The Imminent Front

An Estimate

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SCOPE NOTE

This estimate addresses the following question: During the next three years, how may the Islamic State (DA'ISH) threaten the domestic security environments of nations in the West?

This estimate was produced to help define a strategic intelligence picture of future threats posed by the Islamic State, also referred to as ISIS/L and "al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham" (DA'ISH). In addition, this estimate's contents are intended to help consumers anticipate features of potential plots that may be developed by this terrorist group. A restricted version of this estimate contains additional details concerning prospective plots, as well as the potential developments of capabilities to execute new forms of attacks in the West. The restricted version of this estimate also contains indicators lists furnished to enhance the predictability of future events.

It is assessed the issue of threats posed by DA'ISH to the United States' and allied nations' interests in the West is best examined in the context of the rigorous competition for dominance in the Global Jihad movement underway between DA'ISH and al-Qa'ida. Indeed, an important factor which has informed predictive analysis performed to produce this estimate is DA'ISH leaders' aspirations for their followers to outperform al-Qa'ida's global efforts to damage the interests of these two terrorist groups' shared enemies. In the strategic imaginations of DA'ISH leaders, meeting this objective will increase DA'ISH's capabilities to grow its support base in the near term while concomitantly increasing the likelihood the group can achieve long-term sustainability for its operations.

This effort leveraged the knowledge of intelligence professionals who possess expertise with jihadist literature known to influence the agendas of DA'ISH and al-Qa'ida leaders, extensive reviews of public statements issued by DA'ISH and al-Qa'ida leaders, reviews of internal communications of DA'ISH members and supporters accessed through a variety of efforts focused on infiltrating the group's online networks, reviews of DA'ISH propaganda materials, reviews of statements and other information posted to social media and other Internet-based platforms by DA'ISH members and supporters, reviews of minutes of non-published interviews conducted by generally reliable sources with individuals previously held hostage by DA'ISH leadership figures, interviews with reliable field sources tracking DA'ISH fighters' activities in Syria, reviews of news reports by journalists known to possess expertise with relevant issues sufficient to present accurate and incisive coverage of related developments, and consultations with other intelligence professionals, including senior-ranking defense and intelligence officials (current and former).

While contemplations cover a three-year period, assessments and corresponding judgments are provided for periods spanning incremental portions of the total contemplated period (i.e. "the next year," "the next two years," and "the next three years").

This estimate does not provide comprehensive analysis of al-Qa'ida's aspirations and capabilities to conduct terrorist operations in the West. As volumes of analytic materials concerning DA'ISH's and al-Qa'ida's intensely orthopraxic ideology, known as Salafiyya Jihadiyya, are available to consumers, this estimate does not provide comprehensive

analysis concerning the ideology which informs these groups' agendas. Furthermore, this estimate does not provide comprehensive analysis of Western governments' domestic security vulnerabilities; nor does this estimate provide comprehensive analysis of Western governments' capacities to manage threats posed by terrorist elements.

Analysis performed in the development of this estimate has been influenced by the following key assumptions:

DA'ISH leaders' claim that they have established a caliphate upon so-called "historically Muslim lands" is the most important tool used to generate support for their terrorist group.

Throughout the total contemplated period, DA'ISH will continue to assert de facto control over some areas the group currently claims to be ruling in Syria and Iraq while also seeking to assert control over other territories situated within so-called "historically Muslim lands."

During the total contemplated period, DA'ISH's influence capabilities will increase with time, as members of the Global Jihad movement will increasingly come to view its continued assertion of control of areas the group claims to be ruling in Syria and Iraq as a manifestation of divine providence.

During the total contemplated period, DA'ISH and al-Qa'ida will continue to exist; and, at no point during the total contemplated period will rapprochement occur between the senior-most leaders of DA'ISH and al-Qa'ida.

During the total contemplated period, DA'ISH will continue competing with al-Qa'ida for dominance in the Global Jihad movement.

For DA'ISH's leaders, demonstrating the group's capabilities to match words with deeds will continue to be a foremost priority, as this bolsters perceptions of DA'ISH as a credible steward of the Global Jihad movement's interests.

In order to showcase the group's capabilities to match words with deeds, DA'ISH propaganda will continue to highlight objectives the terrorist group's members are striving to achieve, thereby providing important insights of the group's near-term agenda, to include information about where the group intends to expand its operations.

Language

Many assessments and judgments contained herein are based on fragmentary sets of information. Assessments and judgments contained herein are not meant to be interpreted as statements of fact, or to imply proof of linkages between two or more items or issues is available. In addition to conveying assessments and judgments rather than certainty, estimative language is used to convey assessed likelihood or probability of an event's occurrence, along with the level of confidence ascribed to relevant judgments.

Estimative Language

Remote, Unlikely, Even Chance, Likely, Very Likely, Almost Certain

Terms such as Likely (greater than 50%), Very Likely (greater than 75%), or Almost Certain (greater than 90%) are used to convey degrees of likelihood an event will occur in excess of an Even Chance (50%).

Unlikely (less than 50%) and Remote (less than 10%) are used to convey degrees of likelihood an event will occur when it is assessed the likelihood of occurrence is below an Even Chance (50%); they do not imply that an event will not occur.

The expression "cannot be ruled out" is used when available information is not sufficient to assess the likelihood of an event's occurrence, but even the remote potential of such an event occurring warrants discussion.

Confidence Levels of Judgments

Low, Moderate, High

• High confidence generally indicates available data and the nature of the issue make it possible to render a solid judgment regarding the probability a given scenario/event will occur. A "high confidence" judgment is not a statement of fact or certainty, however, and such judgments carry risk of being wrong.

• Moderate confidence generally indicates available data does not warrant a high level of confidence, yet available data suggests there is more than an even chance a scenario/event may occur, or an adversary intends to pursue a given course of action.

• Low confidence generally means available data does not indicate a given scenario is plausible, or there is not data sufficient to accommodate analytic inferences in favor of its occurrence.

THE BOTTOM LINE

During the next three years, it is almost certain the Islamic State, or DA'ISH, will orient more resources toward demonstrating it has achieved and can maintain global operational capabilities, with focus on orchestrating more impactful terrorism plots in the West than al-Qa'ida. It is assessed these plots will comprise one, or a mix of the following: Low-cost, mass-casualty attacks whose executors seek to both emulate and amplify the potential impacts of attack plots developed by al-Qa'ida; cascading attacks in multiple major population centers and against government facilities; attempts to assassinate senior political figures, national security officials, high-profile industry leaders and cultural icons; and, attempts to deploy unconventional weaponry. In addition, it cannot be ruled out that the terrorist group will attain cyber offensive capabilities required to launch disruptive attacks targeting critical infrastructure systems in the West.

A VIEW TO THE PROBLEM

In mid-2014, DA'ISH leaders galvanized a large portion of the Global Jihad movement by claiming they had achieved a goal shared by all other Salafi Jihadi groups: Restoring a caliphal model of governance within so-called "historically Muslim lands." Since then, DA'ISH has been engaged in an unprecedented competition for dominance in the Global Jihad movement with its former parent organization, al-Qa'ida. To compete with al-Qa'ida, DA'ISH is aggressively orienting its resources to achieve a variety of objectives whose attainments can serve to increase support for the group, such as punishing these groups' shared enemies in the West whom Salafi Jihadis view as responsible for corrupting Islamic societies by asserting secular-oriented political influence in the Muslim world.

Through the Internet, DA'ISH is managing the most effective global influence operation of any terrorist group in history. Leveraging social media and more difficult to monitor communications platforms to both create international broadcast stations and interact with real and prospective supporters around the world, DA'ISH is more aggressively pursuing membership growth than al-Qa'ida. Meanwhile, in accordance with DA'ISH leaders' guidance, anyone who does not pledge loyalty to this terrorist group's leader is considered a legitimate target in terrorist attacks.

In DA'ISH's competition with al-Qa'ida, matching words with deeds is crucial. As such, it is increasingly the case that statements concerning intentions to conduct operations in certain areas contained in the group's propaganda are harbingers of terrorist attack plots executed by the group's members and supporters. Not only does the pairing of overt statements concerning plans to conduct operations in a given area with actual attacks in that area serve to bolster perceptions of DA'ISH's credibility among both its acquired and prospective bases of support; this increases the terrorist group's capabilities to terrorize civilian populaces by undermining confidence in technologically-superior governments' capabilities to manage threats posed by this group.

In the strategic imaginations of DA'ISH leaders, killing Westerners is a vital tool that can serve to cultivate support from members of the Global Jihad movement who have not yet pledged loyalty to the group's leader. Therefore, DA'ISH leaders seek for their organization to demonstrate greater capabilities to execute attacks in the West than al-Qa'ida. Although DA'ISH's support base in the West is larger in Europe than North America, thus its potential capabilities to mobilize attacks is presently greatest outside the United States, aspirations to execute more catastrophic attacks in the United States than al-Qa'ida's 9/11 attacks of 2001 have been made clear in much of the terrorist group's propaganda. Meanwhile, Europe's proximity to DA'ISH's primary areas of operation makes it easier for operatives trained by the group to execute attacks there.

In addition to calls for the executions of more spectacular attacks in the West than al-Qa'ida's 9/11 attacks of 2001, much like al-Qa'ida, DA'ISH has sought to encourage the group's supporters in the West to assassinate political figures, national security officials, high-profile private sector leaders, and cultural icons. Additionally, the group has sought to imbue members of its global support base with awareness that the pursuit of more innovative actions against Western states' interests than have thus far been taken by al-Qa'ida is necessary. To this end, the group has produced propaganda which is designed to stimulate interest in executing attacks in the West using unconventional weaponry. Concurrently, the relatively high-profile efforts of DA'ISH's cyber operatives indicate the group wishes to achieve cyber offensive capabilities which will serve to generate perceptions of the group as capable of the executing more sophisticated forms of assaults on Western interests than al-Qa'ida.

THE NEXT YEAR

During the next year, it is almost certain individuals loyal to DA'ISH's leader will seek to orchestrate attacks in the West. We assess with high confidence that, within key audiences, senior DA'ISH leaders will continue cultivating a sense of urgency to attack the terrorist group's enemies in the West, with individuals in the West who are not loyal to the group's leader designated legitimate targets by them. Therefore, we assess with high confidence this terrorist group's global, cyber domain-based influence operation will yield an increasing volume of attempts to execute attacks in Europe and North America during this time. We assess with moderate confidence individuals who have not traveled to Syria and Iraq will be responsible for a majority of DA'ISH-linked terrorist plots in the West during this time.

It is likely individuals trained in areas controlled by DA'ISH will seek to execute attacks in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH leaders perceive attacks executed in the West by individuals trained in this terrorist group's primary areas of operation to be most impactful on two key audiences: Civilian populations whom DA'ISH leaders seek to concomitantly terrorize and elicit support for large-scale military invasions of so-called "historically Muslim lands"; and, people whom the group seeks to secure support from. We assess with moderate confidence individuals who have spent time in this terrorist group's primary areas of operations and are already present in the West will seek to execute attacks in the West coordinated by operational planners located in the Middle East and North Africa during this time. We assess with moderate confidence this terrorist group will realize success with efforts to deploy individuals from its primary areas of operation into the West for the purpose of executing attacks during this time. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will move trained operatives into the West by means other than those which entail exploitations of various nations' refugee programs. (Scenarios contemplated include: Paying illicit facilitation networks to smuggle individuals into the United States from Latin America and the Caribbean on board small leisure vessels; and, Paying illicit facilitation networks to smuggle individuals into the United States via its southern border.)

It is almost certain DA'ISH will increase efforts to inspire the terrorist group's supporters in the West to execute attacks that entail little or no coordination with DA'ISH's operational planners. We assess with high confidence the managers of DA'ISH's global influence operation that has entailed the conversions of Internet-based technologies into tools used to aggressively engage with real and prospective supporters will rigorously encourage individuals to demonstrate their loyalty to DA'ISH's leader by

killing individuals in the West who do not support this terrorist group. We assess with high confidence managers of DA'ISH's global influence operation will continue presenting real and prospective supporters with instructions concerning how to acquire and/or produce weaponry employed in executions of attacks, targets for attacks, such as major population centers and high-profile individuals and institutions in both private and government sectors, as well as guidance to help members and supporters evade detection by authorities in the West. In addition, we assess with high confidence that both successful and failed plots in the West will serve to further stimulate interest in executing attacks in the West among individuals loyal to this terrorist group's leader who do not receive explicit instructions from terrorists abroad.

It is almost certain the potential occurrence of attacks attributable to DA'ISH will be greatest in Europe. As DA'ISH has cultivated a larger base of support in Europe than North America, and in consideration of both Europe's geographical proximity to this terrorist group's primary areas of operation and the group's overt expressions of interest in building upon recent achievements like the 13 November 2015 attacks in France, it is assessed with high confidence a majority of efforts to execute attacks in the West will materialize in Europe during this time. It is assessed with moderate confidence it will be more difficult for DA'ISH members to maneuver within the United States than in Europe during this time; however, confidence in this assessment decreases with time, because it is assessed with high confidence a scarcity of successful attacks in the United State will stimulate increased focus on killing Americans among DA'ISH leaders, members and supporters.

It is almost certain DA'ISH will seek to secure the means to threaten the West with attacks which entail deployment of unconventional weaponry. We assess with high confidence that, in the strategic imaginations of DA'ISH leaders, securing capabilities to threaten the West with unconventional weaponry will serve to galvanize prospective bases of support for their group. We assess with moderate confidence DA'ISH will recruit individuals who possess knowledge of how to develop unconventional weaponry into its ranks. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will increase efforts to leverage its largess to attract offers for the sales of comprehensive unconventional weaponry program designs and components, pre-fabricated unconventional weaponry, and/or easy-to-assemble, low-cost, high-impact device designs from illicit networks that do not sympathize with DA'ISH's ideology, but which share DA'ISH's aspirations to harm the United States' and other Western powers' interests. Meanwhile, as it is widely known that it would be more difficult to position or assemble rudimentary radiological devices in the West, it is assessed with moderate confidence DA'ISH leaders will focus a majority of

resources toward securing high-impact chemical and biological weaponry capabilities. (Scenarios contemplated include: Efforts to acquire Marburg Variant-U-equipped dispersal devices from illicit networks in former Soviet states; and, Purchases of designs for relatively sophisticated, high-impact chemical weapons that could be constructed by individuals in the West with access to requisite componentry.)

It is very likely DA'ISH will seek to develop cyber offensive capabilities required to launch disruptive attacks against critical infrastructure systems in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH has recruited individuals who possess technical skills required to conduct sophisticated cyber offensive operations. It is assessed with low confidence that an absence of cyber attacks targeting critical infrastructure is an indicator this terrorist group is not intent upon expanding its cyber terrorism capabilities. It is assessed with high confidence DA'ISH leaders view attaining cyber offensive capabilities required to damage critical infrastructure systems as a means to eclipse the specter of al-Qa'ida, which, in their strategic calculations, will serve to generate additional support for DA'ISH among prospective recruits and financiers.

THE NEXT TWO YEARS

During the next two years, it is almost certain DA'ISH will seek to orchestrate attacks in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will orient more resources toward the mobilizations of attacks in the West. We assess with high confidence this terrorist group's influence capabilities will increase with time; therefore, it is assessed with high confidence this terrorist group will increase efforts to inspire individuals to execute acts of terrorism in the West to demonstrate their loyalty to DA'ISH's leader. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH leaders will view orchestrating attacks in the West involving individuals who have visited Syria and Iraq as an important tool used to stimulate interest in conducting similar attacks among individuals who have not traveled abroad to support the group.

It is likely DA'ISH will seek to deploy individuals trained in areas controlled by the group to manage attack plots in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH leaders perceive attacks executed in the West by individuals trained in this terrorist group's primary areas of operation to be most impactful on two key audiences: Civilian populations whom DA'ISH leaders seek to concomitantly terrorize and elicit support for large-scale military invasions of so-called "historically Muslim lands"; and, people whom the group seeks to secure support from. We assess with high confidence this

terrorist group will increase efforts to orchestrate attacks in the West involving individuals who have visited Syria and Iraq during this time.

It is very likely DA'ISH will realize success with efforts to inspire the terrorist group's sympathizers in the West to execute attacks which entail little, or no coordination with DA'ISH's operational planners. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH's influence capabilities will increase with time. We assess with high confidence that, as this increased influence capability manifests in revelations of more attack plots developed by individuals in the West who have not traveled abroad to support DA'ISH, the terrorist group's leaders will be stimulated to increase calls for their supporters to wage jihad at home. We assess with moderate confidence the increased influence capabilities of DA'ISH leaders among key audiences in the West will result in more efforts on the parts of the group's supporters to attack the group's enemies in the West than to travel abroad to support the group.

It is very likely the potential occurrence of attacks attributable to DA'ISH in North America will match the potential occurrence of attacks attributable to DA'ISH in Europe. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH leaders will prioritize the execution of attacks in the United States over European countries during this time. We assess with high confidence the terrorist group's increased influence capabilities will result in the group's supporters in the West prioritizing attacking the United States over traveling to the group's primary areas of operation. We assess with moderate confidence more DA'ISH supporters from Europe will seek to execute attacks in the United States than the group's supporters in the United States during this time.

It is very likely DA'ISH will achieve the capability to mobilize attacks involving unconventional weaponry in the West during this time. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will attain arsenals of chemical weaponry and the means to move them into the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will attain designs for the production of sophisticated chemical weaponry in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will secure support from individuals in the West who have access to components required to manufacture these devices.

There is a remote chance DA'ISH will develop the cyber offensive capabilities required to disrupt critical infrastructure systems in the West. While we assess with high confidence DA'ISH will increase efforts to acquire the cyber offensive capabilities required to disrupt critical infrastructure systems in the West, we assess with low confidence attainment of this capability will be proven during this time.

THE NEXT THREE YEARS

During the next three years, it is almost certain DA'ISH will orchestrate attacks in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will move into the West individuals trained in the terrorist group's primary areas of operation, and we assess with high confidence some of these operatives will successfully execute attacks. Meanwhile, we assess with high confidence more attacks will be conducted in the West by individuals who have not traveled abroad to support the group. (Scenarios contemplated include: Low-cost, mass-casualty attacks whose executors seek to both emulate and amplify the potential impacts of attack plots developed by al-Qa'ida; cascading attacks in multiple major population centers and against government facilities; attempts to assassinate senior political figures, national security officials, high-profile industry leaders and cultural icons; and, attempts to deploy unconventional weaponry.)

It is very likely DA'ISH will orient more resources toward executing attacks in the United States than in Europe. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will prioritize mobilizing attacks in the United States over attacks in Europe during this time. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will increase calls for attacks in the West executed by supporters of this terrorist group who have not traveled to its primary areas of operation, and we assess with high confidence a majority of such messaging will serve to orient key audiences' focus toward targeting the United States. We assess with moderate confidence DA'ISH will realize success with efforts to deploy individuals from its primary areas of operation to the United States to execute attacks.

It cannot be ruled out that DA'ISH will execute disruptive cyber attacks against critical infrastructure systems in the West. We assess with high confidence DA'ISH will seek to attain capabilities to launch disruptive cyber attacks targeting critical infrastructure systems in the West. Despite these efforts, we assess with low confidence this terrorist group will successfully execute cyber attacks which serve to disrupt critical infrastructure systems in the West. Meanwhile, we assess with moderate confidence the likelihood of any such attacks succeeding will be greatest in Europe during this time.