

Remaining, Waiting for Expansion (Again): The Islamic State's Operations in Iraq and Syria

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](/experts/aaron-y-zelin)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](/experts/aaron-y-zelin)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Gloria and Ken Levy Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



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Despite the group's expansion in other parts of the world, its original base in Iraq and Syria remains relevant due to the area's uncertain status quo and the looming prospect of U.S. military withdrawals.

Over the past few years, focus on the Islamic State has rightfully expanded beyond its original territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria. Many of the activities that animated the organization's core have been carbon copied to varying degrees by its global provincial network, with IS's General Directorate of Provinces encouraging territorial control and governance, foreign fighter mobilization, and external operations planning. Today, the Islamic State controls territory and has governance projects at different levels in four African countries—Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, and Mozambique—as well as small foreign fighter mobilizations in these countries and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. More immediate from a Western security perspective is the growth in external operations from the Islamic State's Khurasan Province (ISKP). These issues will remain at the forefront of security discussions related to the future of the Islamic State. However, the original Islamic State base in Iraq and Syria remains relevant due to its historical importance and the uncertain status quo in the region since IS lost full territorial control in Syria in 2019, especially when considering the future of U.S. military presence in the region...

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