

ISIS Rises from the Dust in the Syrian Desert. A Surge of Violence and Terror

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*Over the last few months Syria’s northeast has been spiraling downwards to chaos amid **the surge of violence and terror attributed to Islamic State (IS)**. After almost five years of dormant existence the terror group is once again making its way to prominence in Syria. With the so-called territorial califate no longer viable, the IS members have switched to hit-and-run attacks on remote outposts and prolific use of improvised explosive devices (IED) against vehicles. These attacks target both US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian army units operating in the northeastern provinces of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. At the same time the terrorists managed to [restore a financial safety net](#) by extorting money from local professionals, including small business owners, doctors and teachers. Those who refuse to pay are subjected to threats and torture. The resulting insecurity enables the terror group to widen the scope of its activities even further.*

The deterioration of the security situation in Syria went almost unnoticed by the international community distracted by the Ukrainian conflict. Under these circumstances the U.S. has a window of opportunity to curb the Russian influence in Syria and undermine [the image of power projected by Moscow](#) in the Middle East.

Indeed, the areas held by the Russians and the Syrian army in Deir Ezzor and Homs have witnessed [an increase in bloody attacks](#), supposedly carried out by IS fighters. The terrorists were able to avoid retaliation by retreating to no man’s land in the areas abutting the U.S. bases, namely Al-Shadadi, the Green Zone near Abu-Kemal border crossing and Al-Tanf base. Moreover, previously each IS attack in US-controlled areas had been followed by joint raids of SDF and US special forces. It is no longer so. Considerable resources that might otherwise have been used for counterinsurgency operations are allocated to [maintaining security in Al-Hol camp](#), where some 12,000 IS fighters and their family members are held. Add to that the imminent threat of Turkish invasion from the north. The SDF was led into a deadlock and is losing the grip on the region. Meanwhile IS sleeper cells exploit the situation to their advantage and infiltrate territories controlled by the Syrian army.

These suspicions are confirmed by a high-ranking source in the Syrian intelligence. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the source claimed that the U.S. helicopters transported 200 former IS fighters from prisons in Haseke to the 55-km security zone around Al-Tanf. The terrorists will be split up into groups of 10 - 15 people. These groups will be then sent to provinces with Russian presence including Homs, Latakia, Tartus and Damascus with the task of conducting terror attacks with IEDs at the Russian military sites. Most of the selected militants originate from Northern Caucasia or Central Asia and therefore are fluent in Russian.

The source added that the list of the primary targets of the terrorists includes the phosphate mines in Hneifis guarded by Russian security companies as well as Russian military bases in Lattakia, Tartus, Damascus and Aleppo.

Ultimately, the recruitment of IS members to create disturbance for the Russians would only become a logical development of the proxy policy adopted by the U.S. in Syria. After all, Washington is killing two birds with one stone by destabilizing the area of Russian influence and making use of the IS prisoners. However, there is another conclusion to be made: Washington has failed in its initial mission to defeat IS and is now resorting to the use of terror group splinters in its political power games.

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