

ISIS after the Defeat of the Islamic Caliphate: The Rise of Cyber-Jihad

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Abstract : After the capture of Al-Raqqah and the defeat of the short-lived Islamic Caliphate in 2017, everyone predicted the end of ISIS. However, ISIS proved far more resilient than initially thought. The militant group quickly regrouped from its defeat and started a low-intensity guerrilla campaign in central Iraq (near Kirkuk and Mosul) and north-eastern Syria (near Deir ez-Zorr). At the same time, ISIS doubled down on its cyber-campaign; actually, ISIS is as active on the cyber-domain as during the peak of its power in 2015. This paper, a spin-off paper from a co-authored book on the Syrian Civil War (due to be published by Rowman and Littlefield), intends to examine how ISIS operates in the cyber-domain and how this "Cyber-Caliphate" under re-construction is associated with its post-2017 strategy. This paper will draw on the discipline of War Studies (with an emphasis on Cyber-Security and Insurgency / Counter-Insurgency) and will benefit from the insights of interviewed experts on the field (e.g., Hassan Hasssan). This paper will explain how the successful operation of ISIS in the cyber-space preserves the myth of the "caliphate" amongst its worldwide followers (against the odds) and sustains the group's ongoing insurgency in Syria and Iraq; in addition, this paper will suggest how this cyber-threat can be countered best.

Keywords : ISIS, cyber-jihad, Syrian Civil War, cyber-terrorism, insurgency and counter-insurgency

Conference Title : ICCWS 2020 : International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security

Conference Location : Barcelona, Spain

Conference Dates : May 22-23, 2020