



Special Report: Oaths of Allegiance to Islamic State

Simultaneous oaths of allegiance to Islamic State (IS) increase threat of attacks in North Africa, points to presence of IS in Arabian Peninsula

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Executive Summary

On November 10, a series of statements were issued by groups vowing allegiance to the Islamic State (IS), including from Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Yemen, and the “Arabian Peninsula”, referring to Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, in a November 13 audio recording, IS leader and self-declared Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, stated that he accepted said oaths of allegiance.

- The simultaneous oaths from groups in five countries were likely meant as a “media operation” and may serve to heighten competition between groups while encouraging attacks by new ones.
- In **Egypt**, the pledge to IS by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, now also referred to as the Wilayat (Province) of Sinai, heightens threat of attacks in the country’s Sinai Peninsula as well as potentially in Egypt’s major cities.
- The **Libyan** and **Algerian** statements confirm the previous presence of IS affiliates in these areas, while highlighting the geographic expansion of the group in Libya.
- The known presence of radicalized elements in **Saudi Arabia** underlines the potential that an IS-affiliate exists in the Kingdom; however, the threat is likely to remain limited given the capabilities of the country’s security forces.
- While an IS presence in **Yemen** is not unexpected, the statement’s absence of Yemen-specific references, along with the predominance of AQAP, may reduce the group’s size and influence.

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Methodology

This report is based on MAX's knowledge gained through years of studying the Middle East and North Africa region broadly, which has included close monitoring of the Islamic State (IS), its origins, activities, and expansion, as well as of other militant jihadists groups operating in countries across the region. Connected to our daily coverage of the Middle East and North Africa as part of our ongoing service to our intelligence package subscribers, this necessitates surveying both day-to-day events as well as potential long-term trends and activity.

Team leaders and members assigned to special reports and projects are chosen based on their relevant backgrounds and language capabilities. The team assigned to this particular report was led by senior intelligence analysts with specialties in the Middle East more broadly, and North Africa as well as the Gulf States and Yemen specifically, based on post-secondary education and professional intelligence experience. Designated analysts with relevant academic, professional, and military backgrounds, who are proficient in Arabic and French given the countries involved, were also included as part of this team.

Bolstered by our previously-noted daily coverage of the Middle East and North Africa, this report was the result of extensive reviewing and analysis of militant jihadist materials, including statements, audio recordings, and videos by team members fluent in Arabic. Proactive searches for pertinent information were also conducted by team members in English, French, and Arabic. This involved open sources, such as social networks, news outlets, and expert analysis. Each piece of information is cross-checked and deemed credible through our triangulation of open, ground, and official sources. Unconfirmed information will not be displayed in this report unless considered notable or critical for our assessments.

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Current Situation

On November 10, a series of statements were issued by groups vowing allegiance to the Islamic State (IS), including from Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Yemen, and the “Arabian Peninsula”, referring to Saudi Arabia. While the group in Algeria had already vowed allegiance to IS’s self-declared Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and unconfirmed reports had been circulating that elements in Yemen similarly supported IS, others had not yet done so. This includes Egypt’s Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, while the presence of an active organization in Saudi Arabia was previously unknown.

In a subsequent November 13 audio recording, al-Baghdadi referred to the recent “expansion” of the Islamic State in the aforementioned countries, stating he accepted the oaths of allegiance of the different groups. Al-Baghdadi also referred to other groups that have not sworn allegiance to IS and pronounced “the nullification of [these] groups therein”, while announcing the creation of “wilayas” (provinces) headed by a wali (governor) in each of the aforementioned countries. He further stated that the “serpent’s head and the stronghold of the disease” is located in al-Haramayn, referring to Saudi Arabia. He then lists those that should be targeted, namely, Shiites, the Al-Saud ruling family, and security forces. In Yemen, IS members should “be harsh against the Houthi[s]”, while he warned those in Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco against “surrender[ing] the lands to the sons of secularism”.

In [Egypt](#), the Sinai-based Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), which had previously denied earlier in November that it joined IS, pledged allegiance via an audio message posted to social media. Prior to this, another group linked to IS, known as the “Lions of the Islamic State”, claimed responsibility for the October 24 attack in Sinai, which killed dozens of soldiers. On November 15, however, ABM, rebranding itself as “Wilayat al-Sinai”, the Sinai Province, claimed responsibility for the attack in a video depicting the operation against the Egyptian forces.

In [Libya](#), a group calling itself the “Mujahideen of Libya” pledged allegiance to IS, stating that groups from Libya’s three wilayas have joined, namely, Cyrenaica (Barqa, referring to eastern Libya), Fezzan (southern Libya), and Tripolitania (Tripoli, referring to western Libya). Following this, on November 17, “Wilayat Tripoli” claimed responsibility for [two car bombs](#) that targeted the Egyptian and Emirati Embassies on November 13. “Wilayat Barqa” also released pictures of nine suicide bombers that recently carried out missions against anti-Islamist “Libyan Army” bases in Benghazi. Of the nine, five are Tunisian nationals, two Egyptian, and two Libyan. Additionally, unconfirmed reports indicate that Sofian Ben Qumu, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia in Derna, pledged allegiance to IS on November 11.

The “Soldiers of the Caliphate in [Algeria](#)”, led by former al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) member, Khaled Abu Suleiman, renewed its pledge of allegiance to IS. Reports indicate that the group previously issued such a pledge on September 14 and carried out the

beheading of a French national on September 24. The statement contains threats against France, the US, and their allies.

Meanwhile, a group calling itself the “Mujahideen of the Arabian Peninsula”, referring to [Saudi Arabia](#) given the statement’s reference to the “apostate rulers of the lands of al-Haramayn (Mecca and Medina)”, also vowed allegiance to IS and announced “the raising of the banner of jihad” (holy war). The statement condemns Saudi Arabia’s involvement in airstrikes against the Sunni mujahideen in Iraq and Syria, rather than against Alawites and Shiites.

In [Yemen](#), a group calling itself the “Mujahideen of Yemen” also pledged allegiance to IS. While this particular group has been unknown until now, reports had indicated the presence of IS supporters in the country. In this context, a local Yemen newspaper reported in October that a statement from “Supporters of the Islamic State in the Arabian Peninsula” had been sent to “hundreds of journalists in Yemen”. This statement matches neither the oath of allegiance issued by the “Mujahideen of Yemen” nor the “Mujahideen of the Arabian Peninsula” and included statements regarding the domestic situation in Yemen, such as allegations that the government is “the slave of the crusaders, led by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi” who “gave Sanaa to the heretic Houthis”.

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Impact of IS Pledges across the Middle East and North Africa

Simultaneous oaths of allegiance in five countries likely meant as ‘media operation’; may heighten competition between groups, encourage attacks by those newly-formed

The simultaneous pledges of allegiance by groups in five countries were likely meant as a concerted media operation by the Islamic State. Formerly the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), IS’s declaration of a Caliphate and rebranding was intended to form a global entity by erasing any geographic delineation and demanding that jihadist groups around the world pledge allegiance to it. Thus far, however, the group had failed to gain support from major groups already operating in the Middle East and North Africa. Its most notable supporters were the aforementioned Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria, which is not believed to be comprised of more than several dozen militants, and the two Libyan militias in Derna. With this in mind, the recent series of oaths issued on the same day is likely aimed at demonstrating that the group is quickly expanding and proving that it holds the upper hand in its rivalry against al-Qaeda core. Such a concerted operation from five groups is likely also intended to encouraging other “undecided” groups, including in Libya and in Tunisia, to follow suit, and potentially draw in al-Qaeda-linked organizations. In this context, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis was previously believed to be an al-Qaeda affiliate.

That said, while ABM is well-known, the other groups that pledged allegiance on November 10 are not and could, like the Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria, include a limited number of members. Regardless of their size, the announcements are likely to bolster competition between the different jihadist groups, particularly Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Yemen. New groups may attempt to assert their influence and presence, while attempting to raise their profiles by staging attacks, as was done with the September 24 beheading in Algeria. Moreover, such attacks may be a condition to gain tangible support from the core of IS, as the organization likely seeks to prove that the recent series of announcement was not a simple “media operation”, but rather will actually lead to an uptick in militancy. Finally, other groups already present in the region may attempt to prove their prominence by staging further attacks, as means to highlight that they are still relevant.

In addition, the threats in al-Baghdadi’s speech are not the first to have been issued against countries in the region. In this context, a [September 25 security message](#) from the US Embassy in Riyadh warned its citizens of “direct threats against US and Saudi interests made by IS”, including in retaliation for US-led airstrikes. A subsequent [October 23 security message](#) stated that it had “been made aware of numerous anti-US and anti-Western posts of various social media sites... some simply derogatory, but others calling for violent action against US citizens and others in Saudi Arabia”. Similarly, on September 30, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) [released a video](#) calling for retaliation against the US and for Muslims to unite against all the countries, including the Arab ones, participating in the US-led coalition. Thus, while al-Baghdadi’s audio recording is notable, given that the threats are

clearly originating from IS and its leadership, it comes amidst an already increased awareness that such threats exist and measures aimed at addressing them. This includes within each state, with more stable countries that have stronger security forces, such as Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Egypt, more capable of responding, as well as heightened regional and international cooperation. Each country will be discussed in further detail below.

Meanwhile, the overall absence of official responses from governments involved, or from Western countries, is likely connected to an interest in reducing the overall impact of these five statements. In other words, refusing to acknowledge their existence may serve as a strategy to deny IS at least some of the media coverage they intended to achieve by their issuance, while also refusing to grant them or the affiliate groups any recognition. Moreover, such an expansion of IS into these countries could suggest the failure of the US-led anti-IS coalition in Iraq and Syria, an image that governments likely prefer not to portray.

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Threat of Attacks in Egypt

Recent pledge of allegiance to Islamic State by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis heightens threat of attack in Sinai Peninsula, as well as potentially in country's major cities

In Egypt, the recent pledge of allegiance follows weeks of increasing reports and rumors regarding Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis' upcoming announcement, including reports that were officially denied by the group on November 4. Such rumors and confusion, as well as the fact that the [October 24 attack](#) was claimed by another IS-affiliated group, may indicate the presence of internal conflicts within ABM and that while part of group sought to join IS, part may also remain loyal to al-Qaeda. The most senior leaders of the group, some of whom may have been part of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, formerly led by al-Qaeda core's current head, Ayman al-Zawahiri, may remember that the 1990s Islamist insurgency in Egypt failed primarily due to mass-killings of civilians, a tactic that has seen widespread use by IS. ABM was also widely perceived as aligned with al-Qaeda prior to this announcement.



*Banner released via ABM's social media marketing video of group rebranded as 'Wilayat Sinai'
(Source: @W_SINA55)*

In this context, ABM, had thus far applied the lessons of this former insurgency and focused its attacks almost exclusively on security forces. However, the growing crackdown against the Sinai-based group and a general blockade on the peninsula may have cut the group from its leadership in other parts of the country and caused leaders, including those whose ideology may be more aligned with al-Qaeda, to flee elsewhere in Egypt or to other countries, such as neighboring Libya. During the last months, and as the crackdown intensified, ABM militants in Sinai, now referred to as "Wilayat Sinai", have increasingly used tactics made famous by IS, including beheadings against alleged "collaborators", suggesting a timeframe when ABM more clearly shifted toward IS. Moreover, the likelihood that such internal divisions exists is further highlighted by unconfirmed reports suggesting that, while

ABM's Sinai-based leaders support IS, the group's other branch in the Nile Delta does not. Such a division may lead to the creation of an ABM splinter group in the coming weeks to months.

In addition, the segments of the group that indeed support IS may increase attacks against civilians in the Sinai Peninsula in the coming months, while further beheadings may be reported as a means of both signaling their presence and demonstrating their adoption of IS-like tactics. This possibility was recently highlighted by the November 12 discovery of a car bomb outside of a fast food restaurant in al-Arish, which was subsequently remotely detonated by security forces after evacuating the building. Attacks against foreigners in the peninsula may also be recorded, as was the case in Algeria. Additionally, prior to ABM's pledge of allegiance, one of IS's high ranking members, Abu Musab al-Maqdisi, called on fighters in Sinai to stage attacks both in Cairo and against Christians, in the same way IS is carrying out attacks in Baghdad and targeting minorities. With this in mind, ABM may attempt to follow such advice and conduct attacks in Cairo, although their reach to the city has thus far remained limited. As ABM remains the most prominent IS-affiliate in the region, IS may attempt to transfer substantial financial and military resources to Sinai, conditioning such aid on the carrying out of a major attack in one of Egypt's main cities in order to further raise the group's profile.



*Alleged footage released by ABM of IED attack on Egyptian security vehicle
(Source: Long War Journal)*

In response to such a heightened threat, the government is likely to increase its ongoing counter-insurgency operations in Sinai. The oath of allegiance will also encourage and further legitimize the passage of increased restrictions on movement and telecommunications in the peninsula, as well as the extension of the [state of emergency](#) initially declared in October for a period of three months. Meanwhile, Israel is likely to allow additional troops to be deployed into Sinai, while possibly carrying out raids itself against the group as a preemptive measure against any potential attacks targeting its interests. This possibility is underlined by the fact that Israel can deploy advanced intelligence and attack means that the Egyptian military may lack. In Egypt's main cities and in other regions of the country, the government is likely to increase its arrest raids against Islamist militants and may decide to heighten military deployments and erect more checkpoints, particularly in the Nile Delta.

Overall, we assess the threat of sophisticated attacks inside Egypt's main cities, including the threat of attacks against civilian installations, has been heightened by the recent pledge of allegiance to IS. However, the timeframe for such attack likely depends upon ABM's ability to swiftly reassert its influence over the country's jihadists, in light of the previously discussed appearance of internal divisions. While at the time of writing such divisions may reduce ABM's capacity to conduct sophisticated attacks in Cairo and Alexandria, the recent

pledge of allegiance may encourage the group to allocate additional resources toward the execution of a more high profile attack in the coming months. As shown by an uptick in unsophisticated militancy in Cairo, mostly by Afnad Misr, militant groups do have the capability to stage attacks in the capital and security forces have thus far proven unable to prevent these attacks. This is further underlined by a recent increase in low-level attacks targeting transportation infrastructure, including a [sound bomb](#) thrown in a Cairo metro station on November 13 and an explosive device that [detonated on subway tracks](#) between two stations on November 14, also in Cairo.

In the coming weeks, it further remains possible that Afnad Misr, known to have links with ABM, will clarify its stance regarding IS. Such a pledge of allegiance to IS would serve as a warning sign for a potential increase in attacks against civilians in Cairo and facilitate the execution of more sophisticated attacks. That said, although the group's allegiance remains unconfirmed, an analysis of Afnad Misr's attacks and propaganda suggests that they have thus far remained an al-Qaeda-inspired group. In this context, it continues to largely target security forces and infrastructure, while its propaganda justifies such attacks by denouncing the alleged violence of security forces against protesters. The group has, moreover, not implemented a similar shift in tactics seen in Sinai prior to ABM's oath of allegiance to IS.

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Confirmation of IS Presence, Expansion in North Africa

Statements confirm previously known presence of Islamic State affiliates in Libya and Algeria, while highlighting potential geographic expansion of group in Libya

In **Libya**, while the group pledging allegiance to IS was not previously known, the Derna-based Islamic Youth Shura Council (IYSC) had already issued an oath to IS, stating on [October 5](#) that it was part of IS's Caliphate. That said, there had been no similar declarations in Libya's southern (Fezzan) or western (Tripoli) regions prior to the November 10 statement, and the announcement is thus notable given the geographic implications of an IS-presence in the country's three regions. In this context, as part of the "Mujahideen of Libya", "Wilayat Tripoli" claimed responsibility for the two car bombs in Tripoli on November 13, and "Wilayat Barqa" released photos of nine suicide bombers that recently carried out missions in Benghazi, underlining both their existence and willingness to conduct attacks. It also points to their interest in asserting their newly announced existence in the country, while highlighting the potential that "Wilayat Fezzan" will also aim to demonstrate its presence.



Photos released by Wilayat Barqa of alleged suicide bombers during the "Epics of Benghazi" (Source: GLORIA Center)

Moreover, as underlined by the claim of responsibility by "Wilayat Tripoli" and release of photos by "Wilayat Barqa", we assess that the oath of allegiance to IS will lead to a heightened threat of attacks against civilians, including kidnappings, which is already high. An uptick in beheadings remains possible as well, which would likely be aimed at signaling the presence of IS-affiliates and intended as a deterrent to the local population. In addition, the pledge of allegiance will likely also encourage a shift in attacks

against state institutions seen as "heretical" and anti-Islamist generally, particularly those affiliated with the House of Representatives and Major General Khalifa Haftar and as recently highlighted by the attacks in Tobruk on [November 12](#).

In **Algeria**, the statement by the already known Soldiers of the Caliphate was likely meant as a reminder, and as part of IS's media operation, rather than specifically linked to any internal development in the country itself. It is, however, notable that the statement first mentions France before mentioning the US and other allies, highlighting the already increased threat against French nationals and interests. We [continue](#) to assess that the militant group will seek to stage additional attacks in order to further assert its influence on the country's jihadists.

However, their ability to do so likely remains limited, both in terms of the intensity of a potential attack as well as the targeted locales. The group’s capabilities are likely hindered by heavy security deployments, which may limit the IS-allied faction’s operational area to its stronghold in Kabylie. With this in mind, the group may attempt to stage “opportunistic” attacks on soft targets in Kabylie and in its vicinity, or stage attacks against military convoys circulating in mountainous areas of the region. We assess that after the ongoing winter, which tends to hinder jihadist movements in the area, and should Algerian forces not be able to arrest or kill members of the group, its activity might expand. The group may thus plan an attack on the capital itself, as members of the group, including its leader, were involved in attacks in Algiers in the past. However, thus far, the group is likely unable to plan any future attacks and is likely focused on its own survival in light of the significant military operations. While the statement will not fundamentally change the government’s response to the presence of IS-affiliates in Algeria, given the group has already signaled its presence by executing a French citizen, Algeria will likely continue to expand its military operations as means to capture the leaders of the IS-affiliated group.

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Existence of Islamic State in Saudi Arabia

Potential presence of IS-affiliate underlined by known existence of radicalized elements; threat limited due to capabilities of security forces

While the existence of a known-IS affiliate actively operating in Saudi Arabia had remained unconfirmed at the time of al-Baghdadi's speech, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) [announced on November 24](#) that the leader of a group involved in the [November 3 shooting](#) of Shiites in al-Dalwah in the al-Ahsa Governorate "is directly linked to the terrorist group" of IS. According to Saudi Arabia's official news agency, 77 individuals, including four "leading perpetrators", of which all but four are Saudi nationals. In this context, the MOI's announcement confirms the presence of not only radicalized individuals sympathetic to militant jihadist groups such as IS, but those with direct ties to the organization.



Photos reportedly taken of November 3 shooting incident outside Shiite religious center (Source: Shahada Light Movement)

It must be noted that the November 3 shooting occurred prior to the oath of allegiance from the "Mujahideen in the Arabian Peninsula" and al-Baghdadi's speech. However, the coordination of the five oaths suggests that they may have been prepared ahead of time for such a coordinated release. Under these circumstances, it remains possible that this group, particularly the core four members, were responsible for the issuance of the oath. Conversely, it also remains possible that it was another group entirely, given the known existence of radicalized individuals in the country. This is underlined by recent arrests announced by Saudi authorities, including of relatively large-scale "cells" of which the majority of members were Saudi nationals. On October 21-22, for example, [27 people](#), who were allegedly part of a 41 member group accused of "forming a terrorist cell", were sentenced on multiple charges, including for planning attacks against US forces in Qatar and Kuwait. On September 2, Saudi authorities announced the arrest of [88 people](#) on similar charges. Moreover, given that the affiliation of the arrested individuals, whether it be to al-Qaeda or IS, are not always specified, this particularly announcement may be the government's direct response to both the al-Ahsa shooting as well as the oath of allegiance. In other words, the authorities may be attempting to convey that, although an IS-affiliate may have declared its allegiance, they have found them.

Regardless, while the interest in targeting Saudi Arabia will likely continue due to its participation in the US-led coalition, al-Baghdadi's call, and, as noted in the group's

statement, the presence of two of Islam’s holiest sites, we assess that the size and operational ability of any IS-affiliates or sympathizers will be limited. This is based on increased regional and international cooperation in this regard, as well as the capability of the country’s security and intelligence forces. Such a capability is underscored by ongoing reports of arrests, such as the 77 apprehended less than a month following the attack, and is liable to be assisted by the absence of limitations that often accompany democratic systems or requisite transparency. This includes the “anti-terror” law passed in February that provides vague definitions of “terrorism”. Thus, while further incidents similar to that in al-Ahsa may occur, it is also likely to justify further strict measures, monitoring, and crackdowns by security forces, while also potentially increasing support among the population for such measures. According to a poll conducted by a think tank in September 2014, only five percent of Saudi citizens “voice[d] a favorable view” of IS.

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Islamic State's Encroachment on AQAP's Territory in Yemen

While IS presence in Yemen not unexpected, global interests and predominance of al-Qaeda affiliate may reduce group's size and influence

Given ongoing instability across the country, the known presence of Sunni militant jihadist ideology, and the aforementioned previous reports indicating support for the group in the country, the emergence of an IS-affiliate is not unexpected. Given the established presence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the country, the group's rivalry with IS, along with unconfirmed reports suggesting that the IS-affiliate's size is limited to a few dozen members or less, it is likely that this new group is an offshoot of AQAP. In this context, AQAP has not and is unlikely to swear allegiance to IS. This is underscored by statements from



November 19 AQAP video denouncing al-Baghdadi's statement accepting the various pledges of allegiance to IS (Source: @ABMOGA)

AQAP leader, Mamoon Hatem, describing the "Mujahideen of Yemen's" oath as creating divisions and stating that al-Baghdadi is not the caliph. Moreover, AQAP released a video on November 19 condemning al-Baghdadi's statement, accusing him of creating discord among militants. In this video, the group also renewed its own oath of allegiance to al-Qaeda core's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

While attacks attributed to this newly announced group are likely to occur for the previously discussed reasons, including the interest in new organizations to assert themselves and raise their profile, their ability to recruit members is liable to remain limited. In addition to AQAP's established presence, the statement issued by the IS-affiliate did not include references to domestic current affairs, suggesting a more global outlook and broader goals, which is likely to limit interested parties. Although al-Baghdadi instructed those in Yemen to target the Houthis, he appears to have done so in the context of their status as Shiite Houthis, rather than their domestic policies or actions. IS has persistently targeting Shiites, while the establishment of a Yemen affiliate broadly serves his aim of establishing a greater and global Caliphate.

In this context, although AQAP has attempted to conduct attacks abroad, they also adopt local aims and rhetoric, likely as a means of increasing their support and influence in the country. This was witnessed recently following the government's signing of an [agreement](#) in September with Ansar Allah, the political arm of the Shiite Houthis, after which a notable [increase in attacks targeting and clashes involving](#) Houthis and members of the "Houthi-ized" Yemeni military were recorded. Moreover, Houthi expansion in the country largely under the pretext of fighting militancy has been accompanied by rising reports of clashes with Sunni tribes, including those that have reportedly aligned themselves with AQAP. This,

along with what appears to be an AQAP policy to attack military, government, and Houthi targets rather than civilian locales, is aimed at garnering support among the population. This is underlined by an apology issued by the organization following a December 2013 attack against a hospital within Sanaa's Ministry of Defense compound. There remains little apparent reason at this time why those currently supporting AQAP, particularly in their fight against Houthis, would switch their support to a new IS group that, at least thus far, expresses little interest in domestic Yemeni affairs.

That said, even a group with only a few dozen members is capable of conducting attacks, particularly if they are, indeed, an offshoot of AQAP and are comprised of members that have training and are battle-experienced. Thus, while attacks attributed to the group may be recorded in the coming days or weeks, their impact remains questionable. This is due to the already-existing persistent occurrence of militancy and attacks in locales across the country, including against the Houthis, while the operational capabilities of this IS-affiliate is unconfirmed.

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Conclusion

Despite the known presence of Islamic State-affiliates in various countries in the Middle East and North Africa prior to the November 10 oaths of allegiance and al-Baghdadi's November 13 acceptance, the primary threat from IS has largely been perceived as based in Syria and Iraq. This is due to, among others, the increased strength and capabilities derived from controlling territory and its resources, as well as the military hardware gained from success in battle. With this in mind, and amidst persistent speculation regarding IS's reach and influence, this "expansion" of IS may be a litmus test for the group's broader capabilities, including vis-à-vis funding, training, and other concrete support. Perceived success in this regard will likely translate into additional groups issuing their own oaths of allegiance to IS, potentially serving as a domino effect for other organizations.

Such success is liable to manifest in increased attacks and attempted attacks, particularly as newly-announced groups aim to assert themselves, their presence, and their affiliation with IS, whether by choice or direction from IS central. Increased competition between these groups that swore allegiance to IS and others already operating in the areas will likely trigger a similar result. These attacks will, of course, depend upon the groups' country-specific operational atmosphere, including availability of preferred targets, such as Westerners, Shiites, and governments, and capabilities of security forces. Meanwhile, as authorities attempt to crackdown on these militants, the differences between and importance of stronger security apparatuses and more functioning systems will be more prominently highlighted. Thus, while car bombs may be reported in Libya and Yemen, arrests and sentencing of suspected militants will likely be more common in Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations

If operating or traveling in the Middle East and North Africa region, consult with us for country-specific recommendations regarding threats of IS or militant activity.

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Have additional questions? Contact us at intel@max-security.com or call us at +44 20 3540 0434

MAX Intelligence Division

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