Al-Qaida, which has long embedded itself in local issues and politics, bringing the group some successes but also some problems, as in Idlib. The immediate global threat posed by Al-Qaida remains unclear, with Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri (QDi.006) reported to be in poor health and doubts as to how the group will manage the succession. (Page 6)

Following the territorial defeat of ISIL in its core area, the group's priority is reported to be the security and welfare of the members of its senior leadership. The group shows little concern for its rank-and-file members, including those in camps. (Page 6)

RAND Report

If the Islamic State is planning a comeback, which we assess it is, the group will stick with what works—diversifying its financial portfolio to maintain steady access to financing. What such a reemergence will look like is difficult to project, but its ideology of remaining and expanding, its track record of reemerging from previous defeat, and its actions at maintaining a presence all suggest reemergence is a goal. There are already hints of it, with the group reorganizing its forces in Iraq around Kirkuk and Hawija, as well as in Badush, Zummar, and Rabia, northwest of Mosul. The Islamic State is regrouping throughout southern Syria as well, particularly around the town of Suwayda, setting up in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, maintaining a presence in areas held by the Syrian government, and conducting nighttime attacks in areas held by the SDF. (Page xv)

Although much of the group's leadership has been killed and although regional and international powers will be much more on guard against an overt territorial presence, the group has been considered defeated before. Its knack for fundraising through criminal activities will prove useful as its members seek to extort, kidnap, kill, steal, smuggle, and traffic to obtain the money they need to survive. Controlling territory would facilitate these activities but is far from a prerequisite. (Pages 101-102)

II. ISIS/ISIL' Tactics

ISIS/ISIL tactics have reverted to a mixture of classic insurgent and terrorist tactics, and innovations like crop burnings. Not all of these tactics are necessarily violent, and they include extortion and taxing the populace, ideological indoctrination, recruiting fighters, and establishing networks that give ISIS local control and power. They also seek to combine coercive measures with efforts to exacerbate sectarian tensions and sap public confidence in local and central governance.

It is noteworthy, however, that ISIS seems to give its local operatives and commanders more initiative than many other such movements. The following excerpts from each report highlight the following aspects of ISIS tactics in Iraq and Syria:

Lead Inspector General: LIG

USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS militants in both countries employed similar tactics of targeted assassinations, ambushes, suicide bombings in public places, and burning fields of crops, but did not carry out large-scale conventional attacks or attempt to take and hold territory for more than brief periods. (page 15)

Recently, ISIS has used the burning of village crops to compel village residents to flee. (page 15)

USCENTCOM said that ISIS also used resentment against the forced conscription of local young men into the SDF to foment popular discontent against the SDF. (page 21)

The group is adapting to its insurgency role with far fewer demands on its financial holdings and relying on smuggling, extortion and kidnapping for ransom to maintain funding streams. (page 17)

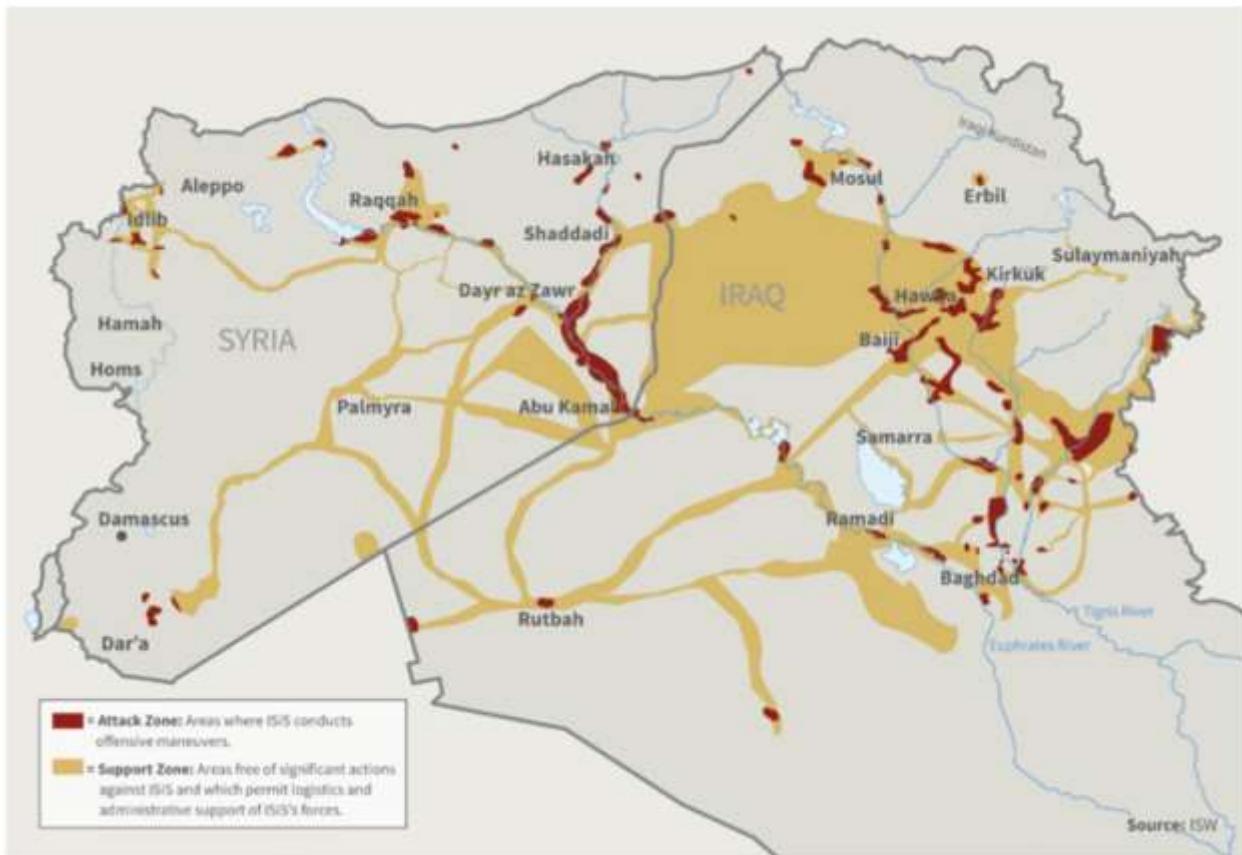
UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

The evolution of a covert ISIL network at the provincial level in Iraq since 2017 is now being mirrored in the Syrian Arab Republic, with attacks increasing in areas controlled by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic...The ISIL core has continued the process of drawing down to protect its essential personnel and functions. It is unable to support foreign terrorist fighters, preferring to focus on the survival of its leaders and Syrian and Iraqi fighters after its territorial defeat....ISIL insurgency activity in Iraq, including the burning of crops, is designed to prevent normalization and reconstruction, in the hope that the local population will ultimately blame the Iraqi authorities. A similar approach is anticipated in the Syrian Arab Republic.

... Meanwhile, ISIL continues to aspire to global relevance, as illustrated by Baghdadi's video late in April 2019, which highlighted its affiliates. The dispersed, delegated leadership approach entails giving specific better-established ISIL affiliates responsibility for supporting lesser or newer ones. This approach also extracts maximum propaganda value from inspired attacks, as demonstrated by the leadership's reaction to the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka, which Baghdadi celebrated but was not aware of before they happened. With the exception of the Easter Sunday bombings, these inspired attacks on which ISIL is currently hoping to disrupt and those that succeed tend to be relatively low-impact.

RAND Report

As of early 2019, there were clear signs that the Islamic State had regrouped. Throughout Kirkuk Governorate in Iraq, Islamic State fighters have constructed fake checkpoints to ambush Iraqi security forces operating in the area. They also set out to destroy oil tankers and target Shia civilians making religious pilgrimages. In Kirkuk and elsewhere, including Diyala and Salahaddin governorates, Islamic State sleeper cells helped organize what analyst Hassan Hassan has called rasd [roughly equivalent to scoping, or reconnaissance] of these areas to determine how best to operate before reorganizing small formations of fighters. The group retained the ability to conduct complex surprise attacks in both opposition-held and government-held territory— another indication of a revived insurgency. Even after losing much of its territory, the Islamic State continued its fight against regime forces in Hama Governorate in central Syria. (pages 103-104)

Figure Two: ISIS Operating Areas as of April 16, 2019

Source: Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve | Quarterly Report to the United States Congress | April 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019 (<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/06/2002167167/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019 LEADIG OIR REPORT.PDF>, p. 21)

III. ISIS/ISIL Crop Burning

The following excerpts from each report highlight the impact of a new ISIS emphasis on crop burning which can serve several purposes. First, the arson allows ISIS to promote itself as the only benefactor that provides *secure* prosperity. Second, it builds credibility for future extortion. Third, it shows the government cannot provide security and control rural areas. Fourth, it both deprives farmers of a stable income and raises food prices – a serious problem in some areas.

Lead Inspector General: LIG

Beginning in May, a series of fires across northern Syria destroyed tens of thousands of acres of farmland containing wheat and barley crops that had been ready to harvest. Farmers in the region expressed concern regarding the loss of food supplies and income. According to the United Nations, the fires were linked to dry conditions exacerbated by bombing, and in some cases were intentionally started.

In its weekly newsletter, ISIS claimed responsibility for some of the initial fires. In northwestern Syria, the United Nations attributed crop fires to fighting between Syrian regime and rebel forces. Videos released by opposition groups claim to show phosphorous shells fired by Syrian regime

forces exploding in wheat fields, triggering fires. In response, the SDF called for full security mobilization to fight the crop fires. (page 41)

According to OFDA, there is a significantly greater amount of land to be harvested this year. Seasonal rains were the strongest they have been in 8 years and, despite the fires, Syria is anticipating a higher than average harvest. USAID does not anticipate additional food shortages as a result of the fires. According to the World Food Programme, approximately 6.5 million Syrians are nevertheless food insecure. In response, USAID/Food for Peace Program continues to program emergency food assistance across northeastern and northwestern Syria and intends to continue to expand support for agricultural development in FY 2019. (page 41)

UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

Although militarily defeated, ISIL still has large numbers of fighters and other supporters in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and is able to operate freely in many locations and mount regular attacks to show its potency and undermine public confidence in the local authorities. An example of this is the burning of crops in northern Iraq, which is part of an ISIL strategy to prevent reconciliation, stabilization and recovery in areas that were part of the “caliphate”. Their hope is that the local populations will become impatient, blame the authorities and grow nostalgic for the time when ISIL was in control. Several Member States expressed concern that the eventual resurgence of ISIL in these areas is a possibility. (page 5)

IV. ISIS/ISIL Force Strength, Organization, and Leadership

The following excerpts highlight estimates of the changing size, organization, and leadership of the threat forces. Having lost its territorial strongholds, ISIS elements have dispersed to the rural countryside in Iraq and Syria, where the ISF or SDF have a limited local presence, if any. The excerpts again highlight the flexibility of ISIS and the speed with which it is adapting and recovering.

Lead Inspector General: LIG

CJTF-OIR reported based on open source data that ISIS likely has between 14,000 and 18,000 “members,” including “fighters,” in Iraq and Syria, including up to 3,000 foreigners. CJTF-OIR defines an ISIS “member” in Iraq and Syria as an individual who has pledged allegiance to ISIS and to the group’s so-called “caliph,” Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, as distinct from a “fighter” who has taken up arms to fight for ISIS. CJTF-OIR said that it did not have the “granularity and resources” to differentiate between ISIS members and fighters. (page 15)

USCENTCOM assessed that, while ISIS is resurging in Syria, the overall threat from ISIS in Syria against U.S. forces likely remained unchanged this quarter. It said that ISIS has likely not recovered sufficient conventional capability to mount effective attacks against hardened facilities manned by U.S. military personnel, but is able to target U.S. vehicles with roadside bombs and car bombs, assassinate individual soldiers or small groups of U.S. forces, and fire or launch weapons at U.S. installations. (page 22)

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS’s presence in Iraq has increased with fighters who fled the battlefield in Syria’s MERV last quarter. The increased ISIS presence “has brought more funding for attacks, a more stable [command and control] node, and a logistics node for coordination of attacks,” CJTF-OIR said. (page 42)

According to analysts at the Institute of the Study of War, a Washington D.C. think tank, ISIS has been reconstituting key capabilities in Iraq since late 2018 that will enable it to wage an aggressive insurgency in the coming months. These analysts reported that ISIS remnants have regrouped in mountainous and desert areas in northern and western Iraq, such as the Makhmour Mountains in Ninewa province and the Jazeera Desert in Anbar province. The analysts said that ISIS stages attacks from these areas and has hidden caches of cash, weapons, and food. (page 42)

CJTF-OIR reported that popular support for ISIS in Iraq comes largely from these isolated and rural areas where the Iraqi government cannot sustain its military reach and that ISIS likely retains support in pockets in the same provinces where it is most active: Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala. CJTF-OIR said that while much of the support is ideological or tribal, some people in these areas are likely coerced into supporting ISIS or may be attracted by the promise of payment. (page 42)

UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

In the Syrian Arab Republic, about 150 ISIL elements are reported still to be in areas south of Damascus that have been retaken by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. East of the Euphrates there are an estimated 800 ISIL terrorists still at large in Raqqah and Hasakah Governorates. These ISIL fighters have perpetrated at least 30 attacks against United States and coalition forces since the beginning of 2019. (page 7)

Member States remain concerned about the challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators, even though relocators have not yet appeared in large numbers and returnees have not yet emerged as leading terrorist actors. National estimates of the attrition rate for foreign terrorist fighters average 25 per cent killed and 15 per cent unaccounted for. Set against an approximate initial figure of 40,000 who joined the “caliphate”, these percentages would suggest that between 24,000 and 30,000 are still alive. Even the lowest credible estimate is huge compared with Afghanistan and Al-Qaida, let alone any other, smaller theatre of terrorist insurgency. (pages 19-20)

RAND Report

Consistent and redundant organizational structure has undergirded the Islamic State's resilience. The group is well organized, with a defined bureaucracy and lines of reporting that ensure a modicum of continuity despite high turnover rates among its senior leadership, midlevel bureaucrats, and rank and file. When a senior leader is killed or captured, others are ready to take his place; often, they will have been his deputies. However, the group is neither monolithic nor rigid, and the autonomy given to its constituent parts increases its ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. This adaptability has applied to the Islamic State's financial behavior, with the group taking advantage of a variety of revenue-raising opportunities as circumstances on the ground changed.⁵ This adaptability has also applied to the group's production of violence. (103)

Military setbacks and deaths of leaders have had some tangible effects on the morale of remaining fighters, such as an increasing number of Islamic State members who voluntarily surrender. In Iraq, some 500 fighters surrendered in Tal Afar, and 1,000 surrendered in Hawija. (104)

V. ISIS/ISIL Recruitment Efforts

The following excerpts from each report focus on current local recruitment efforts. It should be noted that ISIS uses the Internet and other tools to recruit on a much wider basis, and has adapted its methods in other countries to exploit their internal tensions in different ways. There is also a growing concern from the LIG and UN reports that the IDP camps in Syria are a well-advertised recruiting ground for ISIS. Without a serious effort at reintegration of IDPs, the risk of further radicalization increases.

Lead Inspector General: LIG

In terms of recruitment, USCENTCOM reported that ISIS likely will attempt to enlist new members from the large pool of internally displaced persons (IDPs) at al Hol, a sprawling camp in Hasakah province where USCENTCOM says many suspected ISIS family members reside after fleeing fighting in the MERV. USCENTCOM described the residents of al Hol and other, smaller IDP camps as potentially susceptible to ISIS messaging, coercion, and enticement. USCENTCOM said that transferring Syrian camp residents to “tribal guarantors”—village leaders willing to vouch for them in their villages of origin—and repatriating Iraqis and foreigners to their home countries are critical to reducing this recruiting pool. (Page 20)

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS in Iraq continues to recruit from these same areas, drawing from family and tribal connections and exploiting perceived weaknesses and failures of the CJTF-OIR reported that popular support for ISIS in Iraq comes largely from these isolated and rural areas where the Iraqi government cannot sustain its military reach and that ISIS likely retains support in pockets in the same provinces where it is most active: Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala. CJTF-OIR said that while much of the support is ideological or tribal, some people in these areas are likely coerced into supporting ISIS or may be attracted by the promise of payment. (Page 42)

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS in Iraq continues to recruit from these same areas, drawing from family and tribal connections and exploiting perceived weaknesses and failures of the Iraqi government, particularly in Sunni areas where the population may feel neglected. CJTF-OIR said that ISIS has also developed an extensive worldwide social media recruitment effort to draw foreigners to the cause. (Page 43)

UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

Dependents, such as those in Hawl, may come to pose a threat if they are not dealt with appropriately Member States agree that many of the underlying factors that gave rise to ISIL still exist, which suggests that the threat from ISIL and Al-Qaida, or similar groups, is unlikely to abate any further. (Page 6)

RAND Report

The Islamic State has also maintained an ability to recruit new fighters, which helped it sustain itself despite mounting battlefield casualties. Recruiting has slowed, and new recruits will likely be far more local—Iraqi and Syrian, rather than foreign—because traveling as a foreign fighter from Europe or elsewhere to what remains of the caliphate seems like a losing proposition on every end. But this was exactly the situation facing the Islamic State in its earlier incarnation as ISI. (Pages 104-105)

VI. ISIS/ISIL Financing and Revenue Generation

Money is a key issue, and ISIS does not have the high level of funding from sources like oil wells and urban trade that sustained it in the past. It has adapted its fundraising, however, to the point where it can probably sustain itself indefinitely. At the same time, the return to a classical insurgency has eliminated the burden of funding most of the social expenditures that ISIS had to fund in the territory it held, allowing the organization to continue balancing its revenues and expenditures. The following excerpts from each report address financing and revenue generation:

Lead Inspector General: LIG

In both countries, according to the DoD Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counternarcotics and Global Threats (CN>), ISIS is reestablishing financial networks by decentralizing revenue generation, taking in “quick cash” through extortion of the local populace and skimming money from rebuilding contracts or kidnapping for ransom. CN> said that reestablishing financial networks provides senior ISIS leaders with the ability to oversee funding for local priorities and maintain a compartmentalized knowledge base of their accounts. CN> said that using smaller caches of money makes it more difficult for the Coalition to detect ISIS’s financial transactions. (Page 16)

In CN>’s assessment, ISIS likely generates significantly less revenue due to the loss of control of territory, but likely has lower expenses operating as an insurgency. CN> also reported that ISIS’s financial networks continued to be disrupted this quarter as a result of an October 2018 Iraqi-led, Coalition-enabled operation against the largest ISIS financial network, known as the Rawi Network. This quarter, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated as terrorists six individuals and one entity for their connections to the Rawi Network. (Page 16)

USCENTCOM reported that ISIS began to reestablish illicit fundraising capabilities in Syria this quarter through extortion and the collection of “taxes” from residents and businesses in areas where it operates.⁷⁹ In USCENTCOM’s assessment, ISIS remains unlikely to replace more than a small fraction of the revenue it lost when the SDF gained control of the oil wells in northeastern Syria. However, the funds it obtains using these methods will help it to meet its expenses without depleting stockpiled cash, USCENTCOM said. (Page 22)

UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

ISIL is reported to lack liquid funds to run operations and therefore to be exploring ways to raise money. It has been undertaking new criminal activity and benefiting from funds that it had generated through legitimate businesses. With the end of the “caliphate”, some ISIL leaders in the Syrian Arab Republic have been dispersed to other areas around the country, and the group was seeking to transfer money to them while concealing their locations. This is the priority for available ISIL financial resources. ISIL is estimated to have between \$50 million and \$300 million remaining from the revenues of the “caliphate”. The locations of these reserves and their accessibility for operational use are unknown. Although not a significant portion of ISIL assets, there may be caches of antiquities and cultural artefacts intended for future sale. (Page 7)

Financial transfers identified during the reporting period were made mostly in small amounts, with the intended purpose of financing return travel for foreign terrorist fighters. ISIL fighters were reported to depend upon additional sources of money, including credit cards of family members, and requests for donations made on social media platforms and encrypted messaging applications,

such as Telegram. Such methods made it difficult for authorities to link the various individuals or to unravel established networks. ISIL individuals who entered Idlib from areas previously under the group's control were reported to have arrived with cash amounts sufficient for daily expenses. (Page 7)

ISIL is assessed to retain financial reserves totaling between \$50 million and \$300 million and to be able to direct funds both within the core conflict zone and globally to affiliates in its network. ISIL reportedly retains access to cash hidden in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and nearby countries or stored with trusted associates. Its financial reserves are also invested in businesses in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere. (Page 17)

Military pressure on ISIL and the seizure of its last territorial holdings have had a severe impact on the group's ability to raise revenue in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic as of early 2019. The group is adapting to its insurgency role with far fewer demands on its financial holdings and relying on smuggling, extortion and kidnapping for ransom to maintain funding streams. ISIL leadership requires cells and affiliates to maintain financial records and appoint a member responsible for financial matters. It has attempted to increase its oversight of finances, directing, for example, that only half of any revenue raised in a particular province be spent in that location. Cells within the core conflict zone and affiliates abroad are encouraged to be financially self-sufficient. One Member State described ISIL affiliates being treated in a manner similar to start-up businesses, receiving "seed money" and advice from head office, while it is made clear that independence is the expectation. (Page 17)

Cash couriers, unregistered money service businesses and *hawaladars* remain the most commonly used methods of transferring funds in support of ISIL and Al-Qaida. These mechanisms are largely out of view of regulators and law enforcement, making it extremely difficult to identify the remitters and beneficiaries of funds. Financial intelligence units consulted by the Monitoring Team have, however, identified transactions in which foreign terrorist fighters in the conflict zone or their family members are able to receive funds from abroad by having the money deposited into a personal or small business bank account in a neighboring country. The funds are subsequently withdrawn and remitted to the conflict zone either by cash courier or through the use of money service businesses. This type of activity, involving the use of a single account potentially receiving funds from multiple, unrelated parties, can be identified using transaction monitoring rules that are familiar to many financial institutions. (Pages 17-18)

One Member State highlighted concerns about the potential abuse of funds involving deceased foreign terrorist fighters, whereby accounts linked to these fighters continue to be accessed by family members without notifying the authorities. (Page 18)

Mobile payment platforms are of growing concern to Member States. These payment mechanisms are credited with expanding access to financial services for many people in developing countries, especially as an alternative to traditional banks. Some mobile payment providers, however, would benefit from enhanced customer due diligence procedures and transaction monitoring tools, which would lead to improved identification and reporting of suspicious transactions. (Page 18)

A few Member States cited the risks of crypto- or virtual currencies in relation to the financing of terrorism. One Member State monitoring activity on the dark web has observed attempts by terrorists to raise funds in this manner, although it could not be determined whether such activity was related to financial support for ISIL or Al-Qaida. A Member State neighboring the conflict zone noted a sharp increase in suspicious transaction reports to its financial intelligence unit

involving virtual currencies. Again, it could not be established whether they were related to the financing of ISIL or Al-Qaida. As noted in the previous report of the Monitoring Team, such currencies are not currently assessed by Member States to be a significant source of revenue for ISIL or Al-Qaida. The Financial Action Task Force, in an interpretive note on new technologies (virtual assets) issued in June 2019, set forth recommended measures for the regulation and oversight of virtual assets and virtual asset service providers. (Page 18)

RAND Report

Since its inception, the Islamic State has held a consistent financial strategy that aims to support and advance the group's broader religious and state-building goals. The Islamic State's financial strategy and doctrine are characterized by three facets: The group strives to be self-sufficient financially; derives its basic rules and governance of the economy from Islamic economic principles; and, despite these principles, maintains the capacity for significant adaptability and resilience to changing circumstances, battlefield environments, and economic shocks, sometimes deviating from its basic principles to ensure its survival as an organization and its ability to wage jihad in service to its state-building goals. (Page x-xi)

Continued access to finances can keep the movement alive until it can try to take advantage of government failure in either Iraq or Syria, or yet another country in the region that develops any serious political instability. In this stage, it will play not to lose as a necessary and temporary condition. Were it to return, the group likely would retain its underlying structure and goals. (Page 105)

The Islamic State has always had a diversified revenue stream. At its peak during the time of the territorial caliphate, this likely amounted to \$1 billion or \$2 billion (or more) in a year (Table S.1). There have been two consistent patterns to Islamic State revenue raising. First has been an effort to raise money from local sources rather than relying on external donations. Second has been creative diversification. When ISIS controlled territory, it earned revenue from the oil and gas fields it controlled, from taxing and fining the local population, from selling antiquities, and from taxing transit, among other sources. When it did not control territory, it carried out what can be considered criminal activity, including extorting contracts, demanding protection money, and stealing and reselling goods, among other activities. (Page xi)

This diversification of sources comes through clearly in interviews with people who lived under Islamic State rule. In the realm of oil-related revenue, the group sold oil within Islamic State territory but also through traders to the Bashar al-Assad regime and liberated areas in Syria, Kurdish areas, and even Iraq and Turkey. For a fee, it licensed the operation of oil fields. Oil was not the only resource in the ground. It also considered antiquities a resource and licensed people to find, excavate, smuggle, and sell antiquities. (Page xii)

Among non-oil revenues, it levied *zakah* or *zakat*, an Islamic tax requiring payment of 2.5 percent of net worth. In doing so, it required people to inform the Islamic State of their properties so that the group could calculate taxes owed. It recorded income in registers and inspected people's property. There were other taxes and fees, including taxes on money transfers; transit taxes on vehicles entering or leaving its territories; fees for municipal services, such as cleaning; the rental of stalls in markets; and fees for utilities, such as electricity, water, and telephone service. As the purveyor of its own form of justice, the group also collected money through fines for violations of its interpretation of Islamic law. (Page xiii)

The Islamic State's business model after the territorial caliphate will still enable it to raise revenue. In the years from 2004 through 2014, with striking similarities to an organized criminal enterprise, it earned money through smuggling, especially of oil at one point; protection rackets; contract skimming; theft and resale of everything from pajamas to real estate; and other activities. Although these sources included donations, the group's records show that donations were never a large share of total revenues, demonstrating that the group had a strong ability to raise money through a diversified local revenue stream. By 2014, before the group made its major territorial expansion, it was estimated to have the equivalent of \$875 million in assets. (Page xiii)

With the end of the territorial caliphate, the most pernicious consequence of having held territory is that the Islamic State collected records on the individuals over which it ruled. Given its record-keeping practices, it is likely that, even without territory, the Islamic State still has vast amounts of information about these people. This is likely to give it even more of an ability to raise revenue as a clandestine terrorist and insurgent group than it possessed prior to 2014. Furthermore, there is evidence that it has hundreds of millions of dollars in reserve, much of that invested in legitimate businesses that will throw off a stream of revenue for years. (Pages xiii-xiv)

With the end of the territorial caliphate, there has been a striking decline in Islamic State expenditures, often overlooked by those focusing on what the group is earning. By losing territory, it has reduced its governance costs. By reorganizing as an insurgency, it has reduced its military costs. And by having fewer members and controlling salaries, it has reduced its personnel costs. (Page xiv)

Even when the group has been flush with cash, it closely tracked expenses and held its members accountable through an extensive paper trail and oversight at all levels of the organization. When the group was not flush with cash, such as when it was centered in Mosul in 2008 and 2009, it managed to match its salary payments to its revenues, delaying these payments when revenues were low and making up the payments when revenues were higher. (Page xiv)

Even with lower revenue and the loss of territory, the Islamic State is still capable of launching complex attacks. This suggests that, even with the loss of the territorial caliphate, as long as it can gain revenue, it will remain a danger. (Page xiv)

Despite the collapse of the territorial caliphate, the Islamic State has displayed resilience and commitment, signaling a resolve that could help the group engineer a comeback even long after the removal of its state. In a sign of its organizational resilience, as of mid-2018, the Islamic State's security and finance structures as well as its immigration and logistics coordination office remained intact. Even more recently than that, it retained the ability not only to raise revenue but to move money. (Page 56)

Reporting on the Islamic State's turn to illegal investment schemes and ownership of front companies is limited. However, the activities reported indicate that it remains capable of engaging in sophisticated financial criminal activity to protect its existing war chest and to leverage it covertly to rebuild its organization. (Page 59)

Other methods of moving money are available, according to our discussions with experts in Iraq in March 2019. Arrests of ISIS members have unveiled a network of more than 1,000 Islamic State fighters who smuggled an average of \$25,000 per fighter from Syria into Iraq starting in September 2018, with security sources estimating a total amount of \$200 million to be available in Iraq. The

February 2019 United Nations report also noted the smuggling of money into countries neighboring Iraq and Syria but did not describe how this smuggling took place. (Page 60)

VII. Counterterrorism Partner Forces

The Arab states have always done a far better job of creating the political image of over-ambitious alliance structures and frameworks than they have in creating effective ways to actually cooperate. They have also generally failed to achieve effective unity in the field, and many regimes have failed their peoples through corruption, authoritarianism, poor governance at every levels, weak economic development, and gross inequities in income distribution and economic opportunity.

The divisions between Arab countries have continued to grow in 2019, both inside Iraq and Syria, and in the wider Arab World. Many Arab security partners find it easier to partner functionally with the U.S. than with other Arab states, but the U.S. now complicates the situation by sending uncertain signal about its commitment to staying in Syria and Iraq. For a brief period, the U.S. trained and worked with allies to fight a conventional war, one predicated on the control of territory instead of “hearts and minds.” The uncertain signals from the U.S. are further complicated by a more complex task: training units on counterinsurgency tactics as opposed to conventional warfare, something the U.S. itself has consistently struggled with. The following excerpts from each report summarize the changing role of counterterrorism partners.

Lead Inspector General: LIG

CJTF-OIR also said that local forces require much more training and equipment now than during the operations to defeat ISIS territorially. Partner forces must develop new capabilities, such as building “trust and credibility with the local population, and a significantly greater amount of ground-focused, human-based intelligence,” to confront ISIS insurgents effectively. (Page 17)

As of this quarter, there were three main components of the Syrian partner forces and a few smaller elements. The largest combat force is the SDF, which consists primarily of the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC) and the YPG. According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF is a “broadspectrum security apparatus” that conducts “counterinsurgency operations, [local] patrols, checkpoint operations, detention operations, and clearance patrols.” (Page 29)

The second partner force is the Provincial Internal Security Forces (PRISF), composed of fighters recruited from the provinces where they are based. PRISF units conduct operations similar to the SDF at the provincial level—akin to the U.S. National Guard—according to CJTF-OIR. In addition, they “provide a layer of intelligence and more specialized units capable of conducting targeting operations and providing additional resources to SDF operations.”¹⁶² Between March and May 2019, nearly 14,300 people, including an estimated 5,900 children, left Rukban for five shelters in areas of Homs province controlled by the Syrian regime. (Page 29)

The third main group of partner forces is referred to as the Internal Security Forces (InSF), which operate as a wide-area security force in areas cleared of ISIS. The InSF includes units such as the Raqqah Internal Security Force, Manbij Internal Security Force, and Dayr az Zawr Internal Security Force.¹⁶³ These forces are drawn from the local communities and reflect the ethnic composition of the areas where they are based. (Page 30)

The end strength for these main partner forces this quarter was around 100,000. According to CJTF-OIR, the desired end strength is 110,000, consisting of: 30,000 SDF, 45,000 PRISF, and 35,000 InSF. CJTF-OIR stated that achieving this force distribution would require a reduction in

SDF forces, since they are trained largely for conventional combat and the growing need is for more PRISF and InSF counterinsurgency and hold forces. (Page 30)

CJTF-OIR said that the SDF frequently requested counterinsurgency training, equipment, and assistance from U.S. and Coalition forces this quarter. (Page 32)

OUSD(P)/ISA stated to the DoD OIG that the enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq is contingent upon the development of the ISF into a professional and efficient fighting force. While much of the previous U.S. security assistance to Iraq has focused on providing training, equipment, and material solutions to address shortfalls in the ISF, OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the emphasis going forward will be on Iraq developing and sustaining a force structure that meets its most likely future threats. (Page 49)

CJTF-OIR also reported that in April and May, Iraq's Training Directorate oversaw the training of nearly 6,000 ISF and Kurdistan Security Force soldiers and police, and CJTFOIR expects the total to reach 9,000 by the close of the quarter. Law enforcement entities received training in disciplines ranging from constabulary functions—such as checkpoints, stop and search, arrest techniques, and investigative work—to wide area security required by the more area security focused forces. The Iraqi Army, Kurdistan Security Forces, and Border Guard Forces received training in wide area security, battalion and brigade-level tactics, and conventional warfare. (Page 50)

UN: Ninth Report from the Secretary General

Pursuant to its counter-terrorism law, Iraq has prosecuted suspected Iraqi and foreign ISIL members accused of committing terrorism offences in Iraq or in neighboring conflict zones. United Nations entities in Iraq have reported ongoing challenges in upholding the right to a fair trial. In April 2019, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions called upon Iraq to ensure that the prosecution of ISIL leadership is carried out in a transparent, fair and thorough manner and to include the participation of victims in the legal process. (This excerpt can be found in the UN Secretary General's report to the Security Council [S/2019/612] at <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/reports-submitted-transmitted-secretary-general-security-council-2019> on page 17-18)

RAND Report

Iraq, the SDF, the United States, and their partners made significant progress at disrupting—and, in some cases, at denying and destroying—the Islamic State's ability to generate, move, and store money starting in late 2015 and continuing through the completion of this report in 2019. (Page 107)

U.S. involvement with the SDF will likely be necessary until a legitimate government takes over Syria, a process that could take years to unfold and stabilize. The Islamic State and its predecessors have long relied on the desert area straddling Iraq and Syria, the Jazirah, to serve as a hideout and a location from which to rebuild.³⁶ While Iraqi security forces can act against the Islamic State in the Iraqi portions of the Jazirah and even conduct cross-border operations, Turkish forces will likely find it difficult to operate in the Syrian portions, far south of their border with Syria. (Page 118)

VIII. Fighter Detainment, Repatriation, and Sentences

The following excerpts address the ways in which various countries are treating ISIS/ISIL Fighters. In general, Iraq and Syria have failed to create effective programs to repatriate and “deprogram” ISIS fighters, and their repressive approach may well help sustain ISIS’s ability to retain its fighters.

Lead Inspector General: LIG

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the SDF continued to hold about 10,000 ISIS fighters in detention centers in northeastern Syria this quarter. Of these, approximately 2,000 are foreigners from more than 50 countries. The remaining 8,000 are Iraqi and Syrian. (Page 23)

...as of the end of the quarter, only six countries in addition to the United States and Iraq had publicly agreed to repatriate suspected ISIS fighters, according to OUSD(P)/ISA and the DoS. (Page 23)

According to media reports, about 800 of the 2,000 foreign fighters in SDF custody are believed to be from European nations. The rest are mainly from former republics of the Soviet Union; the Middle East and North Africa; and South and Southeast Asia. Despite urging by the DoS and the United Nations, most of these countries remain reluctant to repatriate their citizens held in Syria because of a range of legal, security, and political hurdles. (Page 24)

According to media reports, Iraqi Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi said in June that his country would be willing to prosecute more foreign ISIS fighters held by the SDF, and that talks were ongoing between the SDF and the Iraqi government to transfer additional foreign fighters to Iraq. (Page 24)

Iraq has also tried ISIS fighters, including foreigners, captured in Iraq. According to media reports, Iraqi courts have sentenced 514 foreign ISIS fighters since the beginning of 2018, following trials that UN officials said did not provide adequate due process.¹¹⁰ The DoS echoed these concerns, telling the DoS OIG that the Iraqi government has conducted rushed trials of non-Iraqi women and children over the age of eight on charges of illegal entry into the country and membership in or assistance to ISIS. Dozens of the women have received death sentences, according to the DoS. (Page 24)

Of the camp’s residents, approximately 43 percent are Iraqi refugees, 42 percent are Syrian IDPs, and 15 percent are third-country nationals. The United Nations reported that approximately 11,000 children aged 6 to 18 have not been exposed to any school environment for at least 5 years. The United Nations has identified a need to scale up assistance to unaccompanied children in the camp. (Page 41)

According to the DoS and USAID, approximately 35 relief organizations continue to provide humanitarian assistance to al Hol, including emergency food assistance for all camp residents, malnutrition screening for nearly 21,000 children, monthly hygiene kits, and water, sanitation, and hygiene services. Health organizations continue to respond to ongoing health care needs among residents at al Hol and 3 field hospitals containing up to 100 beds opened in the camp during June. In addition, the World Health Organization plans to conduct a health education campaign on hygiene practices and prevention measures to prevent waterborne diseases. (Page 41)

The NGO Human Rights Watch reported that alleged ISIS affiliates are often denied due process in trials and subjected to torture and coercion to elicit confessions, inhumane detention facilities, and arbitrary sentencing. After monitoring several hundred trials of alleged ISIS affiliates, the UM

Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) human rights office in Baghdad cited significant procedural and policy concerns about the trials. UNAMI cited the overuse of the association clause of the Iraqi counterterrorism law, which allows for individuals with as many as four “degrees of separation” from a known ISIS affiliate to be convicted of being a terrorist associate and sentenced to death. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, any executions resulting from the current ISIS trials may be designated as arbitrary government-sanctioned killing. (Page 53)

In addition, according to the DoS, defense attorneys stated that they rarely had access to their clients before hearings and were threatened for defending them. The DoS stated that judicial officials did not sufficiently take into account the individual circumstances in each case or guarantee the defendants a fair trial. However, a former team leader of the UNAMI Accountability and Administration of Justice section told reporters that some criticism of the Iraqi system was “unfair” and that in some cases, “investigation files are thick. The 10-minute trials are the final hearings which summarized months of fact-finding and investigation that consist[ed] of numerous sessions.” (Page 53)

The DoS said that in some cases, children older than 8 received sentences of up to 5 years in prison for ISIS membership and up to 15 years in prison for participating in violent acts. Dozens of foreign women have received death sentences for violating the counterterrorism law. (Page 53)

According to the DoS, prison and detention center conditions were harsh and even life threatening due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, physical abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care. Al Nasiriyah Central Prison, also known as al Hoot Prison, in Dhi Qar province, was designed to hold 2,400 prisoners, but Iraq High Commission for Human Rights observers reported that the prison held approximately 9,000 prisoners. Women’s prisons often lacked adequate child-care facilities for inmates’ children, whom the law permits to remain with their mothers until age four. Limited and aging infrastructure worsened sanitation, restricted access to potable water, and led to poor food quality in many prison facilities. Authorities kept prisoners confined in their cells for lengthy periods without an opportunity to exercise or use showers or sanitary facilities. The DoS reported that it is engaged with Iraqi government officials to determine how the United States can best support their efforts to detain thousands of ISIS fighters and affiliates in safe and humane conditions, and reduce the prison population by freeing nonviolent offenders. (Page 53)

UN: Twenty-fourth Report of the ISIL & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

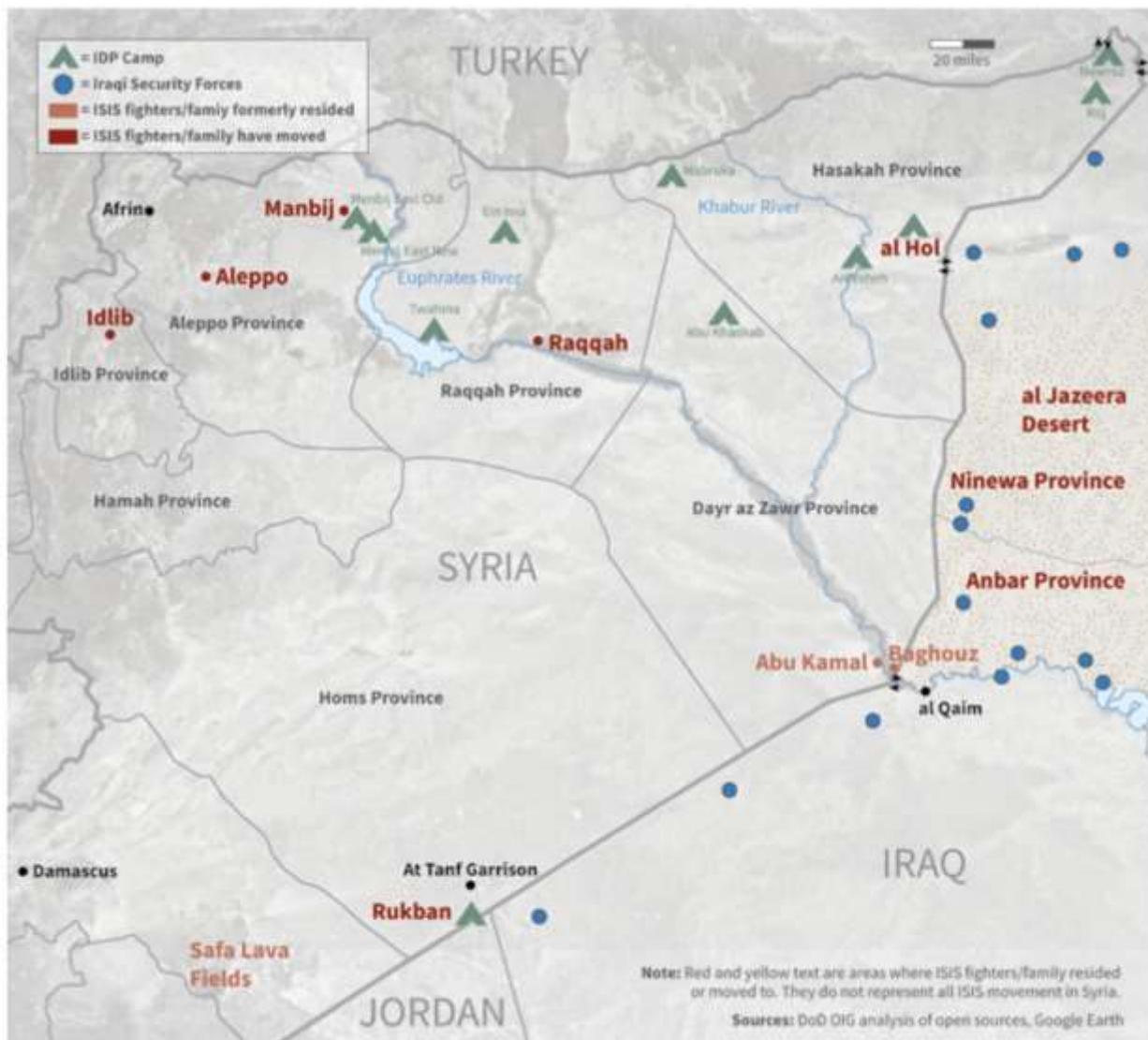
The population of the Hawl camp in the north-eastern part of the Syrian Arab Republic rose from less than 10,000 in December 2018 to more than 70,000 in April 2019. Many Member States are concerned about the security and humanitarian challenges of the post-“caliphate” phase. (Page 5)

Member States have different approaches to repatriating and processing female detainees, including in terms of whether mothers and children are kept together, the difficulty of establishing the parentage and nationality of minors and the specific legal aspects of processing minors. Regardless of the complexities, the conditions in overcrowded camps such as Hawl make it clear that these challenges, if ignored, will not resolve themselves. However, the logistical, jurisdictional and human rights complexities of addressing detainees and displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and to some extent in Iraq, have made a solution elusive. (Page 20)

Security Council resolution 2396 (2017) remains the key text on this issue, with regional Member States acknowledging its value but arguing that it does not go far enough to impose a fair share of responsibility upon States of nationality and origin of foreign terrorist fighters and dependents. The Monitoring Team promotes resolution 2396 (2017) among Member States at every opportunity and assesses that, if these challenges are not addressed more systematically, the threat posed in the short to medium term by adult detainees and in the medium to long term by minors who become increasingly traumatized and radicalized will grow more serious, with consequences in terms of terrorist attacks carried out over a period of decades from now. (Page 20)

RAND Report

In both countries, determining what to do with former and suspected members of the Islamic State will prove a challenge. In Iraq, thousands of people are held in detention centers for suspicion of fighting with or otherwise supporting the Islamic State. In Syria, the SDF hold thousands of Islamic State-linked prisoners. A related challenge will be what to do with the many women and children who were associated with the Islamic State, especially children who have known little else or have a poor memory of life before the Islamic State. Some have proved to be security threats and have carried out attacks. (Page 115)

Figure Three: ISIS Fighters Move Out of the MERV

Source: *Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve* | Quarterly Report to the United States Congress | January 1, 2019 – March 31, 2019, p. 21.

IX. Mapping the Trends in Violence Using the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

There is no way to precisely measure or map the trends in extremist or terrorist activity. As the previous analysis has shown, violence and casualties are only part of the terrorist and extremist toolbox — which includes the exploitation of ideology, religion, ethnicity, tribe, employment, status, extortion, informal governance and the rule of law, kidnapping and covert attacks on individuals. Moreover, no database on terrorism reports on the massive levels of state terrorism — which produce far more casualties than non-state actors in cases like Syria.

All of the sources generating databases on terrorism and extremism are careful to note that they have significant limit in the accuracy of their coverage and description of attacks, the attribution of the attacker and the method of attack, and their counts of killed and injured. Several do provide different data for different levels of confidence, but it is clear that no single source is totally reliable and that most open sources disagree sharply in at least some cases.

The semi-official databases provided by the U.S. government are no longer being updated. The U.S. Department of Defense no longer publishes regular open source reporting on the patterns of terrorism and extremism in Iraq and Syria (or Afghanistan) that the **defenselink** material published by OSD Public Affairs provided through 2016. DoD has also sharply reduced the level of detail it provides through press conferences with its defense and military spoke persons, and no other government or international organization has provided matching data.

For reasons that have never been satisfactorily publicly explained, the U.S. State Department ceased to support the START database of terrorism in 2019. This was the only semi-official open source report on world-wide terrorism issued by the United States government, and was the source of the annual Annex of Statistical Information in the State Department's annual Country Reports on Terrorism. In any case, this annex generally took eight to nine months to generate data on the previous year, and had serious limits as a source in flagging current trends.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), however, is an organization that attempts to map the trends in global violence in near-real time. It is a non-profit organization with 501c3 status in the United States and receives financial support from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) at the U.S. Department of State, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO), the Tableau Foundation, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the University of Texas at Austin. It also received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme from 2013 to 2017.

While it does not provide the same level of detail on terrorism as the START database, its data on the patterns in attacks and fatalities by source and country seem broadly reliable. Moreover, the SIRI model developed by Dr. Abdullah Toukan provides a unique ability to display the trends by country, terrorist organization and other force elements, and show the number and location of attacks and the estimated facilities – the two most reliable indices of open source data on terrorist activity.

Figure Four: The Global Patterns in ISIS Activity in 2019

Figure Four sets the stage for tracking the resurgence on ISIS in Syria and Iraq. It uses the ACLED data to illustrate the global trends in ISIS activity during 2019 through July 27th. It shows that ISIS remains active – or is expanding its operations — in 12 different countries. It also shows that it is most active in Syria and Iraq, although it is clear from media reporting that it also plays an important role in Afghanistan, Egypt, Yemen, and Niger.

Figure Four: Countries ACLED Reports as Having Islamic State Terrorist Attacks in 2019, up to July 27.



Country	Terrorist Attacks	Fatalities
Iraq	338	682
Syria	211	577
Egypt	88	231
Libya	9	38
Yemen	24	58
Afghanistan	33	131
Pakistan	12	28
India	2	2
Somalia	3	3
Mali	13	91
Burkina Faso	2	1
Niger	30	73

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.)

Figure Five: The Role of ISIS in Syrian Violence: 2017-2019

The various parts of **Figure Five** focus on the patterns of violence in Syria and trace the interaction between the civil war between the Assad and anti-Assad factions, the fight to break up the ISIS “Caliphate” and ISIS’s recovery as a terrorist/insurgent group, and the role of ISIS relative to other non-violent state and non-state actors.

It is important to note how much more complex the fighting was in Syria than in Iraq, and that it was not dominated by the fight against ISIS.

The data for 2017 in **Figure Five - Part One** reflect the ISIS “caliphate” at one of its most successful levels of activity, but it is clear that it already faced a major challenge in Eastern Iraq, and that the Assad forces were fighting a major civil war in Western and Central Iraq.

At the same time, they show that ISIS was only one of several major non-state actors shaping the level of violence in Syria, and that it was government land and air forces that caused the largest number of attacks and fatalities. While such data have significant uncertainties, ACLED estimates that Government (Assad) forces caused 14,321 attacks and 20,959 fatalities – most of which was directed at targets where civilians were known to be present, and such data do not include mass interrogations, imprisonment, and torture. In contracts, ISIS caused 1,709 attacks and 5,519 fatalities.

The data for 2018 in **Figure Five - Part Two** show that the ISIS “caliphate” had been put on the defensive in the East and that the Assad factions had made major gains relative to the opposition in the West. It is clear that ISIS already faced a major challenge in Eastern Iraq.

In 2018, Assad government land and air forces had made significant gains in the west, but still caused 9,183 attacks and 13,133 fatalities. In contrast, ISIS caused 636 attacks and 1,541 fatalities.

The data for 2019 through July 27th in **Figure Five - Part Three** show the impact of the breakup of the ISIS “caliphate” and reductions in overall fighting in the east, but also reflect the fact that the Assad forces had largely defeated the other Sunni rebel groups and forced most into a cluster in the Idlib region. At the same time, the data show the expansion of the post “caliphate” ISIS forces to other locations in the East – an expansion that also affected Iraq – as is shown again in the maps in **Figure Six**.

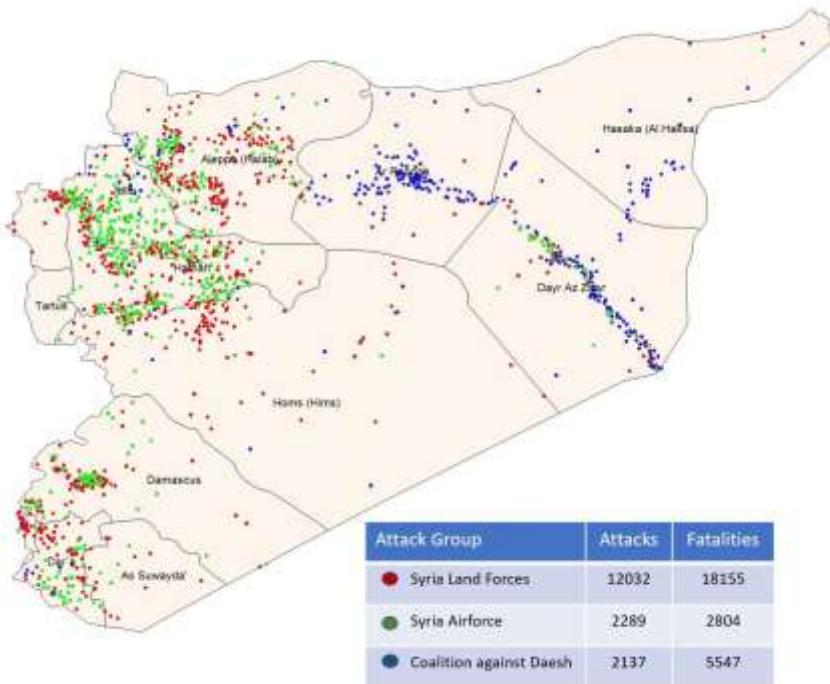
The Assad government land and air forces had pushed most rebel forces into a small enclave around Idlib, west, but still caused some 6,517 attacks and 3,710 fatalities – most of which were directed at targets where civilians were known to be present, and such data do not include a sharp rise in mass interrogations, imprisonment, and torture. In contrast, ISIS was only able to cause 211 attacks and 577 fatalities.

The data in **Figure Five – Part Six** highlight comparisons of Assad, Coalition, and ISIS attacks and fatalities in each year from 2017 through July 27, 2019. They clearly reflect the dominant role of the Assad state forces in shaping the overall levels of violence and fatalities – a key illustration that secular state terrorism can be more destructive than Islamic extremism. At the same time, they also reflect the impact of the Coalition attacks that broke up the “caliphate”.

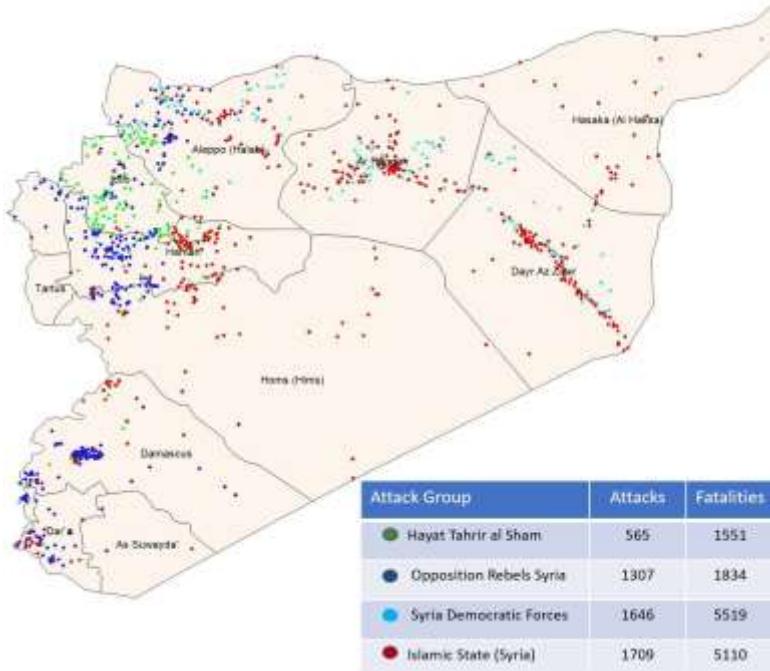
The data in **Figure Five – Part Seven** highlight the fact that other non-state actors, largely fighting against the pro-Assad forces – now play a much larger role in Syrian violence than ISIS. This resistance by other non-state actors may be crucial in the future. It seems unlikely that any stable

peace can be forced on a Sunni majority that includes 76% of the people in Syria through sheer repression, and that does not eventually lead to new forms of civil war.

Figure 5 — Part One: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2017
State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2017)



ISIS and Other Non-State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2017)



Syrian Military Land Forces: Combat operations spread in the South, in Dara, Damascus in the outskirts of the capital, and Quneitra. Concentrated mainly in Hamah, Idlib and Aleppo, as well along the Euphrates River in Dayr az Zawr from the borders with Ar-Raqqah to the borders with Iraq. In addition to some presence in Homs and Ar-Raqqah.

Syrian Airforce: Combat operations in Hamah, Idlib, Aleppo, Dara and Damascus mainly concentrated in the outskirts of the capital. High concentration of operations in the Dayr as Zawr, along the Euphrates river from the borders of ae-Raqqah down to the Syrian-Iraq borders

Coalition against Daesh: Combat operations heavily concentrated in Ar-Raqqah down to the borders with Dayr as Zawr along the Euphrates river to the Iraqi borders. In addition to combat operations in the South of Hasaka, and some in Aleppo and Idlib.

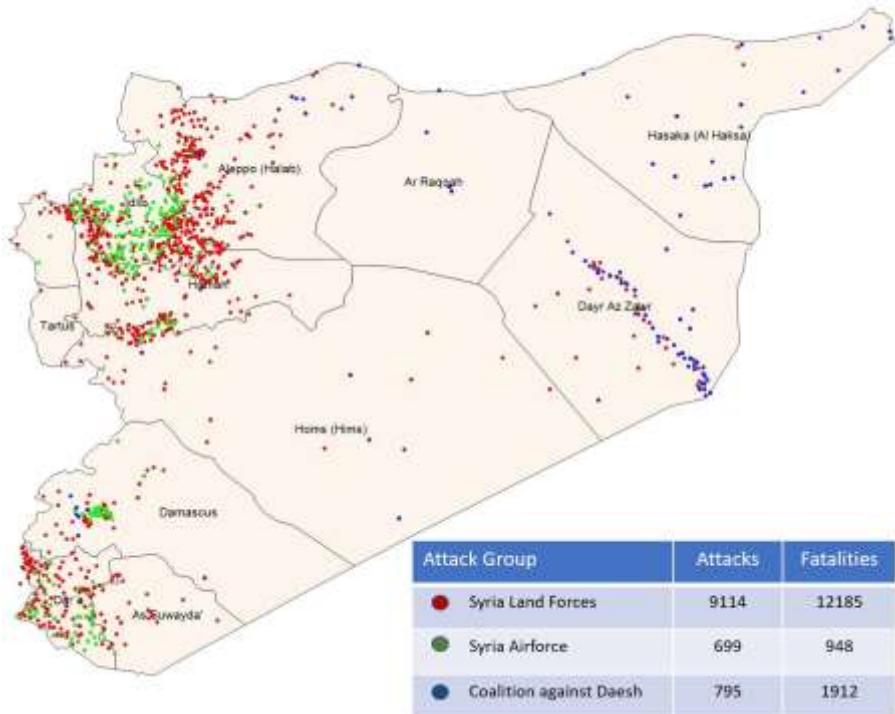
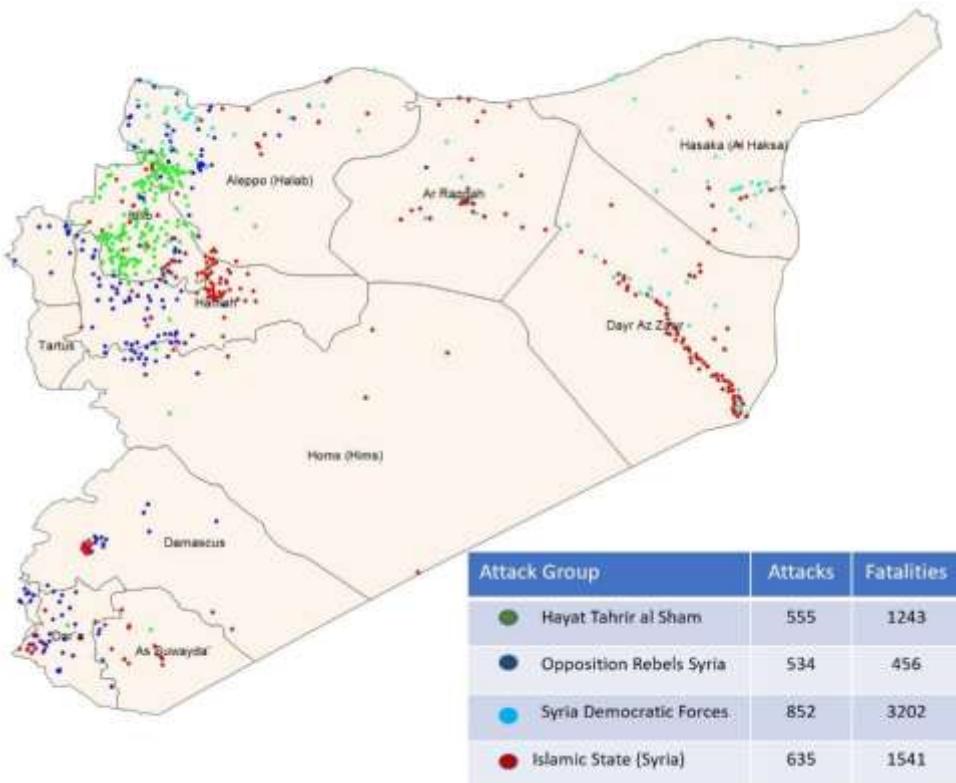
Attacks by the main Opposition Forces

Hayat Tahrir al Sham: Attacks in the South of Aleppo, in Idlib, Hamah, Damascus concentrated in the outskirts of the capital. In addition to a few attacks in Dara.

Opposition Rebels Syria: Concentrated attacks in the Eastern part of Aleppo and Hamah, as well as Dara plus Damascus in the outskirts of the capital. In addition to some attacks in Idlib, Homs bordering with Hama area, and Idlib borders with Lattakia.

Attacks concentrated in Aleppo, but mainly concentrated in Ar-Raqqah and all along the Euphrates river in Dayr as Zawr from borders with Ar Raqqah down to the Iraqi borders. Some attacks in the South of Hasaka.

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

Figure 5 — Part Two: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2018**State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2018)****ISIS and Other Non-State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2018)**

Syrian Military Land Forces:

High concentration of Land Forces in Aleppo, Idlib, Hamah and north of Homs close to the borders with Hamah. In addition, a concentration in the outskirts of the capital Damascus, and in Dar'a and Quneitra. Continued presence, but not as large as in 2017, along the Euphrates river in Dayr As Zawr.

Syrian Airforce:

Heavy concentration of operations in Idlib, outskirts of the capital Damascus, and in Dar'a. Some attacks in the Northern part of Aleppo.

Coalition against Daesh:

High concentration along the Euphrates river in Dayr Az Zawr, plus attacks around Hasaka, North of Aleppo, with some attacks in Homs and the outskirts of the capital Damascus.

Hayat Tahrir al Sham:

High concentration of attacks in Idlib, and East of Aleppo along the borders with Idlib.

Opposition Rebels Syria:

Concentration of attacks in Hamah, and some forces in the North of Homs on the borders with Hamah. Attacks in Damascus and in the outskirts of the capital, in addition to Dar'a and Quneitra. Some attacks in Lattakia.

Democratic Forces of Syria:

Concentration of attacks along the Euphrates river from Ar-Raqqah to the Iraqi border. Attacks in Ar-Raqqah, Hasaka, and the North East of Aleppo.

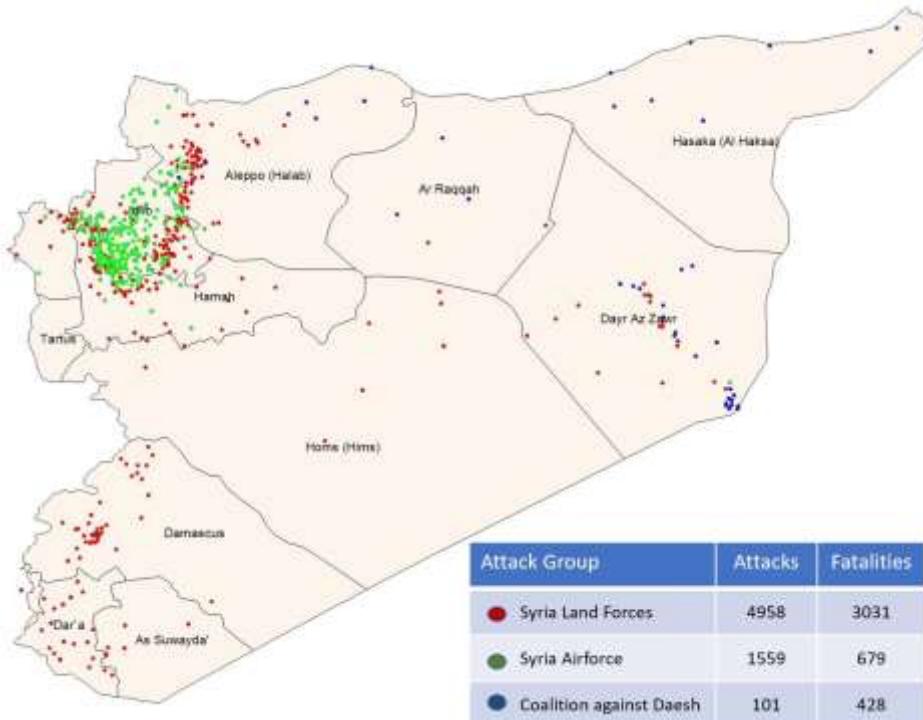
Islamic State:

Concentrated attacks along the Euphrates river, down to the Iraqi border, around the capital Damascus, north of Hamah around border intersection with Idlib, Aleppo and Hamah. Attacks in Raqqah, Hasaka, Homs, Suwayda and Dar'a.

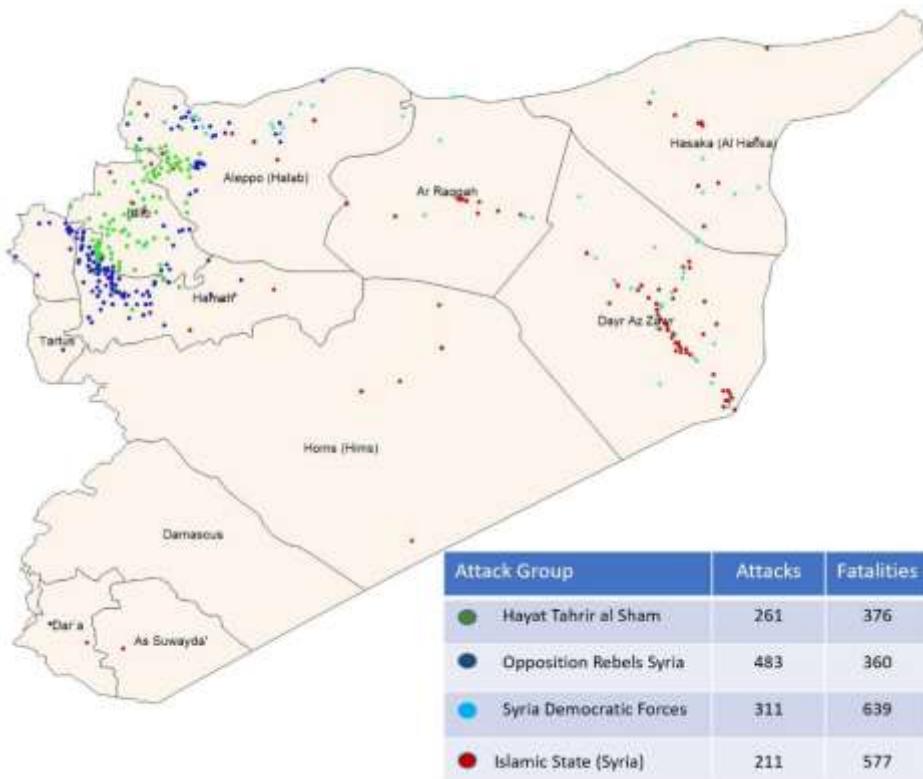
Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

Figure 5 — Part Three: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2019 to July 27, 2019

State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2019)



ISIS and Other Non-State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2019)



Syrian Military Land Forces:

Concentrated mainly in East of Aleppo, Idlib, Hamah, Damascus, Dar'a and Dayr Az Zawr.

Syrian Airforce:

Mainly concentrated in Idlib, some in the northern part of Hamah along the Idlib borders, and East of Aleppo.

Coalition against Daesh:

Main concentration in Dayr Az Zawr, on the Euphrates along the Iraqi border. Some presence in Hasaka, Ar Raqqah and Northern Aleppo.

Hayat Tahrir al Sham:

Concentration of attacks in Aleppo, Idlib and North East borders of Hamah with Idlib.

Opposition Rebels Syria:

High concentration in Hamah into the North of Lattakia. Some attacks in Aleppo, and a small number of attacks in the South of Idlib.

Democratic Forces of Syria:

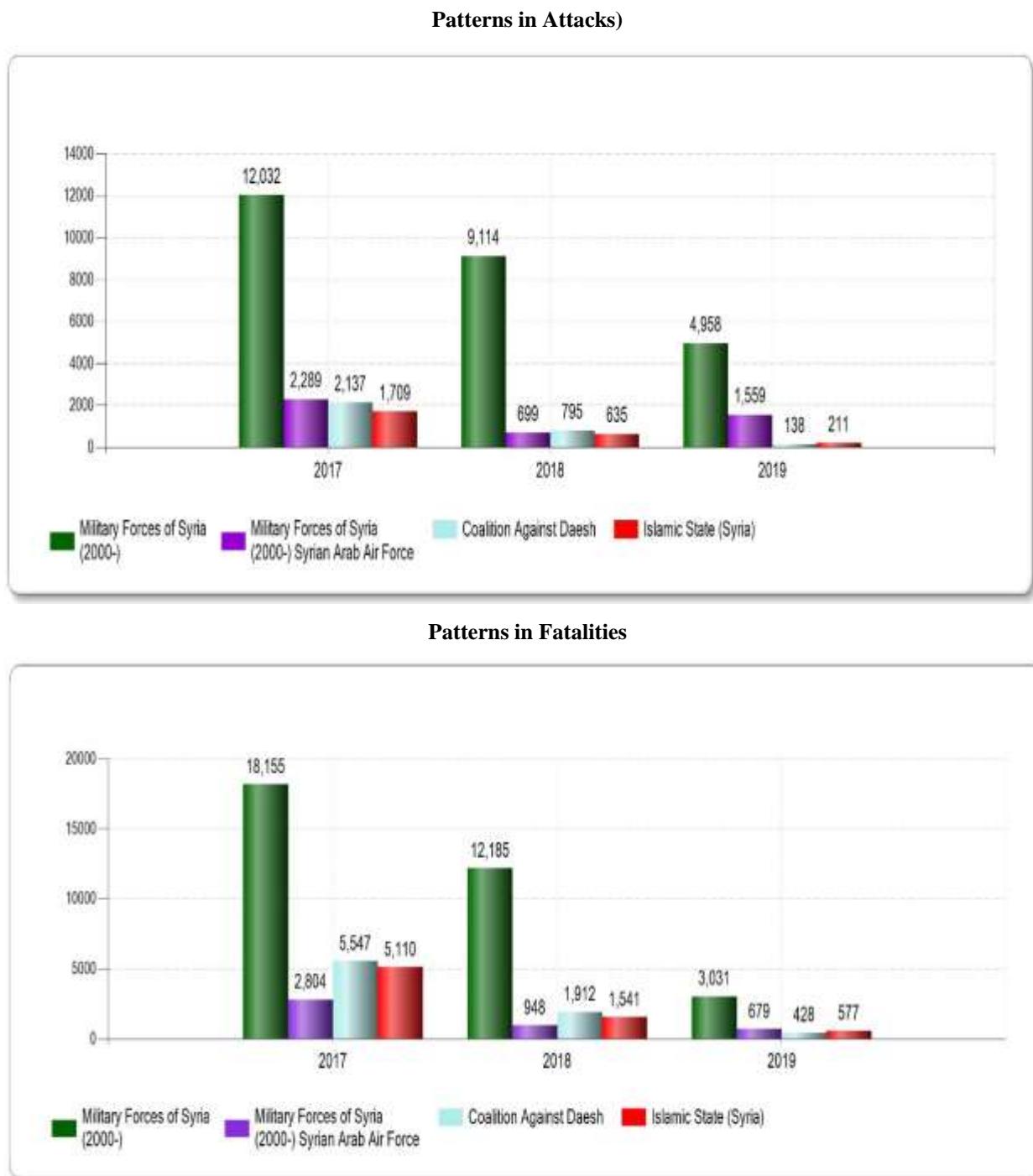
Attacks mostly concentrated in Dayr Az Zawr, down to the Iraqi borders. Also attacks in Hasaka, Ar Raqqah and North of Aleppo.

Islamic State:

Attacks mostly concentrated in Dayr Az Zawr, Hasaka and Ar-Raqqah.

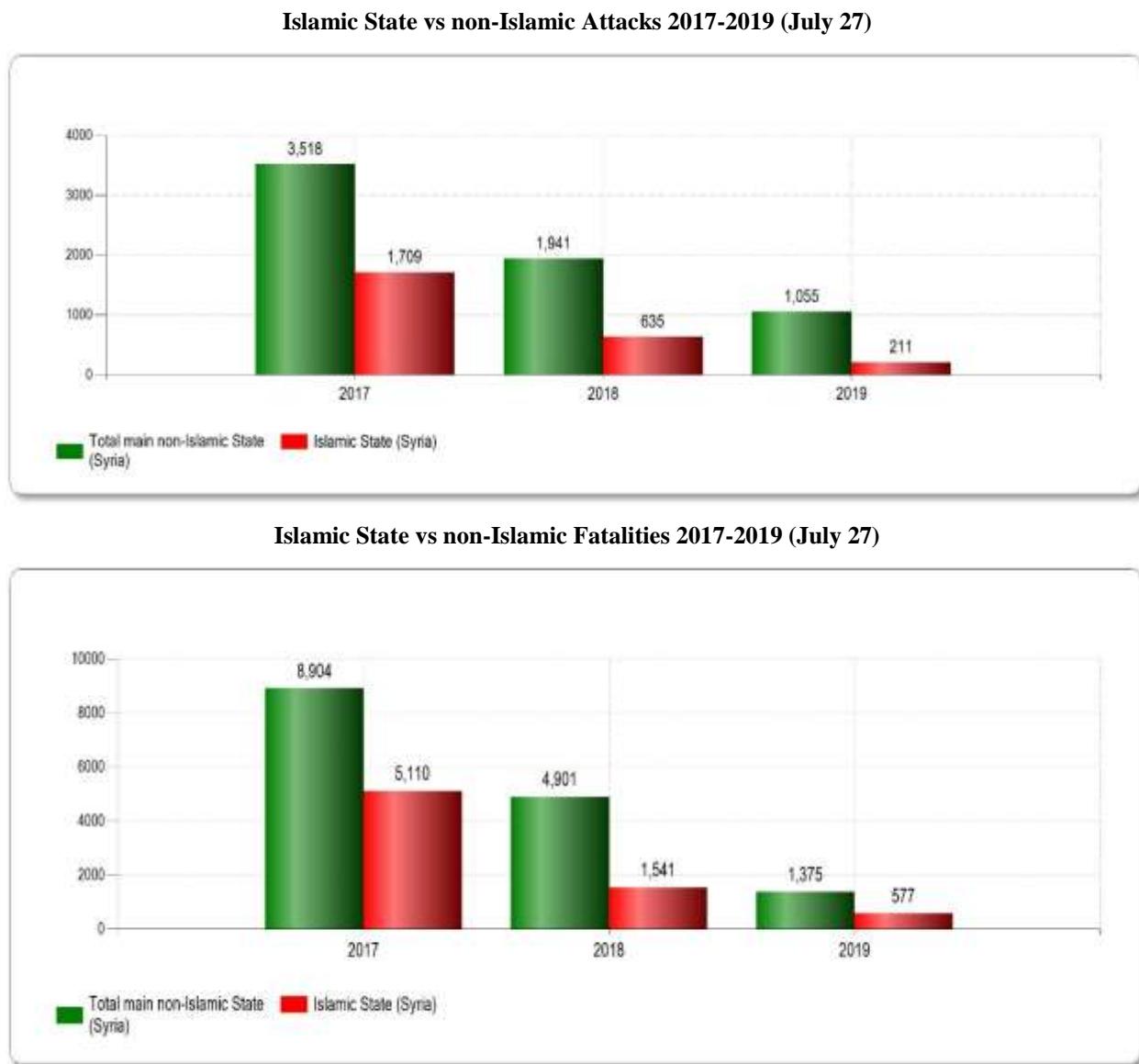
Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

Figure 5 — Part Four: Patterns in Attacks, and Facilities in Syria in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to July 27, 2019



Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

Figure 5 — Part Five: Patterns in Attacks, and Facilities by ISIS vs. Other Non-State Actors in Syria in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to July 27, 2019



Main non-Islamic groups in Syria considered in this report:

- Hayat Tahrir al Sham
- Opposition rebels in Syria
- Syria Democratic Forces

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

Figure Six: The Role of ISIS in Iraq Violence: 2017-2019

The various parts of **Figure Six** focus on the patterns of violence in Iraq. These patterns are simpler because there was no separate civil war, and the fighting involved only two major sides, regardless of the fact that some elements on the government and coalition side were hostile or had tense relations. Accordingly, it is easy to focus on the fighting that helped break up the “caliphate” and the degree to which ISIS could recover.

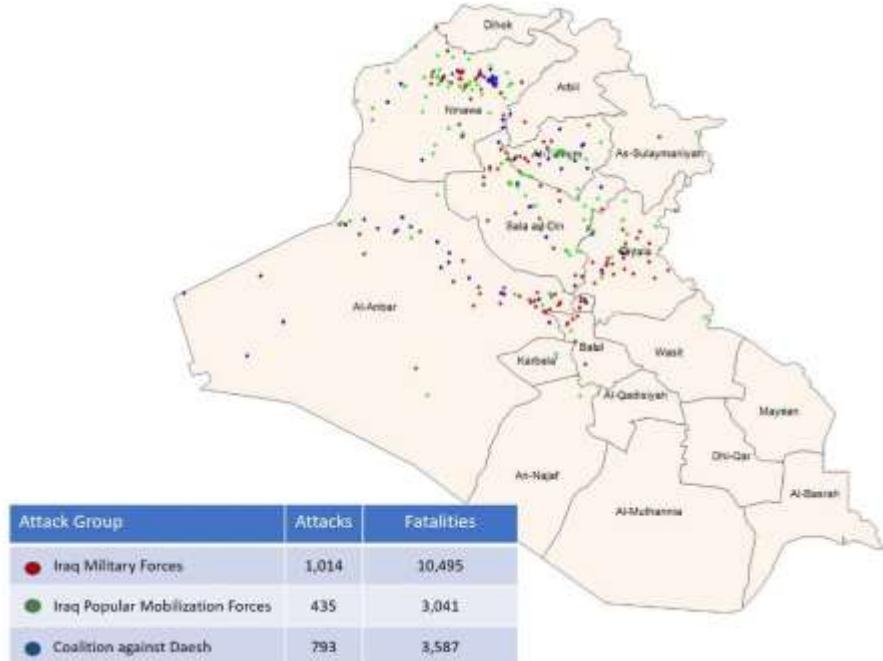
The data for 2017 in **Figure Six - Part One** again reflect the ISIS “caliphate” at one of its most successful levels of activity, but it is clear that it already faced a major challenge. It is also clear that Iraq military forces and Popular Mobilization Forces were sometimes fighting intense battles in populated areas in Northern and Western Iraq. While such estimates of fatalities are uncertain, the data show that the Iraqi government forces produced some 54% more fatalities may well be correct.

The data for 2018 in **Figure Six - Part Two** show that the ISIS “caliphate” had been put on the defensive. Attached numbers and civilian casualties are much lower on both sides.

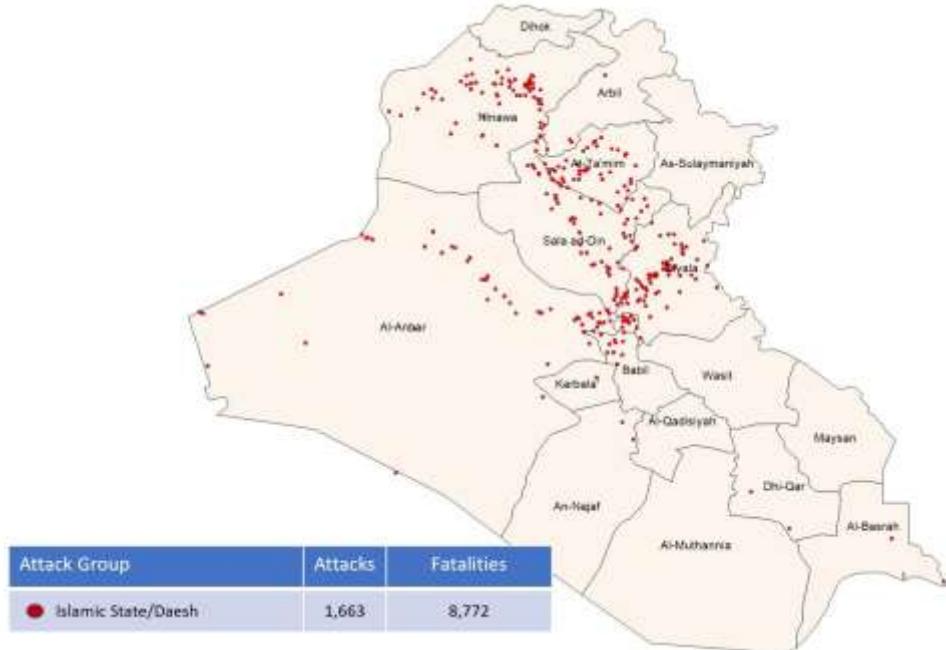
The data for 2019 through July 27th in **Figure Six - Part Three** show the impact of the breakup of the ISIS “Caliphate” and sharp reductions in government attacks. At the same time, the data show the recovery in the post “caliphate” ISIS attacks and fatalities, many of which are in Sunni areas. It is far from clear that Iraq is on the path to stability, and ISIS activity may still be supplemented by Sunni vs. Shi’ite and Arab vs. Kurd violence.

Figure Six — Part One: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Iraq in 2017

State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2017)



ISIS and Other Non-State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2017)



Iraq Military Forces:

Attacks concentrated in the North of Iraq, Babil, Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Sala ad-Din, Al-Ta'mim, and Ninawa.

Iraq Popular Mobilization Forces:

Attacks concentrated in the North of Iraq, Babil, Al-Anbar, Diyala, Sala ad-Din, Al-Ta'mim, and Ninawa.

Coalition against Daesh:

Area of operations, Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Sala ad-Din, Al-Ta'mim, and Ninawa.

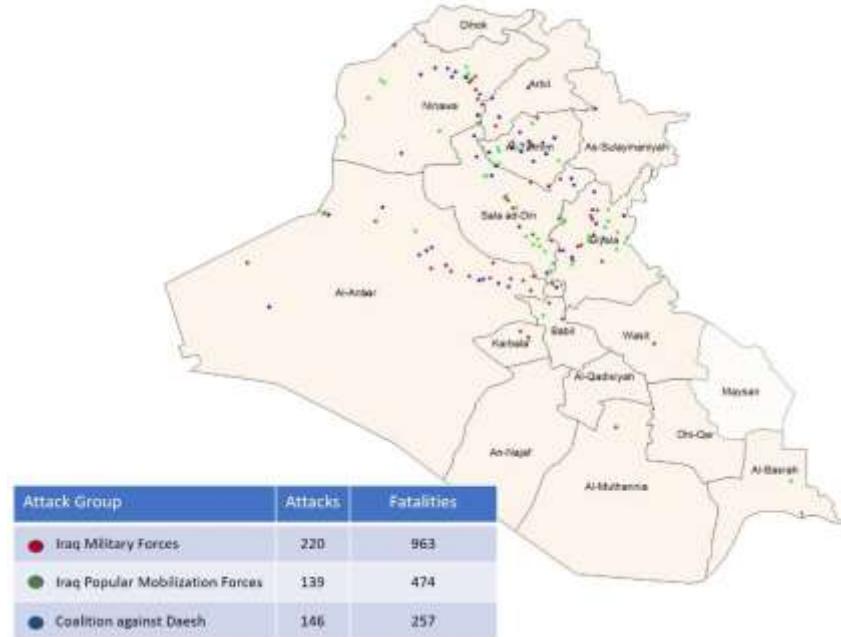
Islamic State (Iraq)/Daesh:

Concentration of attacks in Babil, Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Diyala, Sala ad-Din, Al-Ta'mim, Ninawa, Arbil.

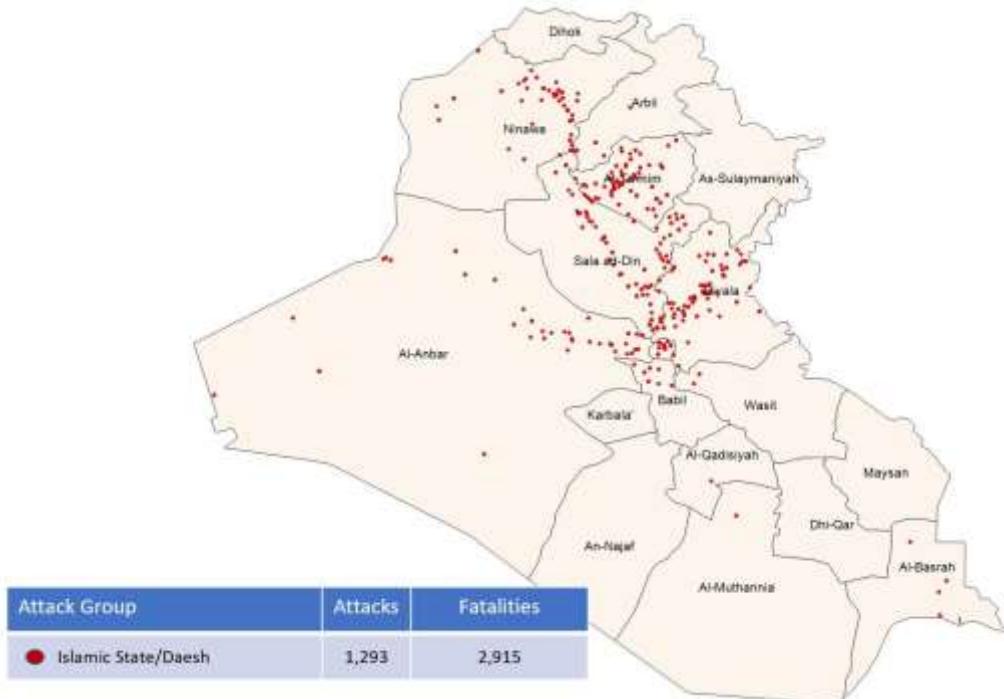
Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

Figure Six — Part Two: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Iraq in 2018

State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2018)



ISIS and Other Non-State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (2018)



Iraq Military Forces:

Areas of attack, Karbala, Babil, Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Sala Ad-Din, Diyala, Al-Ta'mim, and Ninawa.

Iraq Popular Mobilization Forces:

Areas of attacks, Babil, Baghdad, Sala ad-Din, Diyala, Al-Ta'mim, and Ninawa.

Coalition against Daesh:

Operated in Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Sala ad-Din, Diyala, Al-Ta'mim, Arbil, and Ninawa.

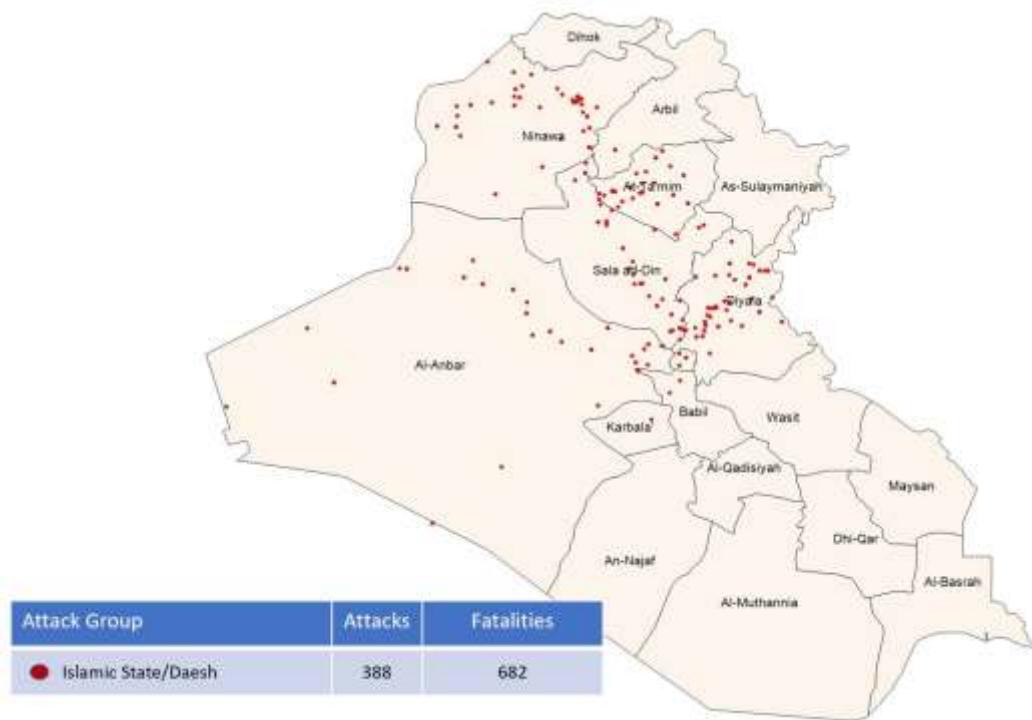
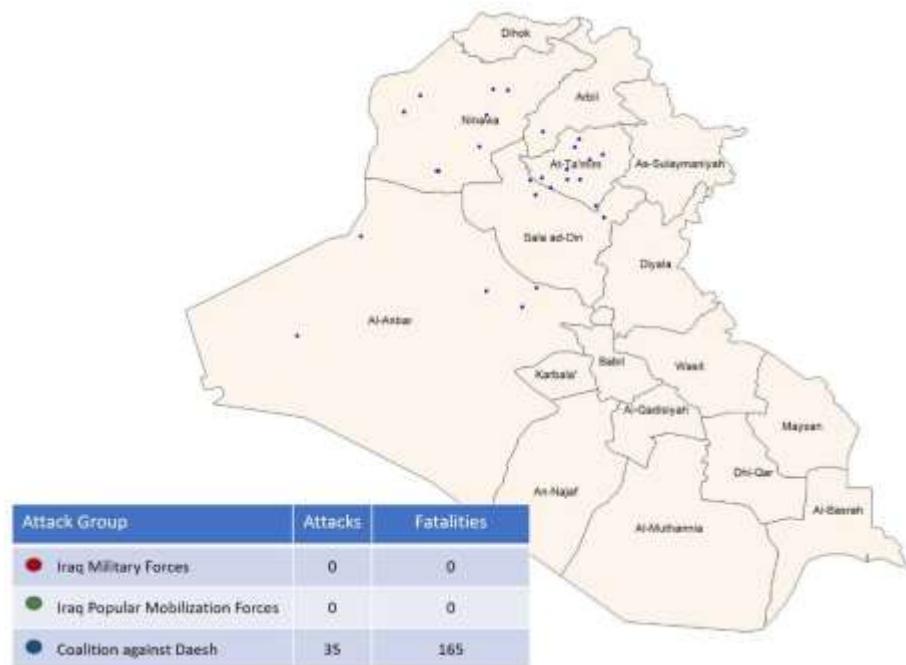
Islamic State (Iraq)/Daesh:

Attacks took place in Wasit, Babil, Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Sala as-Din, Al-Ta'mim, Ninawa, and Arbil. In the South attacks took place in Al-Basrah, Al-Muthannia, and Al-Qadisiyah.

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.)

Figure Six — Part Three: Key Forces, Attacks, and Facilities in Iraq in 2019, through July 27, 2019

State Forces, Attacks, and Fatalities (201)



Iraq Military Forces:

No attacks took place.

Iraq Popular Mobilization Forces:

No attacks took place.

Coalition against Daesh:

The Coalition Force was the only force that carried out attacks against active Daesh terrorists. Attacks took place in Al-Anbar, Sala ad-Din, Al-Ta'mim, Arbil and Ninawa.

Islamic State (Iraq)/Daesh:

Attacks took place in Karbala, Babil, Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Sala Ad-Din, Diyala, Al-Ta'mim, and Ninawa.

(Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.)

Figure Seven: The Rise, Collapse and Return of ISIS in Syria and Iraq: 2016-2019

The various parts of **Figure Seven** focus the overall pattern of ISIS violence between 2016 and July 27, 2019.

The data for 2016 in **Figure Seven - Part One** show that ISIS was focused on consolidating its position in Iraq, and pressing on Mosul and the areas near Baghdad.

The data for 2017 in **Figure Seven - Part Two** show that ISIS had made major gains in Syria, although it still focused on consolidating its position in Iraq, and pressing on Mosul and the areas near Baghdad. Most of these gains outside Western Iraq, however, consisted of attacks rather than political success and the ability to sustain any occupation of a given area.

The data for 2018 in **Figure Seven - Part Three** show that ISIS was now under acute pressure in both Iraq and Eastern Syria, and that it was attempting to relieve pressure on its core remaining “caliphate,” rather than score lasting new political gains.

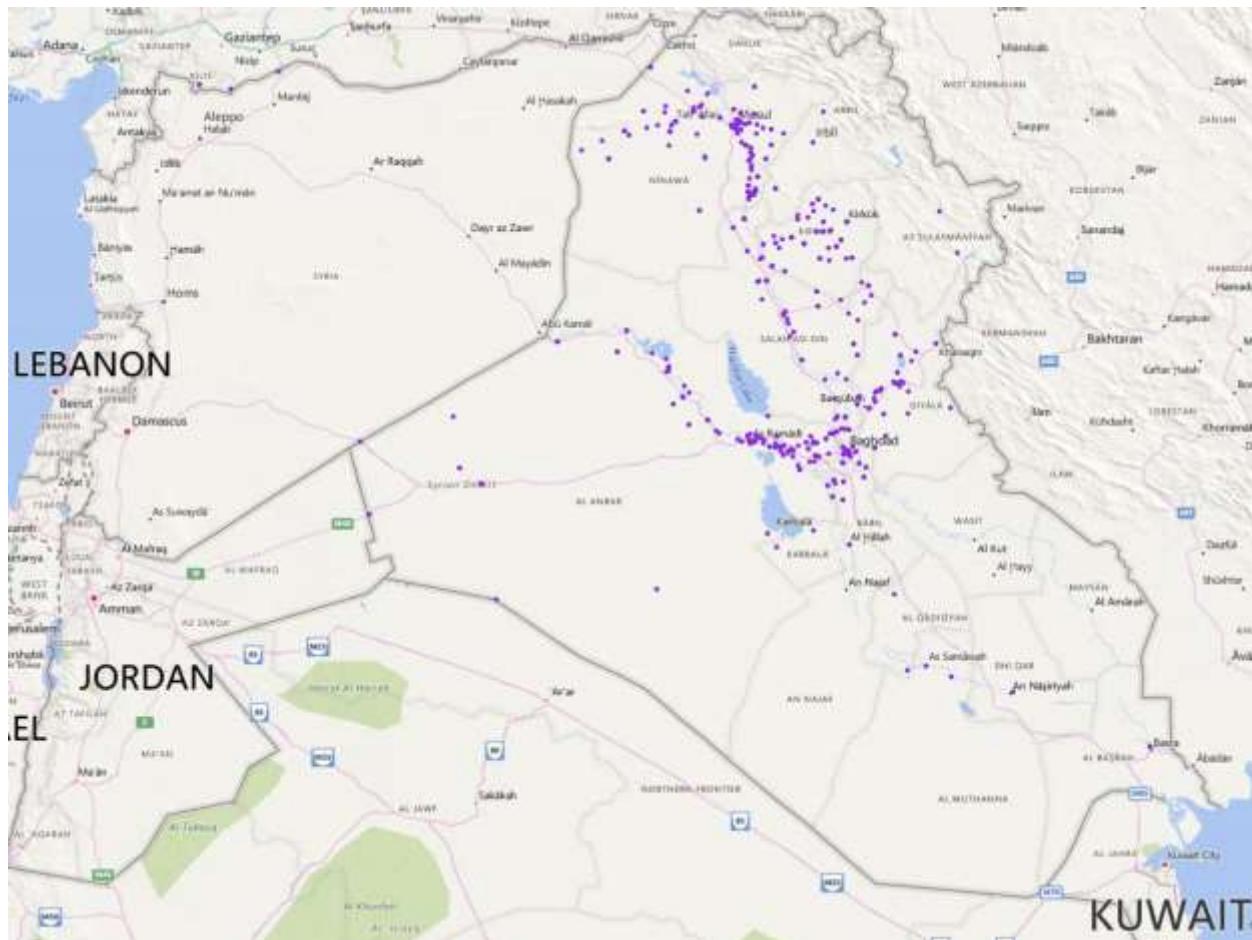
The data for 2019 through July 27 in **Figure Seven - Part Four** show that ISIS was able to carry out attacks in a wide range of areas even after it lost its last positions near its “caliphate.” It is still too early to determine how significant a lasting threat it will become, but a repressive Assad regime in Syria, and a weak and divided regime in Iraq, are clearly vulnerable.

Figure Eight: Comparisons of Violence by ISIS in Syria and Iraq: 2016-July 27, 2019

Figure Eight highlights the extent to which the attacks and fatalities causes by ISIS were dominated by the fighting in Iraq—although ISIS did score major gains in Syria in 2017.

**Figure Seven — Part One: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq
(2016-2019 July 27)**

In 2016

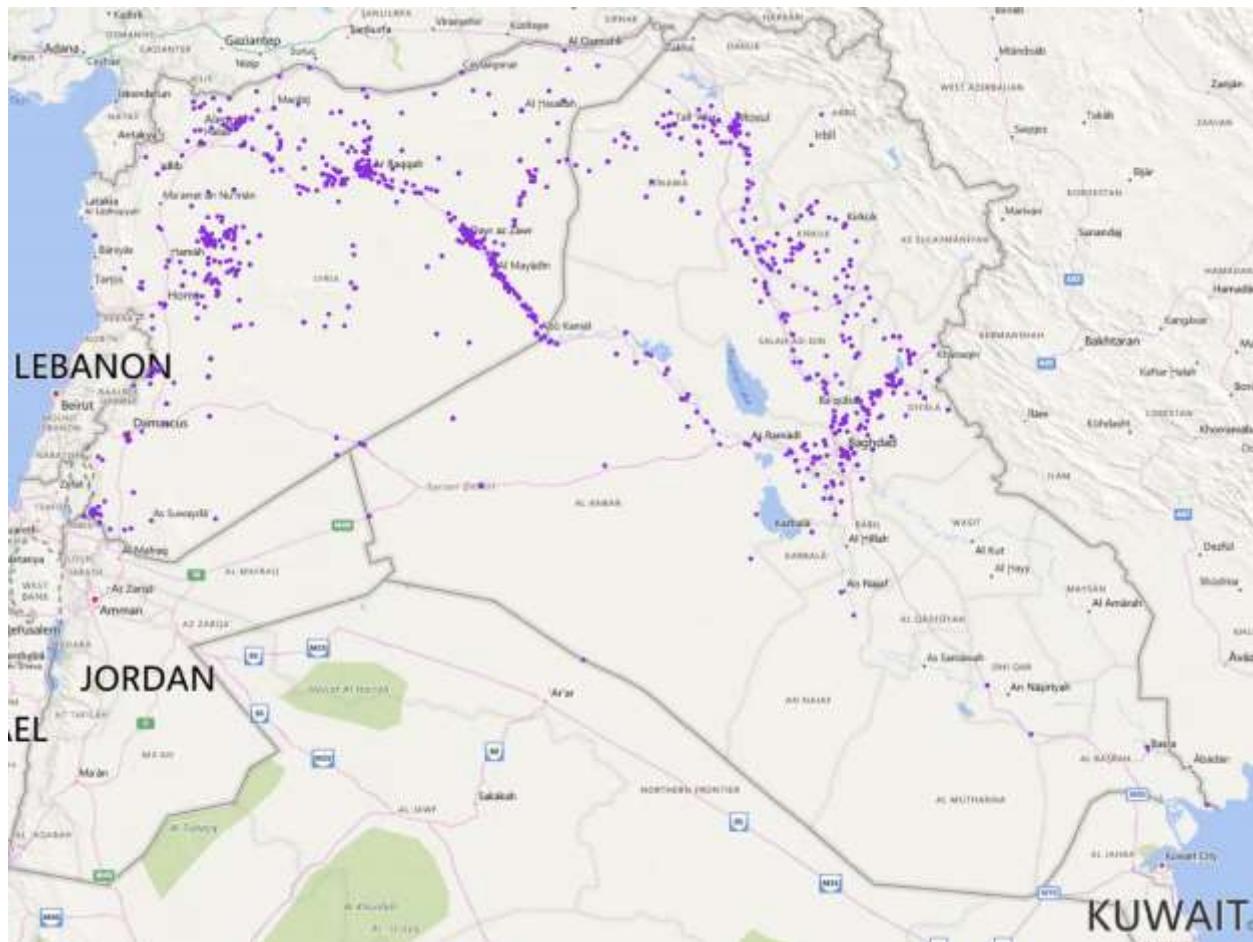


Year	Iraq Attacks/Killed	Syria Attacks/Killed
2016	1836/14086	8/15

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

**Figure Seven — Part Two: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq
(2016-2019 July 27)**

In 2017

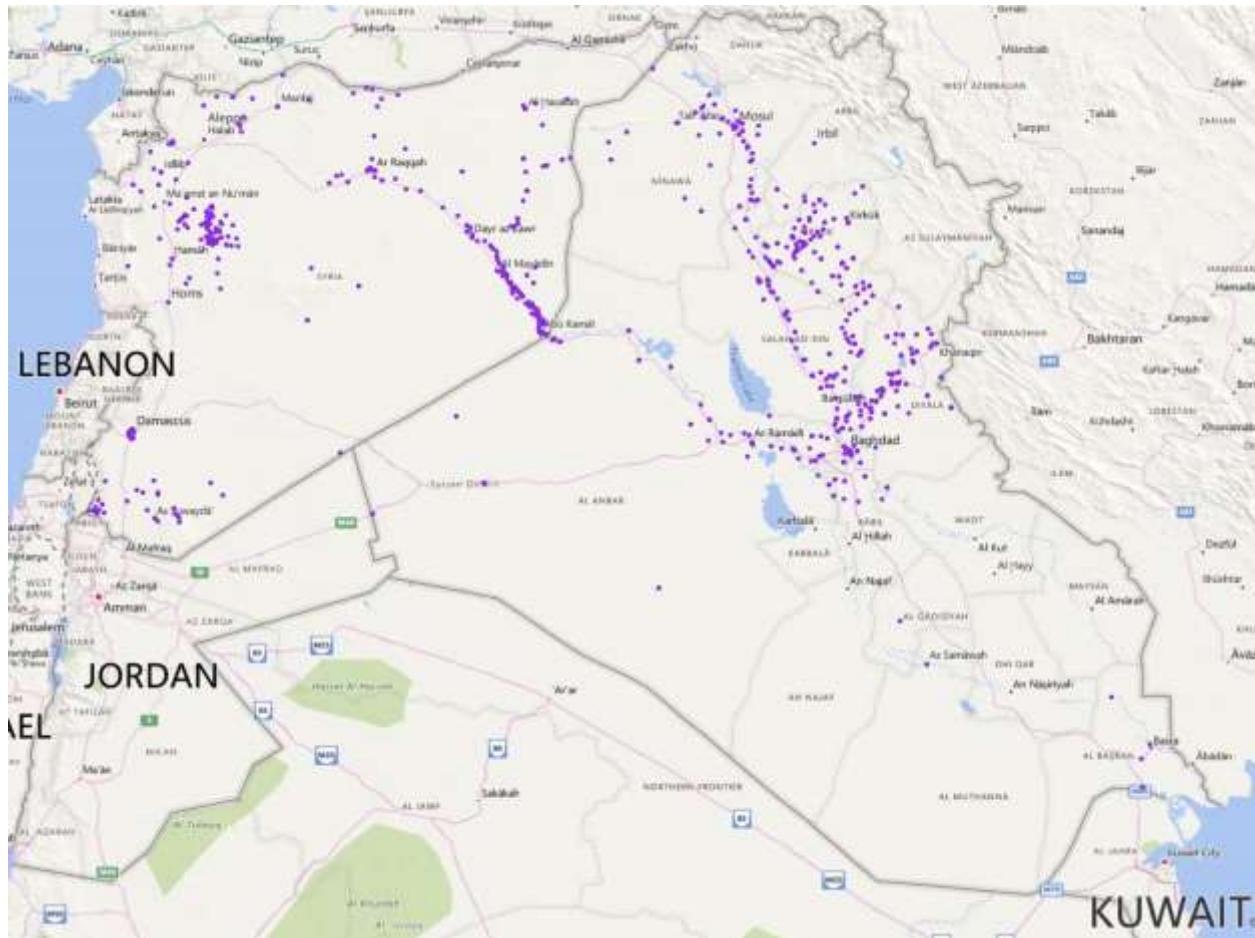


Year	Iraq Attacks/Killed	Syria Attacks/Killed
2017	1663/8772	1710/5110

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

**Figure Seven — Part Three: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq
(2016-2019 July 27)**

In 2018

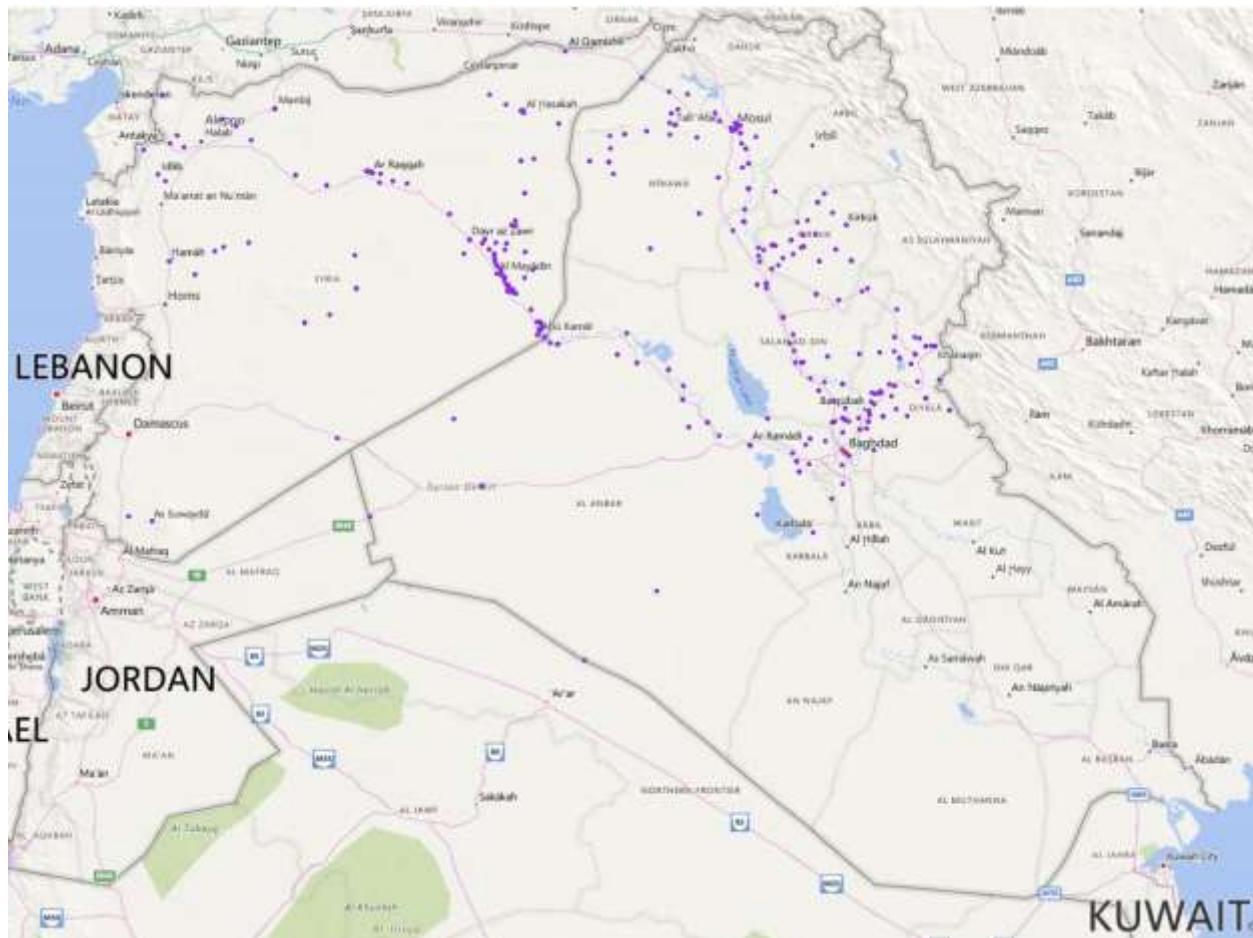


Year	Iraq Attacks/Killed	Syria Attacks/Killed
2018	1293/2915	636/1551

Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.

**Figure Seven — Part Four: Islamic State Terrorism Patterns in Syria and Iraq
(2016-2019 July 27)**

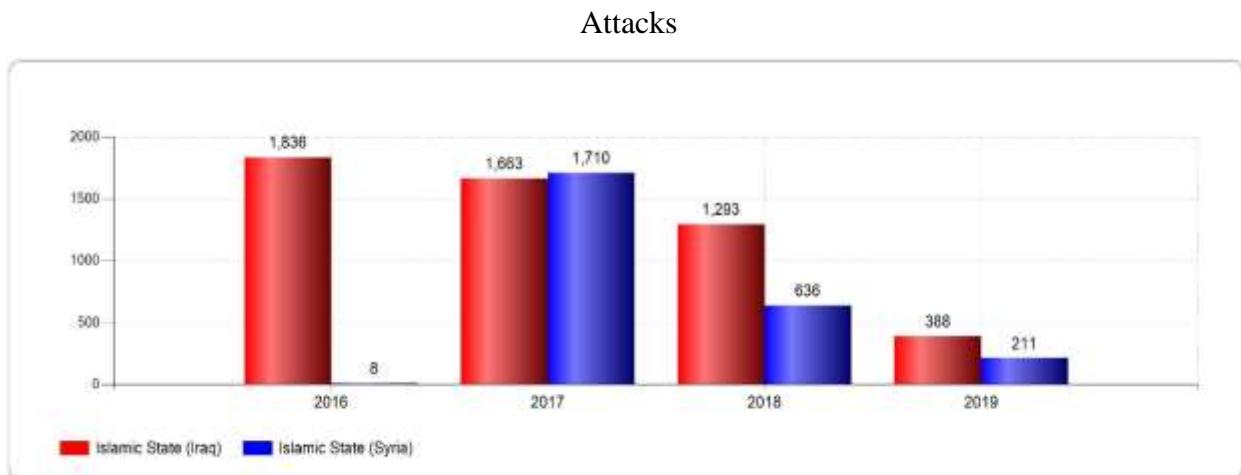
in 2019 to July 27



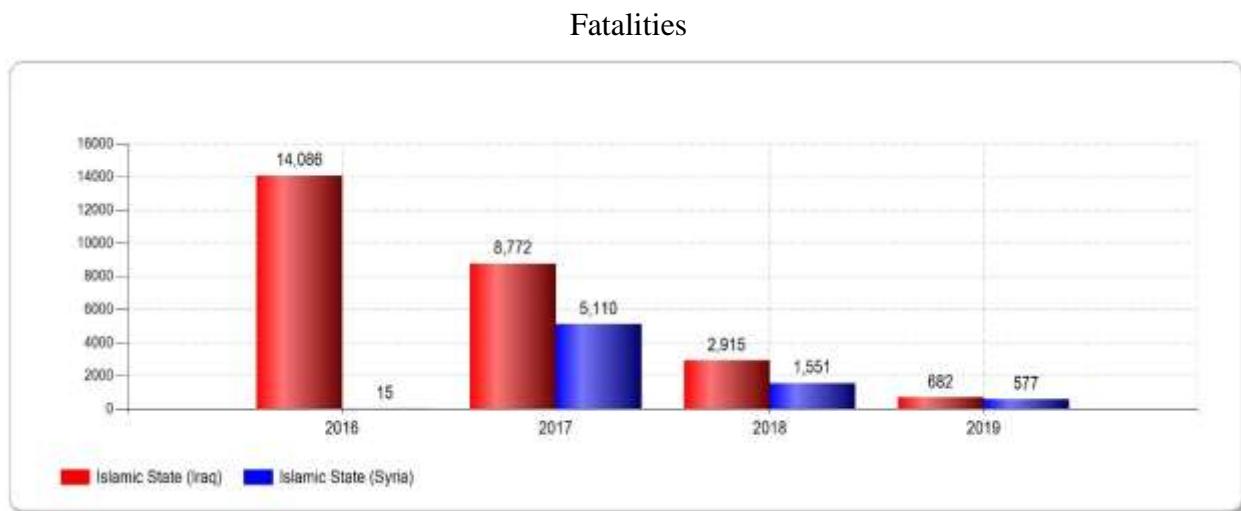
Year	Iraq Attacks/Killed	Syria Attacks/Killed
2019 July 27	388/682	211/577

(Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.)

Figure Eight: Islamic State Iraq vs Syria Attacks and Fatalities through 2016-2019 July 27



(Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.)



(Source: "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com", graphics developed by Abdullah Toukan using the SIRA model.)