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EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

Al-Qa'ida: Possible Trajectories in 2016

Key Assumptions

- Al-Qa'ida, including leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, expects setbacks and periods of operational dormancy.
- Al-Qa'ida retains influence over its affiliates.
- Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates will continue to feud with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) over primacy in the global jihad.

Key Intelligence Gaps

- Al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's well-being and status.
- The status of al-Qa'ida's Western terrorist plotting.
- The leadership depth of al-Qa'ida.



Al-Qa'ida's flag

MOST LIKELY



Revitalize



LEAST LIKELY

INDICATORS	OUTCOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zawahiri continues to exercise strict operational security. • Fighting between the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qa'ida continues. • Al-Qa'ida's larger affiliates—al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb, and the Nusrah Front—continue consolidating territory in their areas of operation. 	Major al-Qa'ida affiliates remain loyal to Zawahiri, taking measured steps to ensure the organization's longevity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al-Qa'ida plots or conducts attacks in the West. • The pace, scale, and quality of al-Qa'ida's messaging begins to rival ISIS's media platforms. • New affiliates emerge and encourage defections from ISIS. 	Al-Qa'ida returns to prominence in the global jihadist movement, with an increase in plotting, public messaging, and territorial consolidation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The larger affiliates begin to suffer a series of military defeats, leading to infighting over strategy and tactics. • Competition increases between the affiliates for recruits and finances. • The affiliates, choosing to focus exclusively on rebuilding capabilities, distance themselves from al-Qa'ida or renounce their affiliation. 	Al-Qa'ida disintegrates as a cohesive organization.

Leading "Wildcard" Variables

Zawahiri dies.

Additional military intervention by foreign powers in Syria or Iraq.

Major political reforms gain traction in the Middle East.