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ISIS: Displaying Some Structural Weaknesses

A series of military defeats, an inability to effectively administer territory it controls, and internal dissension in the last several months are undermining the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) strength. These setbacks come nearly a year after the group announced the establishment of its self-proclaimed “caliphate,” which spans large portions of Iraq and Syria.

- In February, US Central Command claimed that ISIS made no territorial advances or captured any towns or cities in Iraq and Syria since October. The US military attributed the group’s inability to advance beyond its current sphere of influence to US airstrikes and multinational operations in Iraq’s Tikrit, Sinjar, Diyala, and Mosul Dam areas and in the Syrian cities of Kobane and Qamishli.
- US and Iraqi military operations have also caused ISIS to revisit aspirations for long-term governance in Iraq and Syria. Since last fall, there have been increased interruptions of water and electric services, a collapse of wheat production, and shortages in medical supplies and personnel in the group’s Mosul stronghold—a possible sign ISIS’s perceived legitimacy as a functioning “state” is eroding.
- Between October and December, a UK-based human rights organization claimed that ISIS executed about 100 foreign fighters for trying to leave the group; the fighters allegedly were disillusioned with ISIS’s brutal tactics and difficult living conditions. Since November, moreover, there have been two coup attempts against ISIS leadership from within the organization.

Contact Information

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