

What this is:

This report is the product of academic research. As the IC's university, NIU is uniquely positioned to use academic approaches to research—and report on—subjects of interest to the community.

What this is not:

Research Shorts are not finished intelligence and are not IC-coordinated. The opinions expressed are solely the author's and do not represent those of the National Intelligence University, Defense Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, or any other U.S. Government agency.

RESEARCH SHORT

INSIGHT Sharing academic research

March 17, 2021



IMAGE FROM SHUTTERSTOCK

Islamic State Resurgence in the Era of COVID-19

Dr. Stacey Pollard, Henry Baraket, Girish Ganesan, and Natalie Kim

One year after U.S.-led coalition operations liberated ISIS-held territories in Iraq and Syria and killed ISIS core leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS is resurging. Taking a page from its old playbook, the organization is capitalizing on social unrest and a rapidly deteriorating security environment—exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—to reconstitute in permissive areas of Iraq and Syria. This *Short* examines ISIS's pandemic-era ground and information operations through the lens of its state- and nation-making efforts to help analysts and decisionmakers better understand the imminence and scope of the threat. ISIS is rapidly overcoming U.S.-supported counterterrorism gains and, without direct pressure to reverse these advances, is poised for recovery.

Background: Analytic Oversight and the 2014 Ascent of ISIS

In June 2014, U.S. and partner intelligence and national security strategists were surprised when ISIS exploited state and nation failures in Iraq and Syria to establish the so-called Islamic Caliphate. This 280,000 km² area from Aleppo, Syria, to Diyala, Iraq was home to 10 million people.³ Although deteriorating Iraqi and Syrian operational environments had raised concerns about the fragility of these countries, analysts missed the opportunities these conditions provided a violent extremist organization with transnational state-making ambitions.⁴ In contrast to the ambitions of traditional insurgent groups, which aim to overthrow an established government and win over local populations through state- and nation-building, ISIS aimed to redraw territorial boundaries and reinvent national identities.⁵ Its swift ascent can be attributed to its ability to accomplish what no other Sunni insurgent group had—establishing an Islamic state rooted in a defensible territory that transcended internationally recognized state borders.⁶ Unlike the Taliban’s primitive military-religious emirate or al-Qaida’s oversight of its global terror franchise network from Sudanese, Afghan, and Pakistani safe havens, ISIS built a transnational proto-state, supplanting regional state systems and performing all the roles of a nation-state despite lacking international recognition and access to legitimate economies.⁷ By exploiting state collapse, ISIS invented a new state and nation from the ashes of old ones,⁸ making ISIS the most formidable insurgent force in Iraq, Syria, and the largely Salafi-jihadi world.⁹

Counterterrorism scholars note ISIS created its nation-state by capturing and defending territory; raising revenue to support institutions and war efforts; building government systems to sustain gains; and cultivating a shared sense of citizenship.^{10, 11} Analysis of artifacts from the 2014-era project shows ISIS’s comprehensive approach to becoming a full-fledged state with a military apparatus and institutionalized—albeit ruthless and totalitarian—government overseeing taxation, an oil-based economy, a healthcare system, social services, and a rigid ISIS ideology-indoctrinating education curriculum.^{12, 13, 14} In 2015, the U.S. Congressional Research Service reported that ISIS had \$2 billion to pay for military operations, salaries, infrastructure, and social services.¹⁵

States fail when a government’s inability to deliver political goods to citizens undermines the legitimacy and existence of the state. These goods include security, a legal system to adjudicate disputes, economic and communication infrastructures, social services, and opportunities to participate in the political process.¹

Nations fail when cultural projections of nationhood are unconvincing and the population lacks consensus on cultural traditions, customs, symbols, rituals, and historical experiences, which allow competing, often mutually exclusive, nationalisms to emerge that seek to replace the common identity.²

Horizon Scan: ISIS’s Prospects for Reclaiming a National Identity

In 2019, the U.S.-led coalition liberated ISIS-held territories in Iraq and Syria—dismantling the physical caliphate, minimizing its ability to extract revenue, and eliminating its government. Although decentralized and globally dispersed, the organization is loyal to new ISIS-core leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, and the caliphate maintains a national identity. This study considers prospects for ISIS to reclaim its territory in Iraq and Syria. The

literature indicates the crucial first step in nation-state making is capturing territory and exercising a monopoly of force over it. ISIS's ability to do this relied on a permissive regional environment; organizational prowess (through military competition); strategic selection of territorial and political targets; and ideological uniformity and motivation.¹⁶ We will assess pandemic-era conditions in Iraq and Syria and ISIS's ground and information operations against those criteria—adding the reassertion of shared citizenship.

Permissive Conditions: Insecurity Exacerbated by Pandemic in Iraq and Syria

Pandemic-accelerated U.S. and coalition drawdowns and diversions of forces are creating security vacuums in Iraq and Syria. Iraq's fractured security forces are overwhelmed by popular unrest, Iranian attacks against U.S. targets in Iraq, and clashes between Iranian-backed militias and Iraqi forces. In Syria, the coalition-backed, Kurdish-dominated Syrian Defense Forces (SDF) are beset by Turkish incursions in the north and are battling regime-affiliated and violent extremist challengers Syria-wide. In some areas, SDF are struggling to provide security to local ethnic and sectarian populations that dispute the Forces' legitimacy.

Iraq: A Disintegrating Social Contract

Iraq's failure to contain COVID-19 has only added to existing disillusion with the government that has made it difficult to implement and enforce pandemic protocols or manage the economy.¹⁷ Iraq has had 13,204 deaths among more than 650,000 cases, although these numbers are difficult to confirm because medical personnel are forbidden to publicly discuss the situation.¹⁸ Declining oil prices and pandemic-associated economic losses have thrown millions of Iraqis into poverty. The World Bank estimates the two crises have pushed 5.5 million more Iraqis below the poverty line.¹⁹ The UN estimates 300,000 people live in crowded camps without healthcare—risking a severe COVID-19 outbreak and humanitarian crisis.²⁰ These abysmal conditions intensify the Iraqi' distrust of Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's newly formed government, further eroding the country's disintegrating social contract. October 1, 2019, marked the start of a massive Iraqi resistance movement led by young Shia men demanding better job opportunities, better essential services, accountability for state security forces, and an end to political corruption influenced by foreign powers, especially Iran.²¹ The unarmed protesters wave Iraqi flags and call for a united, nonsectarian Iraq and enjoy broad, pan-sectarian support,²² in contrast to elements of the Iraqi security forces that worsen sectarian divides and fly flags of poorly regulated, often Iranian-linked militia groups.²³ After several violent clashes, demonstrators see the Iraqi forces as an extension of the corrupt government.²⁴

Syria: Unprepared for COVID-19 Challenges

Syria is unprepared to cope with the pandemic challenges. The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Syrian is unknown because the Health Ministry tightly controls the data. However, citing independently gathered data, the UK-based NGO Syria Relief declared a COVID-19 emergency there in October 2020 and called for international aid. Syria's civil war destroyed 40 percent of its medical facilities—depleting the infrastructure needed to cope with the

pandemic. The risk of an outbreak is high among the two million displaced people living in crowded camps that lack the healthcare capacity to control the virus.²⁵ Because Iranian, Russian, and Chinese aid meets only a fraction of Syria’s needs,²⁶ the country has looked to oil-rich nations like Kuwait, which gave \$4 million to UNICEF’s Syrian COVID-19 effort in November.²⁷ Measures to contain the virus created economic turmoil and civil unrest when food prices skyrocketed, the value of the Syrian pound dropped, and the cost of living soared.²⁸ At a monthly median state salary of \$97, few can afford \$4 masks, \$6 hand sanitizer, and \$300 oxygen cylinders.²⁹ Animosity toward the regime has grown even in strongholds like Damascus, where rare civilian protests are taking place. People are skirting restrictions to air grievances on social media.

COMPARING PERMISSIVE CONDITIONS

2014 ERA: ISIS evolved by capitalizing on post-Arab Spring destabilization, the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, and spillover effects of the Syrian civil war. The sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia groupings in Iraq allowed ISIS to offer an alternative to the increasingly Shia-dominated government. As uprisings erupted across the Arab world, ISIS infiltrated Syria, exploiting longstanding animosities between the Sunni majority and President Assad’s repressive Shia-Alawite minority regime and offering stability relative to the civil war chaos.

COVID-19 IMPACT: COVID-19’s spread is allowing ISIS to exploit insecurity, weak governance, and social unrest in Iraq and Syria. Iraqi Security Forces’ violence against Iraqis protesting against Iranian influence is aggravating sectarian tension. Pandemic-associated security vacuums and fraying social fabrics are allowing ISIS to move between western Iraq and central Syria and restore access to critical infrastructure and networks. ISIS is increasing attacks and information operations to exacerbate ethno-sectarianism, discredit both governments, and hasten Iraqi and Syrian state and nation failure.

ISIS Ground Operations Target Weaknesses To Reclaim Caliphate

In August 2020, the UN estimated 10,000 active ISIS militants were in Iraq and Syria, a third of their presence in 2014.^{30, 31} Although ISIS has lost its monopoly of force in once held areas, fighters are regrouping along a rural belt across Kirkuk, Salahuddin, and Diyala provinces—including territories Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government claim.³² The COVID-19-associated suspension of Iraqi and SDF patrols and intelligence collection in Iraq and Syria allows ISIS to reinfiltate old stomping grounds where disaffection with government and U.S.-supported forces is growing.³³ Overburdened security forces and the reopened Iraq-Syria border allow ISIS to move more freely, reengage in illicit cross-border activity, carry out more sophisticated attacks, conduct prison breaks, and negotiate the release of fighters and families from prisons.³⁴ Increased attacks in Iraq and Syria show ISIS’s desire to hasten instability.³⁵

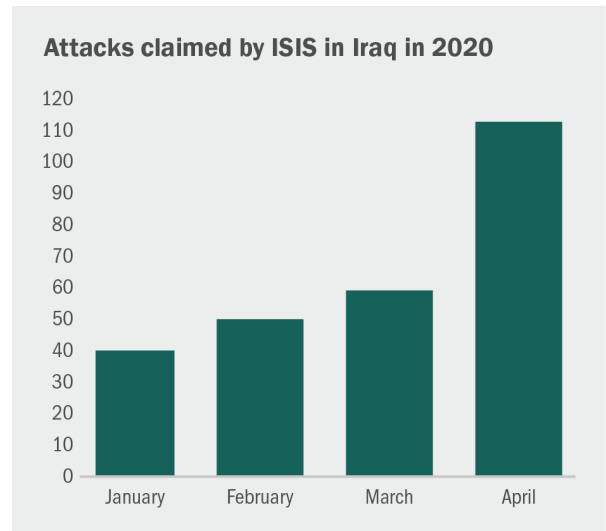
Figure 1 shows that guerrilla-style IED detonations grew under ISIS’s declared “battle of attrition” against Iraqi security forces.³⁶ This includes two incidents of simultaneously

detonated IEDs on February 22 and March 12 near military and police installations, intensifying pressure on Iraqi Security Forces.^{37, 38} ISIS claimed responsibility for 269 shootings, raids, ambushes of security forces, roadside bombs, and killing of informants in Iraq during Ramadan (April 23-May 23). In August, ISIS fighters killed four SDF members in Syria,³⁹ and in January 2021 two ISIS suicide bombers killed 32 and wounded over 100 civilians in a Baghdad market, the first such attack since January 2018.⁴⁰

Figure 2 shows that ISIS attacks in Aleppo, Deir Ez Zor, Hama, Homs, and Raqqa have doubled or more since 2019.⁴¹ In early March, ISIS and pro-regime Syrian forces clashed over control of a road between Raqqa and Homs, which has had the greatest number of attacks since summer 2020, including the slaying of 10 shepherds, the capture of a large Syrian Arab Army outpost, and an attack on a joint Syrian-Russian station in November.⁴²

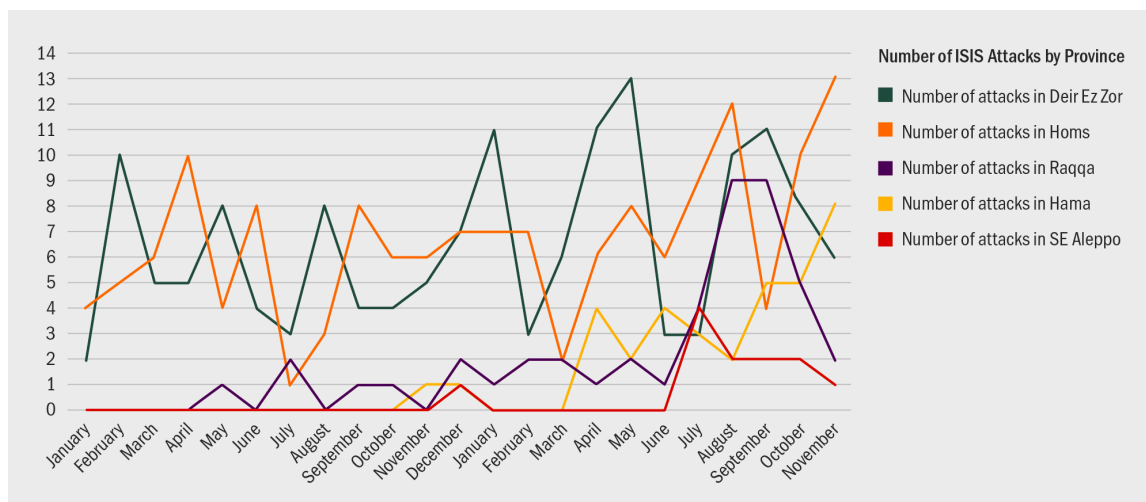
That month, overwhelmed SDF units released ISIS leaders and families from Syria's overcrowded prisons, including former ISIS leader of public relations, Abd al-Hamid al-Dairi. While 23 former ISIS fighters were released under tribal guarantees that prevent their rejoining ISIS, 515 freed family members had no guarantees.⁴³ In December, ISIS killed a Syrian mayor and at least 29 pro-Syrian regime fighters, and injured 25 more in Deir Ez Zor, Hama, and Homs provinces, showing resurgent organizational prowess and increasingly sophisticated attacks.

Figure 1. Dramatic Rise in Attacks Claimed by ISIS in Iraq



Sources: BBC Monitoring, based on data gathered from ISIS media outlets. Mina al-Lami, "Jihadists See COVID-19 as an Opportunity," Global Network on Extremism & Technology, June 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/06/01/jihadists-see-covid-19-as-an-opportunity/>.

Figure 2. Dramatic Rise in Attacks Claimed by ISIS in Syria



Source: Gregory Waters, "ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2020," December 1, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/blog/isis-redux-central-syria-insurgency-november-2020>.

ISIS Information Operations To Restore ISIS National Identity

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has revived ISIS-core information operations as the organization attempts to capitalize on deteriorating conditions to advance its nation-rebuilding ambitions. ISIS is using insurgent operators and media platforms to amplify pandemic-exacerbated insecurity in Iraq and Syria; erode Iraqis' and Syrians' sense of citizenship; galvanize ideological uniformity and motivation among its ranks; and reclaim ISIS national identity. The organization is using word-of-mouth influence activities, propaganda material, social media campaigns, and ISIS publications to renew a commitment to action among ISIS followers and promote narratives already reinvigorated by the pandemic's erosion of the region's material, political, and ideological conditions. ISIS's well-funded online recruitment—reserves are estimated at \$50-300 million—has emphasized increased urgency.⁴⁴

Reinforcing and Advancing Ideological Narratives

ISIS's pandemic narrative has been consistent with the group's broader ideological underpinnings. A February 2020 editorial in the Islamic State newspaper *Al-Naba* called COVID-19 “God's wrath.”^{45,46} It also claimed the virus arose from China's mistreatment of its Uyghur Muslims and that Iran's outbreak was punishment for Shia Muslim idolatry.⁴⁷ ISIS's “divine wrath” narrative claims its enemies—the Iraqi and Syrian governments, the United States, and other Western countries—are vulnerable.⁴⁸ Another *Al-Naba* editorial, “The Crusaders' Worst Nightmare,” describes the West as fearful ISIS fighters will escalate military operations or terrorist attacks against the West's apostate Muslim allies whose security and medical institutions have reached the limits of their capacity.^{49,50} The editorial claims that “Crusader” powers cannot handle new burdens as they struggle with the pandemic and economic recession and that they fear Russian or Chinese gains at their expense.^{51,52}

Open Calls to Action

Despite operational challenges and pandemic-induced mobility restrictions, ISIS aims for tangible action, while other extremist groups have focused on idealist messaging and gaining popular support.⁵³ Although ISIS advises travel cautions to avoid illness, its media outlets use COVID-19 to urge followers to attack security forces, encourage detainees' release, and contribute funds. The “Crusaders” editorial implored supporters to liberate Muslim captives from prisons and camps and attack “infidels” because the calamity befalling the West and its allies will prevent them from resisting ISIS's resurgence. The editorial urged obedience to avoid God's punishment—including coronavirus—and that God's most beloved act of obedience is inflicting pain on His enemies.”^{54,55} These directives have spurred security threats, particularly in SDF-controlled camps and prisons where COVID-19 adds urgency. Detainees use online messaging and social media platforms to share grievances and call for support: some in al-Hawl camp launched social media campaigns to raise money for detainees' families.⁵⁶ ISIS operators are also reaching into camps, prisons, and other deteriorating areas to seek out vulnerable recruits and reindoctrinate former followers.⁵⁷

ISIS Nation- and State-making in the COVID-19 Era

ISIS appears poised for recovery, given the release of ISIS leaders, fighters, and families from camps and prisons; permissive conditions in Iraq and Syria; and lack of direct pressure on the group. Sophisticated and targeted attacks by an expanding, ideologically unified militant force will enable ISIS to reclaim territory, populations, and resources. Past ISIS nation-making success was based on dogmatic compliance with its principles, adhering to the notions of religious imperative and divine inevitability.⁵⁸ ISIS media's framing of COVID-19 as "divine punishment" builds on this national identity, and the group is likely to reap the ideological gains. By portraying enemy nations as weak, ISIS may be able to energize its followers to act.⁵⁹ Calls to action in SDF-run camps unite followers under a common cause, "cultivating a shared sense of citizenship within this establishment."⁶⁰

In addition to reclaiming its national identity, ISIS can bolster its state-making capacity through numerous competitive advantages the virus has brought to light. ISIS's media portrayal of COVID-19 now exposes many of the same economic, social, and sectarian crises that enabled the group's rise to power. The influx of media surrounding ISIS detainees "underscores the narrative that coalition forces are not able to take care of the people."⁶¹ Such narratives provide powerful mechanisms to strengthen ISIS's political foothold in the region. With the unprecedented pressure COVID is imposing on these already fragile states, indications of state and security sector collapse should signal to analysts a rise in the likelihood that ISIS will swiftly resurrect the caliphate—this time embodying the war- and pandemic-hardened second generation of an Islamic state. Although ISIS's current approach to nation- and state-making is similar to its previous efforts, COVID-19 deepens the grievances on which the organization's influence depends.⁶² Experts also postulate that pandemic-induced feelings of isolation and uncertainty may create circumstances especially amenable to ideological radicalization—potentially broadening the caliphate's citizenry.⁶³

Dr. Stacey Pollard, Director of the Caracristi Institute for Intelligence Research and Center for Designing Intelligence Research, specializes in conflict in the Middle East and North Africa.

Henry Baraket is pursuing an M.S. in national security studies at New Jersey City University, with interests in research, political philosophy, and advancing liberty. He has lived in the Middle East, where he earned a B.A. in political science and international affairs. **Girish Ganesan**, a Rutgers University sophomore majoring in computer science and mathematics, is interested in applying quantitative and statistical techniques to natural and social sciences problems. **Natalie Kim**, a senior at Rutgers University majoring in electrical engineering and mathematics, is interested in applying quantitative and technological tools to problems in the social sciences. The students completed this research as part of the IC Center for Academic Excellence (IC CAE) program at Rutgers University. The IC CAE program, under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, engages in research involving subjects of interest to the IC.

If you have comments, questions, or a suggestion for a *Research Short* topic or article, please contact the NIU Office of Research at NIU_OOR@dodiis.mil.

Endnotes

- 1 R.I. Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators,” in *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003).
- 2 Armin von Bogdandy et al., “State-Building, Nation-Building, and Constitutional Politics in Post-Conflict Situations: Conceptual Clarifications and an Appraisal of Different Approaches,” in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law, Volume 9*, ed. A. Bogdandy and R. Wolfrum (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 579–613.
- 3 Cameron Glen et al., “Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State,” Wilson Center, October 28, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-rise-and-spread-the-islamic-state>.
- 4 Stacey E. Pollard, David Poplack, and Kevin Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages: Remaking State and Nationhood in the Middle East and North Africa,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2015): 1045-65, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2015.1108310?journalCode=ftpv20>
- 5 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 6 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 7 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 8 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 9 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 10 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 11 This model combines Charles Tilly’s early criteria for state making in, Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back in*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), with his later work on the role of nationalism in state-making in, Charles Tilly, “The State of Nationalism,” *Critical Review* 10 (1996): 299–306.
- 12 Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents,” Aymenn Tamimi’s Blog, January 27, 2015, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents>.
- 13 Charles Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State,” Brookings Institution, November 2014.
- 14 Researchers such as Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, Shadi Hamid, Kenneth Pollack, Charles Lister, and Graeme Wood (among many others) have published prolifically on the Islamic State.
- 15 Carla E. Humud, Robert Pirog, and Liana Rosen, “Islamic State Financing and U.S. Policy Approaches,” Congressional Research Service, 2015.
- 16 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, “Understanding the Islamic State’s Competitive Advantages.”
- 17 Abbas Abboud Salem, “Iraq Faces Coronavirus with Empty Coffers and a Crumbling Health System,” Washington Institute, August 13, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/iraq-coronavirus-corona-covid-covid19-health>.
- 18 COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, Worldometer, February 18, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>.
- 19 Ashraf Al-Saeed and Nabeel Darweesh, “COVID-19 and Low Oil Prices Push Millions of Iraqis into Poverty,” World Bank, November 11, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/11/11/new-world-bank-report-calls-for-urgent-fiscal-stimulus-and-economic-reforms-to-help-the-poor-and-the-most-vulnerable-in-iraq>.
- 20 Andres Gonzalez, “Coronavirus Threatens Iraq with New Humanitarian Crisis,” Oxfam International, 2020, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/coronavirus-threatens-iraq-new-humanitarian-crisis>.
- 21 Katherine Lawlor and Ketti Davison, “Iraq is Fragile, Not Hopeless: How Iraq’s Fragility Undermines Regional Stability,” Institute for the Study of War, December 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Iraq%20is%20Fragile%2C%20Not%20Hopeless.pdf>
- 22 Lawlor and Davison, “Iraq is Fragile.”
- 23 Katherine Lawlor and Brandon Wallace, “Anti-U.S. Protests in Baghdad: Interim Summary,” Institute for the Study of War: Blogspot, January 24, 2020, iswresearch.blogspot.com/2020/01/anti-us-protests-inbaghdad-interim.html.
- 24 Mina al-Lami, “Jihadists See COVID-19 as an Opportunity,” Global Network on Extremism & Technology, June 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/06/01/jihadists-see-covid-19-as-an-opportunity/>
- 25 “COVID-19 in Northwest Syria: Taking Risks Simply to Survive—Syrian Arab Republic,” ReliefWeb, November 10, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/covid-19-northwest-syria-taking-risks-simply-survive>.

-
- 26 Sarah Dadouch, “Coronavirus Is out of Control in Syria, No Matter What the Government Says,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syria-coronavirus-outbreak-doctors/2020/09/24/95d9323a-fcea-11ea-b0e4-350e4e60cc91_story.html.
 - 27 “Kuwait Fund Contributes US\$4 Million Supporting UNICEF’s COVID-19 Response in Syria—Syrian Arab Republic,” ReliefWeb, November 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/kuwait-fund-contributes-us4-million-supporting-unicef-s-covid-19>.
 - 28 Mehmet Ozalp, “In War-Torn Syria, the Coronavirus Pandemic Has Brought Its People to the Brink of Starvation,” *The Conversation*, September 25, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/in-war-torn-syria-the-coronavirus-pandemic-has-brought-its-people-to-the-brink-of-starvation-144794>.
 - 29 Danny Makki, “Syria Is Facing a COVID-19 Catastrophe,” Middle East Institute, November 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/syria-facing-covid-19-catastrophe>.
 - 30 Edith M. Lederer, “Over 10,000 Islamic State Fighters Active in Iraq, Syria as Attacks ‘Significantly’ Increase: UN,” Associated Press, August 25, 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/08/25/over-10000-islamic-state-fighters-active-in-iraq-syria-as-attacks-significantly-increase-un/>.
 - 31 Jim Sciutto, Jamie Crawford, and Chelsea J. Carter, “ISIS Can ‘Muster’ Between 20,000 and 31,500 Fighters, CIA Says,” CNN, September 12, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/09/11/world/meast/isis-syria-iraq/index.html>.
 - 32 Sam Heller, “When Measuring ISIS’s ‘Resurgence,’ Use the Right Standard,” Crisis Group, May 13, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/when-measuring-isis-resurgence-use-right-standard>.
 - 33 Heller, “When Measuring ISIS’s ‘Resurgence.’”
 - 34 Elizabeth Dent, “US Policy and the Resurgence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria,” Middle East Institute, October, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2020-10/US%20Policy%20and%20the%20Resurgence%20of%20ISIS%20in%20Iraq%20and%20Syria%20%20.pdf>.
 - 35 Dent, “US Policy and the Resurgence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.”
 - 36 al-Lami, “Jihadists See COVID-19 as an Opportunity.”
 - 37 Brandon Wallace, “Iraq Situation Report: February 20-25, 2020,” Institute of the Study of War, March 2, 2020.
 - 38 Katherine Lawlor and Brandon Wallace, “Iraq Situation Update: March 11-17, 2020,” Institute for the Study of War, March 20, 2020, www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-update-march-11-17-2020.
 - 39 Counter-Extremism Project, “Iraq: Extremism & Counter-Extremism,” December 1, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/iraq>
 - 40 Jaelyn Diaz and Alice Fordham, “Twin Suicide Bombings in Baghdad Market Kill at Least 32, Wound Over 100,” National Public Radio, January 21, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/21/959115619/twin-suicide-bombings-in-baghdad-market-kill-and-wound-dozens>
 - 41 Gregory Waters, “ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2020,” December 1, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/blog/isis-redux-central-syria-insurgency-november-2020>.
 - 42 Michael Land and Nada Atieh, “Syria Situation Report: March 4-17, 2020,” Institute for the Study of War, March 20, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syria-situation-report-march-4-17-2020>.
 - 43 Andrew Greco, “Syria Situation Report: November 11-December 1, 2020,” Institute for the Study of War, December 3, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syria-situation-report-november-11-december-1-2020>.
 - 44 Sean W. O’Donnell, Stephen Akard, and Ann Calvaresi Barr, Lead IG Report to the U.S. Congress: Operation Inherent Resolve (Washington: U.S. Federal Government, 2020), 18, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Aug/04/2002469838/-1/-1/1/LEAD%20INSPECTOR%20GENERAL%20FOR%20OPERATION%20INHERENT%20RESOLVE%20APRIL%201,%202020-%20JUNE%2030,%202020.PDF.PDF>.
 - 45 Mohamed Mokhtar Qandil, “Terrorism and Coronavirus: Hyperbole, Idealism, and Ignorance,” The Washington Institute, April 28, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/Terrorism-Extremism-Coronavirus-ISIS-Al-Qaeda-Resurgence-COVID-19>.
 - 46 Al-Naba Newsletter #220, February 26, 2020, <https://jihadology.net/2020/02/06/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-220/>.
 - 47 Qandil, “Terrorism and Coronavirus.”
-

-
- 48 Tova C. Norlen, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Salafi-Jihadi Terrorism," *Connections: The Security Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic* 19, no. 2 (2020): 11-24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26937606.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad4b2886ef0eedb2d9447af3ca01ba3e9>.
- 49 Al-Naba Newsletter #227, March 26, 2020, https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2020/03/The-Islamic-State-al-Naba%CC%84%E2%80%99-Newsletter-227.pdf.
- 50 "Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus," International Crisis Group, March 31, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/contending-isis-time-coronavirus>.
- 51 Al-Naba Newsletter #227.
- 52 "Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus," International Crisis Group.
- 53 Quandil, "Terrorism and Coronavirus."
- 54 Al-Naba Newsletter #227.
- 55 "Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus," International Crisis Group.
- 56 "Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," United Nations Security Council, July 23, 2020, <https://undocs.org/S/2020/717>.
- 57 Ilan Berman, "ISIS Is Using the COVID Distraction to Rearm and Regroup," *USA Today*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/08/28/isis-did-not-disappear-and-now-its-poised-rise-again-amidst-instability-column/5644397002/>.
- 58 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, "Understanding the Islamic State's Competitive Advantages."
- 59 "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism," United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, June 2020, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTED-Paper%E2%80%933-The-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>.
- 60 Pollard, Poplack, and Casey, "Understanding the Islamic State's Competitive Advantages."
- 61 Audrey Alexander, "The Security Threat COVID-19 Poses to the Northern Syria Detention Camps Holding Islamic State Members," *CTC Sentinel: COVID-19 and Counterterrorism* 13, no. 6 (June 2020), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-security-threat-covid-19-poses-to-the-northern-syria-detention-camps-holding-islamic-state-members/>.
- 62 "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Terrorism."
- 63 Gary Ackerman and Hayley Peterson, "Terrorism and COVID-19: Actual and Potential Impacts," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (June 2020): 59-73.