

## Annex A- Background of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

- The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) blazed onto the terrorism scene in a spectacular way on 29 June 2014, the first day of Ramadan, with its self-proclamation of the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate that stretched across eastern Syria and much of northern and western Iraq. ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi also declared himself the Caliph and “leader for Muslims everywhere”.
- ISIS’ establishment of the so-called Caliphate allows it to exert “state-like” control over physical territory, thereby differentiating itself from all other terrorist groups, including the hitherto dominant Al Qaeda. At the same time, it also gives it an aura of divine sanction, which adds to its legitimacy in the eyes of radicalised Muslims who have bought into the romanticised notion of *Islamic* Caliphate peddled by ISIS through its tech-savvy propaganda machinery.



- ISIS’ territorial ambitions extend beyond its territories in Syria and Iraq. It has also declared *wilayat* (provinces under the ISIS Caliphate) in parts of Nigeria, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, North Caucasus and the Afghan-Pakistan region.

• That ISIS was able to recruit tens of thousands of foreign fighters into its ranks and radicalise many more across the globe with its virulent brand of ideology can be attributed to its ability to fully exploit the internet and social media platforms to seek out potential recruits to its cause. At the same time, it also harnessed the diversity within its ranks to produce sleek propaganda campaigns which are customised to tap into the existing grievances of the communities it is targeting to galvanise into taking up arms. That said, ISIS’ appeal has begun to ebb from 2015 onwards as the brutality and extreme violence that it espoused began to turn off would be supporters.

- Since late 2015, ISIS has also come under pressure from the anti-ISIS coalition in Syria and Iraq. According to some estimates, the terrorist group has lost about half of its territories in the past two years.
- As at May 2017, it still retains Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, which are of strategic importance to ISIS (It was from the al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul’s Old City that ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his caliphate in June 2014, while Raqqa is the de facto capital of the self-declared ISIS caliphate).

- These setbacks in Syria and Iraq have prompted ISIS to project its activities outside the conflict zone, to carry out attacks in countries that belong to the anti-ISIS coalition.