



Islamic State

Also known as: Al-Qa'ida in Iraq; Al-Qa'ida in Iraq – Zarqawi; Al-Qa'ida of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers; Al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers; Al-Tawhid; Al-Tawhid and al-Jihad; Brigades of Tawhid; Islamic State of Iraq; Dawla al-Islamiya; Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa as-Sham; Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham; Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad; Kateab al-Tawhid; Mujahidin Shura Council; Qaida of the Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers; Tanzeem Qa'idat al Jihad Bilad al Raafidaini; Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn; The al-Zarqawi network; The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham; The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; The Islamic Caliphate; The Islamic Caliphate State; The Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria; The Monotheism and Jihad Group; The Organisation Base of Jihad Country of the Two Rivers; The Organisation Base of Jihad Mesopotamia; The Organisation of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers; Unity and Holy Struggle; Unity and Holy War; Unity and Jihad Group.

This statement is based on publicly available information about Islamic State. To the Australian Government's knowledge, this information is accurate, reliable and has been corroborated by classified information where available.

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Legislative basis for listing a terrorist organisation

Division 102 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (the Criminal Code) provides that for an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation, the AFP Minister must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the organisation:

- is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, or assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act or

- advocates the doing of a terrorist act.

For the purposes of listing a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code, subsection 102.1(20) of the Criminal Code describes the doing of a terrorist act as including the doing of a specific terrorist act, the doing of more than one terrorist act and the doing of a terrorist act, even if a terrorist act does not occur.

Background to this listing

The Australian Government first listed Islamic State under its former Arabic name, *Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, in 2005. The group was re-listed under this name on 17 February 2007.

The group was formerly listed as *al-Qa'ida in Iraq* on 1 November 2008, and re-listed on 29 October 2010 and 12 July 2013.

The group was formerly listed as *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)* on 14 December 2013.

On 11 July 2014, the group was listed as Islamic State to reflect the expansion of its operating area and its announcement of an Islamic caliphate on 29 June 2014. The group was re-listed on 1 July 2017, 1 July 2020 and 1 July 2023.

Details of the organisation

Islamic State is a Sunni Islamic extremist group and self-declared pan-Islamic Caliphate with a historic base of operations within Northern Iraq and Syria. At its 2014 peak, Islamic State controlled large swathes of both countries, subsuming government resources and bureaucracy, along with commerce and industry. In March 2019, Islamic State lost the last of its territory in Iraq and Syria. As such, Islamic State has since reverted to traditional terrorist tactics in the region with an increasing degree of ferocity and tactical sophistication, including areas within Türkiye.

Islamic State continues to maintain an active presence around the globe through satellite entities, operationally active within declared 'provinces' (Wilayat). These include IS-Libya, IS-Sinai, IS-Khorasan Province, IS-East Asia, IS Somalia, IS West Africa Province, and the Abu Sayyaf Group, all of whom are listed terrorist organisations pursuant to Australia's Criminal Code. Islamic State rejects existing national borders and opposes elected governments, seeking to remove them through violence.

Islamic State adheres to the extreme Salafi interpretation of Islam which regards all who fail to follow its religious doctrine as apostates and infidels. Seeking to emulate the expansive success of Islamic conquests during the 7th to 10th centuries, Islamic State seeks to subjugate through terror and establish a pan-Islamic imperialist theocracy, with a view of ultimately dominating the globe. In prosecuting this agenda, it has commissioned numerous crimes against humanity, including genocide, ethnic cleansing, summary

execution (including public beheading, crucifixion, stoning, hanging, burning, mutilation and dismemberment), mass rape, paedophilia, sexual slavery, forced marriages (including minors), theft, extortion, kidnaping and trafficking.

Islamic State began operations as Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad (JTJ) with the first attributable terrorist act committed on October 28, 2002: the murder of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officer Laurence Foley outside his home in Jordan. In October 2004, JTJ leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, declared allegiance to Usama bin Laden and the group became known as al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI). In late 2011, the group established operations in Syria through its former subordinate organisation, Jabhat al-Nusra (now known as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham). In April 2013, then leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the creation of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to subsume the then Jabhat al-Nusra and consolidate operations across Iraq and Syria.

The then-Jabhat al-Nusra (and now Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham) leader Abu-Muhammad al-Jawlani attempted to annul the announcement by pledging allegiance to then al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In June 2013, al-Zawahiri ruled that the then Jabhat al-Nusra was the only al-Qa'ida affiliate in Syria and annulled the creation of ISIL. However, al-Baghdadi refused to follow this ruling and confirmed the creation of ISIL, later announcing the formation of Islamic State with himself as the Caliph in 29 June 2014.

Leadership

Fourth Caliph: On November 2022, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi (aka Juma Awad al-Badri) was named as the new (extant) leader and fourth Caliph of Islamic State. The announcement was made in a recorded audio message distributed online. On 29 April 2023, the Caliph was allegedly killed during a Turkish security operation conducted by the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT). The announcement was made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 30 April 2023. At the time of writing, a new IS leader had not been announced.

Third Caliph: On 10 March 2022, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi was named as the new leader and third Caliph of Islamic State. On 15 October 2022, the Caliph killed himself with a suicide vest during an operation by the Free Syrian Army in Dar'a province, Syria.

Second Caliph: On 31 October 2019, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi was named as the new leader and second Caliph of Islamic State. On 3 February 2022, the Caliph killed himself and family with a suicide vest during a US counterterrorism operation in Atme, Syria.

First Caliph: On 16 May 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was named leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), changing the group's name to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in April 2013. On 29 June 2014, the group declared the Islamic State Caliphate with al-Baghdadi as its first Caliph. On 27 October 2019, Baghdadi killed himself and children with a suicide vest during a US counterterrorism operation in Barisha, Syria.

The current Islamic State spokesman, Abu Omar al-Muhajir, assumed this role following the death of former Islamic State spokesman, Abu Hamza al-Qurashi, who was also killed during the US operation on 3 February 2022.

Islamic State's hierarchical structure was decentralised following the group's loss of territory, to allow the group to preserve its leadership cadre and more effectively transition to an insurgency. However, Islamic State's core leadership still retained general strategic direction for the group. Furthermore, while Islamic State's global affiliates adhere to its jihadist ideology, they act semi-autonomously from the organisation's leadership in Iraq and Syria.

Membership

At the height of its power, Islamic State's membership was believed to have reached over 65,000, including approximately 40,000 foreign fighters from over 120 countries. Following Islamic State's complete loss of territory in 2019, membership numbers are difficult to determine, but are estimated to range between 14,000 and 18,000 across Syria and Iraq, including foreign fighters. There are also around 30,000 Islamic State fighters detained in prisons across Iraq and Syria.

Recruitment and funding

Since its establishment, Islamic State has used a combination of threats, incentives and ideology to recruit new members, including through a sophisticated social media campaign in several languages. It has mostly targeted young Sunni men worldwide, exploiting anger at the perceived mistreatment of Sunni Muslims and encouraging them to join in restoring an Islamic caliphate. Islamic State also targets young women and children. However, since 2017, the Islamic State's media and propaganda capabilities have suffered significantly, limiting its global reach for recruitment.

Islamic State forcefully recruited from areas under its control and is known to have run schools to indoctrinate children into its extremist ideology at a young age. It also aims to recruit Iraqi security force members to gather intelligence and undermine the performance of those who oppose the group. In recent years, the group has targeted prisons and internally displaced person camps in Syria to free members and boost its ranks.

Islamic State attracted a large number of foreign fighters, including Westerners, following the announcement of the caliphate in June 2014. Foreign fighter numbers joining Islamic State in Iraq and Syria decreased significantly from 2016 due to the group's territorial losses and the increasing difficulty in travelling to the region. During this period, the group began encouraging potential recruits to go directly to other Islamic State outposts, or stay in their home countries to launch attacks as part of its global campaign.

Following the appointment of Islamic State's then leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hasemi al-Quraishi, Islamic State spokesperson, Abu Omar al-Muhajir, declared that IS personnel had "pledged allegiance" to the new caliph.

Similarly, following the appointment of former Islamic State leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the group requested members re-pledge allegiance to the new caliph, with many responding to the request globally. These pledges can be made from any location, publicly or privately, and demonstrate support for Islamic State's ideology and acceptance of its brand of violence without the need to travel to Syria and Iraq. Pledging allegiance also demonstrates an intent by the individual to join Islamic State.

Islamic State initially relied on funds donated for operations in Syria to also fund its activities in Iraq and transfers weapons, fighters and resources between the two countries. As Islamic State expanded, it began seizing assets from areas under its control, particularly oil refineries and banks. While oil was a major source of revenue, Islamic State also taxed and extorted those living in areas under its control. Since its loss of territory, Islamic State's ability to raise revenue has been reduced; however, the group was likely able to move cash reserves out of Iraq and Syria prior to their territorial defeat to ensure it had sufficient funds to maintain an insurgency.

Islamic State has also been able to diversify its funding through criminal activity, including but not limited to extortion, kidnapping for ransom and theft. Furthermore, the group has significant funds invested in legitimate businesses globally. As operating costs for an insurgency is considerably less than running a caliphate, Islamic State are likely to have sufficient funds to continue attacks in Iraq and Syria.

Links to other groups

Islamic State's success in Iraq, particularly in 2014, attracted the support of other terrorist groups around the world with a number of Islamist militant organisations declaring allegiance or support to Islamic State; particularly from the Middle East, West Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. While some of these groups were created as a response to Islamic State's call for Muslim support, others were already in existence. Islamic State has accepted a number of pledges of allegiance; however, this does not always indicate a working relationship or operational ties. Islamic State continues to have contentious relationships with various Syrian opposition groups which have included cooperation where tactically useful.

Eight groups currently listed as terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code are either official Islamic State affiliates or have publicly pledged support for the group. They include the Abu Sayyaf Group, Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province, Islamic State-Libya, Islamic State-Sinai, Islamic State-East Asia, Islamic State-Khorasan, and Islamic State-Somalia.

Terrorist activity

Directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act

Despite no longer controlling territory in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State remains one of the world's deadliest and most active terrorist organisations, conducting regular attacks on security forces and civilians. Islamic State also inspires, encourages, enables and directs attacks internationally, ranging from low-capability attacks with knives, vehicles or small arms through to complex, coordinated mixed-mode attacks with firearms and explosives. Its attacks often aim to maximise casualties and publicity by targeting crowds and gatherings at festivals and religious events; choosing targets such as churches, nightclubs, music venues and national commemorations for symbolic value. Islamic State also targets police and military personnel, both within and outside Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, the group incites and conducts violence against Muslims and non Muslim religious minorities within the region and globally.

Islamic State's operations in Iraq and Syria consist of terrorist attacks including arson, bombings, suicide bombings, suicide car bombs, armed attacks including sniper attacks and hit and run attacks using bombs and firearms. In Iraq, attacks are mostly in the provinces to the north and west. Attacks in the Kurdish-majority northern provinces and the Shia-majority provinces in the south are less common, but do occur. Islamic State's primary targets in Iraq are security forces, Shia civilians in public areas, including cafes, mosques and markets, political figures, community and tribal leaders and anti Islamic State militias. By attacking these targets, the group hopes to undermine security force efforts to contain the group, destroy public confidence in the security forces and provoke a widespread revolt against the government.

In Syria, attacks are predominately against the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad and the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces, but Islamic State also attacks some other Syrian armed opposition groups, which it considers apostates and infidels as well as on occasion directly targeting civilians. Islamic State has targeted Turkish forces, Turkish, Kurdish and Shia militants in northern Syria, Syrian refugees and Kurdish organisations in Türkiye. The group has also targeted US forces present in Syria.

IS can be reliably attributed to commission of the following terrorist activity since it was last proscribed (in July 2020):

- On 17 March 2023, Islamic State militants attacked a group gathering truffles near Hama, Syria; killing 26.
- On 16 March 2023, Islamic State militants attacked shepherds in Deir Ezzor, Syria; killing four.
- On 18 February 2023, Islamic State sleeper cells carried out an attack in Syria's central desert of Homs, which killed 53 civilians and wounding two.
- On 12 February 2023, Islamic State militants fired machine guns at a group of about 75 people picking mushrooms near Palmyra, Syria, which resulted in 11 deaths.
- On 26 October 2022, an armed Islamic State operative carried out a shooting attack in the Shiite Shah Cheragh shrine in the city of Shiraz, Iran. This attack killed 15 people and injured 40 others.

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- On 27 March 2022, Islamic State militants attacked a bus stop in Hadera, Israel; killing two and wounding 12.
- On 20 January 2022, Islamic State militants launched an assault on the al-Sina prison in al-Hasakah, Syria, killing 121 Syrian Defence Force personnel and wounding scores of others. Hundreds of prisoners, including Islamic State fighters, escaped during the 10 day battle. This attack caused 159 casualties.
- On 21 January 2021, 2 Islamic State suicide bombers detonated bombs in a busy marketplace in eastern Baghdad, which killed 32 people and injured 100 others. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the bombings through a statement on Telegram.
- On 2 November 2020, a lone gunman killed four people and injured 23 others in central Vienna, Austria.

On the basis of these examples, Islamic State is assessed to have directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act.

Advocates the doing of a terrorist act

Since the group was last proscribed, several media statements have been issued by the group's official media arms, including:

- On June 21, 2021, Islamic State's al-Furqan Media Foundation released an audiotape titled "You are the Sublime Ones if you believe". The audiotape encouraged Islamic State fighters around the world to intensify their attacks against their enemies, particularly against 'Crusaders'.
- On 2 February 2023, Islamic State's weekly Al-Naba published an article titled "Kill the Jews," which called on Muslims around the world to carry out terrorist attacks against Jews.

On the basis of these examples, Islamic State is assessed to advocate the doing of a terrorist act.

Other considerations

Links to Australia and threats to Australian interests

In September 2014, Islamic State released a directive to supporters around the world, sanctioning unilateral terrorist attacks against Australia and other western nations "wherever, whenever and however" they could, without requiring instruction or permission from Islamic State leadership.

In December 2014, Australian citizen Man Haron Monis held ten civilians hostage within the Lindt Café, Martin Place, Sydney. During the ensuing siege, hostages were forced to hold jihadist flags against the window of the café whilst Monis made repeated requests for an Islamic State flag from Police. Two civilians and Monis himself subsequently lost their lives. Monis a Shia Muslim, had previously converted to Sunni Islam and swore allegiance to Islamic State.

Islamic State retains an enduring presence within certain extremist fora. Islamic State's coordinated and effective propaganda campaign exposed susceptible Australians to an extremist ideology and influenced some toward radicalization and violence. Research shows that from 2012 until 2019, more than 200 Australian men, women and children travelled to Syria and Iraq to join Islamic State. Dozens more assisted

Islamic State by supporting those overseas or by planning or carrying out terrorist attacks in Australia. Australians fighting with Islamic State have been involved in acts of violence including suicide bombings and holding the decapitated head of a Syrian soldier following Islamic State beheadings. These incidents have subsequently been used in Islamic State's propaganda campaign.

In addition to those who have travelled to Syria and Iraq, Australia-based individuals can pledge allegiance to Islamic State, affirming their support for the group without the need to travel to Iraq or Syria, and their intent to be a member of the group.

Since the collapse of the Islamic State Caliphate, support for Islamic State within Australia has declined.

Islamic State has openly called for attacks against Australia and its interests, both because of Australia's support to military operations against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and because of the group's anti-Western ideology. Islamic State promotes its opposition to Australia through propaganda material, foreign fighter videos and speeches by senior leadership.

A successful terrorist attack directed or inspired by Islamic State or one of its affiliates could result in harm to Australians, and the group's activities and propaganda have the potential to inspire Australian violent extremists.

Listings by likeminded countries or the United Nations

Islamic State is listed as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant under the United Nations Security Council resolution 2253 (2015) which expands on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267 (1999) Sanctions Committee's consolidated list. It is also listed as a proscribed terrorist organisation by the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Engagement in peace or mediation processes

Islamic State is not engaged in any peace or mediation process.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above information, the Australian Government assesses that Islamic State continues to be directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of terrorist acts or advocates the doing of terrorist acts, involving threats to human life and serious damage to property.

In the course of pursuing its objectives, Islamic State is known to have committed or threatened actions that:

- cause, or could cause, death, serious harm to persons, serious damage to property, endanger life (other than the life of the person taking the action), or create a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public

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- are intended to have those effects
- are done with the intention of advancing the Islamic State's political, religious or ideological causes
- are done with the intention of intimidating the government of one or more foreign countries
- are done with the intention of intimidating the public or sections of the public.

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