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Terror attacks are likely to increase in 2018, with ISIS and al-Qaeda both still dangerous

- ISIS lost its stronghold, but it hasn't lost its will to kill innocent civilians
- More frequent attacks, accompanied by a decrease in lethality, are likely
- "We're going to see without a doubt more attacks in the West," says one expert

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Published 9:32 PM ET Thu, 28 Dec 2017 | Updated 11:49 PM ET Thu, 28 Dec 2017



Brendan McDermid | Reuters

A woman is aided by first responders after sustaining injury on a bike path in lower Manhattan in New York, NY, U.S., October 31, 2017.

The "caliphate" may be in ruins, but that doesn't mean ISIS is gone forever.

Terror attacks are likely to increase in 2018, as the destruction of the Islamic State's physical stronghold in [Iraq](#) and [Syria](#) will strengthen its will to strike out abroad, experts say.

"ISIS will want to show that they are still in the fight, and their followers remain as fanatical as ever," said Lewis-Sage Passant, a former British Army intelligence officer and founder of travel security company HowSafelsMyTrip. "The number of attacks globally will likely increase as

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the group switches focus from the war in the Middle East to international terrorism."

Adam Deen, executive director of counter-extremism think tank Quilliam, makes a similar argument.

"We're going to see without a doubt more attacks in the West," he told UK newspaper the Independent in October. Deen said ISIS is now more focused on revenge, and warned against the false sense of victory that many expressed after the death of [Osama Bin Laden](#).

"They will be less able to mount well-funded operations such as the Paris attacks. But they want to show that they are still in the fight."

-Lewis-Sage Passant, former intelligence officer, speaking on ISIS

Propaganda will continue online and elsewhere, despite the destruction of its main source in the former ISIS "capital" of Raqqa, Syria.

"Threats in the West will persist in the form of people who are still inspired by the propaganda that has been disseminated by ISIS," Anthony Richards, an assistant professor in Terrorism Studies at the University of East London, [said on CNBC](#).

"I think in the longer term, the defeat of ISIS and the propaganda defeat that goes with that will actually reduce the threat in the UK and Europe, but ... In the shorter term, we'll still see more terrorist attacks."

Some foresee more frequent attacks, accompanied by a decrease in lethality, including a rising number of knife and vehicle attacks.

"The loss of ISIS' central coordination and revenue-generating capabilities means that they will be less able to mount well-funded operations such as the Paris attacks," Sage-Passant said, "But they want to show that they are still in the fight."

5,600 fighters go back 'home'

An estimated 25,000 foreign fighters from more than 100 countries left their homes to fight in Syria. A report by the Soufan Center in October put the current figure for returned fighters at 5,600 from 33 countries, and revealed that on average 20 to 30 percent of those from Europe are already back. In the [U.K.](#), [Sweden](#) and [Denmark](#), a whopping 50 percent have returned. Almost 20,000 names have been shared with Interpol.

For the U.S., the figure is far smaller: The Soufan Center reported 129 Americans made it to the battlefields of Syria or Iraq, and only seven of them have returned as of October. Seventy-seven out of 135 people charged with ISIS-linked terrorism offenses have been convicted as of August.

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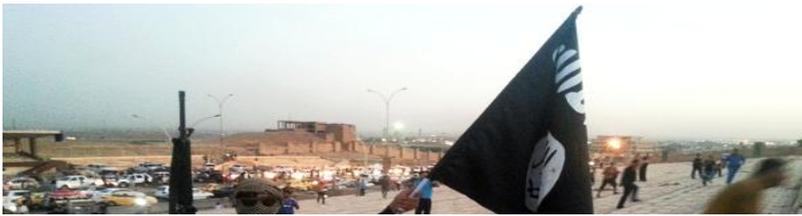


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Terrorism expert says America is losing the digital war against ISIS. Here's why

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That presents a tremendous challenge for domestic authorities. However, many warn that blanket bans on movement or entry, such as U.S. [President Donald Trump's](#) travel ban on six majority-Muslim countries, aren't likely to effectively stem the threat.

"The underlying ideology that drives the violence of groups like ISIS is not a physical entity that can be stopped by territorial borders," Mubarak Ahmed, analyst at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, told CNBC.

Domestic networks and individuals are what matters, he argued — after all, ISIS attacks in Europe [have](#) been carried out almost exclusively by citizens or residents of those countries.

The return of Al-Qaeda

Even if the ISIS threat ultimately recedes, al-Qaeda is very capable of filling that void in terms of [a](#) major terrorist threat, warned Richards at the University of East London. ["We shouldn't just be looking at ISIS. al-Qaeda, for example, is still \[v\]\(#\)ery much in existence and could change its focus back to attacks on the West."](#)

In recent months, Osama bin Laden's son Hamza has released a series of messages upping his calls for attacks on Westerners and Western interests, particularly following [Trump's naming of Jerusalem as Israel's capital](#). The organization is likely to use the younger Bin Laden to spearhead a comeback as it sees opportunity in ISIS's military defeats.

"There can be no misunderstanding or complacency," Ahmed urged. "Al-Qaeda remains active and ideologically engaged in activities against the West. An over-concentration on ISIS, rather than jihadi terrorism as a whole, risks creating blind spots for the group to exploit."

MI5, the U.K.'s domestic counterintelligence agency, revealed in October that it was overseeing 500 live operations and had 20,000 people on its counterterrorism radar. Between January and October 2017, seven terror plots in the U.K. had been foiled.

The numbers paint a sobering picture for the year ahead, despite military victories in the Middle East, as governments grapple with how to tackle the evolving terror threat.



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"This is a generational struggle," Ahmed explained, "And the simplicity of their approach, combined with their ability to still inspire, has the power to outlive the end of their physical caliphate."

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