

Islamic State Expansion into Saudi Arabia

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The Islamic State (IS) recently extended its attacks to Saudi Arabia, threatening future confrontations within the kingdom as well as actively expanding its recruiting efforts to Saudi nationals. The organization already operates in a variety of countries including Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. Its proximity to the Saudi border and possible expansion to the kingdom signal the group's desire to play a role at the heart of Islam. So far, however, the majority of the group's activity takes place in Syria and Iraq where counter measures to prevent its expansion in this region are the focus of a coalition of allied powers including the United States and Saudi Arabia.

In a recent video recording, Islamic State urged supporters to kill all Shia Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, including those in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the group's fight goes beyond the Shia to include opposition to all Islamic countries believed to not be Islamic and pious enough, among which is the kingdom, home to Islam's two Holiest places, Mecca and Medina. Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations rooted in Islam also maintain a similar view of what constitutes the enemy. The IS recording narrowed in on



The mosque bombing in al-Qadeh in eastern Saudi Arabia

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Saudi Arabia by urging young Saudis to take action against Shiites and also criticizing the effectiveness of King Salman's rule by claiming that he was not doing enough to protect the Sunni majority.

In the same recording the group claimed responsibility for a May 22, 2015, suicide bombing of a Shiite mosque in al-Qadeeh that killed 21 and left more than 50 wounded. The Shia in Saudi Arabia are a minority. In addition to this recording, the group has vowed to carry out revenge attacks against the kingdom for its role in participating in the international coalition's air strikes against it in Syria and Iraq. After this recording the organization carried out another car bomb attack on Saudi soil on July 16 at a checkpoint near the kingdom's highest security prison. These factors, along with the fact that Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's holiest places, make the kingdom an increasingly important target for future IS attacks.



Saudi Arabian Interior Ministry officials announcing arrests

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The recording also highlights the certainty that IS is attempting to tap into the sectarian divisions in Saudi Arabia to stir up support and recruit followers within the kingdom. State security agencies have so far arrested 431 persons on suspicion of belonging to IS cells. Youths in particular appear to be affected by the organization's propaganda because they see it as a successful military power to stop Shia expansion and defend the Sunnis. IS furthers its attempts to recruit Saudi youth by tapping into the sectarian emotions currently fostered by Saudi Arabia's war on the Shia rebels in neighboring Yemen. The kingdom's focus is to prevent the perceived encroachment of Iran into the Arabian Peninsula which Riyadh sees as clear Shiite expansion. Islamic State emphasizes the revitalized sectarianism among the Saudi youth and funnels this emotion towards the group's goal of ending the perceived Shiite threat in the Arabian Peninsula; thus the practice of attacking Shias locally.

Some believe that Saudi Arabia supports the Islamic State as a defender of the Sunnis and that the kingdom uses the organization as an agent to arrest the rise of Iran as a Shia power in the Middle East. While Saudi Arabia is currently at war with Shia rebels in Yemen in an effort to

stop the spread of Iran's power and influence and to restore Yemen's legitimate authorities, the kingdom does not use IS in its military operations. In addition, the large number of arrests of suspected supporters of the organization and attacks within the kingdom point to an adversarial relationship rather than a cooperative one. On the contrary, the evidence points to an increase in attempted attacks by IS on Saudi soil.

Images accessed August 15, 2015

Mosque bombing in al-Qadeeh

http://ichef.bbc.co.uk/news/660/media/images/83167000/jpg/83167679_ioriattack.jpg

Saudi Arabian Interior Ministry officials

<http://www.aawsat.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ISIS-cell.jpg>