

The Role of the Islamic State in the Assad Regime's Strategy for Survival

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Without years of tolerance and outright support from Damascus, the terrorist network could not have evolved into the powerful organization it became over the past decade.

The following is an excerpt from *The Fight Against Terrorism: Achievements and Challenges* (Bruylant, 2021), a *liber amicorum* compilation prepared by Christiane Hohn, Isabel Saavedra, and Anne Weyembergh in honor of EU counterterrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove. To read the full chapter, download the PDF above or [visit the original publisher's website \(https://www.larcier.com/fr/la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-ses-acquis-et-ses-defis-the-fight-against-terrorism-achievements-and-challenges-2021-9782802768890.html\)](https://www.larcier.com/fr/la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-ses-acquis-et-ses-defis-the-fight-against-terrorism-achievements-and-challenges-2021-9782802768890.html).

It may seem contrary to conventional wisdom, but the regime of Bashar al-Assad has consistently supported the Islamic State terrorist group even as the regime struggles to retake control of Syrian territory from the various rebel groups engaged in the Syria civil war. ISIS has been fighting in Syria since its precursor organization sent operatives into the country from Iraq in 2011. But the Assad regime took the strategic decision to enable and facilitate the continued survival of the Islamic State in Syria in an effort to paint all of the Syrian opposition as “terrorists.” This included both passive support, such as deciding not to target ISIS positions, and active support, such as releasing terrorists from Syrian prisons and helping to bankroll the group by purchasing oil from ISIS and wheat from areas that ISIS was able to tax. In fact, Syrian government support for the terrorist network goes back many years, to include support for foreign fighters traveling through Syria to join al Qaeda in Iraq, making it the group’s earliest and most significant state sponsor... ❖

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