

## 3.5. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

### COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

The **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**, also known as ISIS, IS and Daesh, was originally created by the wing of Al Qaeda in Iraq and by smaller Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups. It is an UN and EU designated terrorist organisation aiming to establish a global Islamic caliphate and fostering violent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims [[Actors](#), 6, p. 59].

ISIL's strength has been estimated at between 5 000 and 7 000 members across Syria and Iraq, about half of whom were reported to be fighters. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33]

ISIL's territorial control and governance in Syria ceased to exist in March 2019. However, according to recent sources, ISIL was reported to 'remain resilient' to be 'taking advantage of political and military developments' in Syria to regain presence. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33; [Security 2021](#), 1.4.6., p. 28]

ISIL fighters were present in the mountainous and hard-to control Badia desert and along the Syrian-Iraqi border, especially in the areas of Deir Ez- Zor, Palmyra, Al-Sukhna, and also in AlQaryatain. The group reportedly used these regions as operational bases to rebuild cells, train its fighters and carry out attacks throughout the region. ISIL cells and activities were moreover reported in Syria's south, particularly in Dar'a governorate. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33]

The first quarter of 2023 saw an increase in ISIL activities in Syria. ISIL attacks within the Syrian desert have increased but decreased in northeastern Syria. In spring 2023, ISIL reportedly launched two separate operations in the Badia region involving more than 100 fighters, indicating the group's coordinating and tactical capacity. ISIL operations centred on Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, but also reached Hama, Hasaka, and Raqqa governorates. The group's attack zones reportedly expanded along both banks of the Euphrates River. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 34]

ISIL continued its 'guerrilla warfare tactics' launching hit and run attacks against GoS and SDF forces, but also against civilians. Intimidation and extortion practices, as well as attacks on businesses and assassinations of community leaders were also reported. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 34]



For further information on human rights violations committed by various anti-government armed groups and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see [8. Exclusion](#).

See other topics concerning actors of persecution or serious harm:

- [3.1. Areas of control and influence](#)
- [3.2. The Government of Syria and associated armed groups](#)
- [3.3. Syrian Democratic Forces and Asayish](#)
- [3.4. Anti-government armed groups](#)
- *3.5. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*
- [3.6. Other non-State actors](#)

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