



NATO Foundation
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EMERGING CHALLENGES March 2018

ISIS out and Al Qaeda in

Despite the military defeat of ISIS, the threat of Islamic terrorism still persists and its shape is changing. In fact, while the Islamic State has attracted media attention, has monopolised the public debate and worried national security officials for the last four years, Al Qaeda has been rebuilding and reorganising itself. With a global network of affiliates and fighters in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and Kashmir and with a residual hard core of top commanders still in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Al Qaeda has been confirmed as the terrorist group with the greatest resilience and vitality, with a capacity to disrupt local and regional stability and launch attacks against its enemies in the Middle East, Africa, Southern Asia, Europe and Russia.

Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS – Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant), the latest name adopted by Al Qaeda's local affiliate in Syria and the largest rebel group in the country, will probably continue to dedicate most of its resources to local activities. In particular Syria, with more than 20.0000 men in arms, has become, the most popular venue to wage a holy war since Afghanistan during the 1980's, as the important number of top Al Qaeda's leaders sent to Syria during the last six years has shown.

Al Qaeda's leader, Al Zawahiri has been able to reorganise his terrorist network in several ways, namely: forbidding attacks abroad in the West so that he could rebuild the organisation without significant interference; decentralizing in order to increase its survival capabilities; avoiding mass casualty operations, especially those that might kill Muslim civilians; letting ISIS absorb all the blows from the coalition led by the USA while Al Qaeda unobtrusively rebuilt its military strength.

According to the *Worldwide threat assessment of the US intelligence community*, even if ISIS will almost certainly continue to give priority to transnational terrorist attacks, Al Qaeda will remain a major actor in global terrorism and the primary threat to the US and Western interests, even though not all Al Qaeda's affiliates will have the intent and the ability to pursue or inspire attacks in the US homeland or elsewhere in the West.

(Source: Trandsmap.com, Islamism map,
<https://www.trendsmap.com/twitter/tweet/963686363366346752>, 21/03/2018)



Matteo Bressan – *Teacher at the Italian Society for the International Organisation, he is author of various books concerning terrorism and focused on Eurasia geopolitics, jihadism and hybrid wars. International relations professor at LUMSA University.*