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Islamic State, Syria's Civil War and the Reshaping of the Middle East

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Abstract

The Islamic State grew out of the ashes of a defeated al-Qaeda in Iraq. The continued conflicts in Iraq and Syria have provided the catalyst for a resurgent Islamic State. Syria's civil war has allowed the Islamic State to remerge like a terrorist phoenix, reborn from its own ashes. This thesis analyses the origins of the Islamic State, and the geo-political conditions and on-going conflicts in Iraq and Syria which have permitted the growth and expansion of the Islamic State. It also analyses how the fight against the Islamic State is changing the security environment within the Middle East.

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

W.B. Yeats.
The Second Coming.¹

¹ William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," Poetry Foundation,
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming>.

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Acronyms

AQ - Al-Qaeda

AQAP - al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

AQIM - al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

AQI - al-Qaeda in Iraq

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CPA - Coalition Provisional Authority

EU - European Union

FSM - Free Syrian Army

HSM - Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen more commonly known as al-Shabaab

HTS - Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Assembly for Liberation of the Levant)

ICU - Islamic Courts Union

IS - Islamic State

ISI - Islamic State in Iraq

ISIS - Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

JaN - Jabhat al-Nusra

JTS - Jabhat Fatah al-Sham

KNC - Kurdish National Council

KRG - Kurdish Regional

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO - Non-Government Organisation

YPG - Yekineyen Parastina Gel - People's Defence Units

PKK - Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane - Kurdish Workers Party

PLO - Palestine Liberation Organisation

PMU - Popular Mobilisation Units

PYD - Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat - Democratic Union Party

SOFA - Status of Forces Agreement

SNC - Syrian National Coalition

SNF - Syrian Nationalist Front

TTP - Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

TFG - Transitional Federal Government

UN – United Nations

UNSCR - UN Security Council Resolution

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

US – United States

SEAL - US Navy Sea Air and Land Teams

VBIED - Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device

WMD - Weapons of Mass Destruction