

The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is not the only Salafi-Jihadist threat emanating from Syria. Its prominence in U.S. policy has overshadowed a threat of similar magnitude from Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), the official al-Qaeda (AQ) affiliate in Syria. JN rivals ISIS as a sophisticated, intelligent, strategic actor in the region and continues to enjoy a dangerous freedom to operate in Syria. The two groups share common goals, including a revived Islamic Caliphate. JN, however, is pursuing its aims through a distinct, more patient methodology that is highly threatening despite its low signature. Whereas ISIS has announced its state and tried to legitimize it by conquest, JN is following AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's method of fomenting a religious and social revolution by embedding itself within an indigenous insurgency. The Syrian war has provided JN a nearly ideal environment within which to implement this strategy on behalf of al-Qaeda, and JN has enjoyed worrying success to date