Global Terrorism Index 2025

- Global Results
- Trends in Terrorism
- The Sahel
- Islamic State & Affiliates

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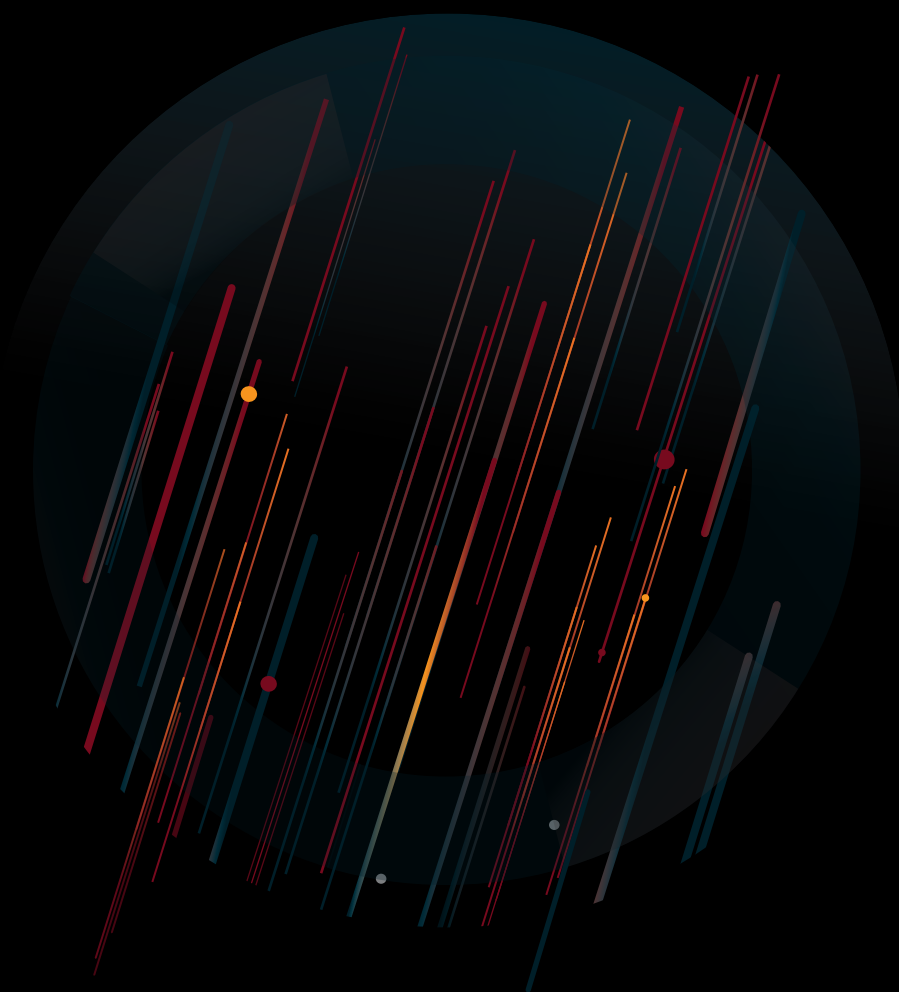
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dragonfly

The GTI uses Dragonfly's TerrorismTracker database, which contains detailed and structured event records of every terrorist incident reported in open sources since January 2007. Dragonfly is a leading risk intelligence and data company that specialises in global security, geopolitics, crises and instability.

TerrorismTracker is the most comprehensive, current and methodologically robust dedicated open-source terrorism incidents database available. It is widely used for professional applications in countering terrorism, by law enforcement, government, military, in the private sector, in academia, and among insurers.

Further information about Dragonfly is available at **www.dragonflyintelligence.com**

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Executive Summary

This is the twelfth edition of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), which provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in terrorism over the last decade.

Terrorism remains a persistent global threat, with 2024 marking another year of shifting patterns and evolving challenges with the geographic reach of terrorism spreading. The number of countries experiencing at least one terrorist incident increased from 58 to 66, the most countries affected since 2018. In 2024, more countries deteriorated than improved for the first time in seven years, with 45 countries reporting a higher impact from terrorism, while only 34 showed improvement.

Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the deadliest terrorist organisation in 2024, responsible for 1,805 deaths across 22 countries. The four major terrorist organisations, IS, Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab continued to increase their activity, with deaths attributed to these groups increasing by 11 per cent to 4,204. In 2023, these groups were active in 29 countries which increased to 30 countries in 2024.

In 2024, 36 per cent of terrorist attacks were not claimed by an organisation. IEP has developed a machine learning model to assign these incidents to likely groups. The analysis found that deaths attributed to IS would have been 58 per cent higher, while those linked to JNIM would have been 176 per cent higher. This underscores the challenges in accurately assessing the impact of different terrorist organisations.

In 2024, deaths from terrorism fell to 7,555, representing a 13 per cent decline from the previous year. This reduction was entirely due to the large spike in the prior year from the Hamas October 7th attack, otherwise deaths would have been approximately the same. The number of terrorist attacks also declined, falling by three per cent to 3,492. The drop in incidents was primarily driven by an 85 per cent decrease in terrorist activity in Myanmar. Excluding Myanmar, global terrorist attacks would have increased by eight per cent.

In the West, lone actor terrorism is on the rise with terrorist attacks increasing from 32 to 52 in 2024. These attacks are typically carried out by youths, often in their teens, who have no formal ties to terrorist organisations. Instead, they become radicalised through online content, constructing personal ideologies that often blend conflicting viewpoints influenced via access to fringe forums, gaming environments, encrypted messaging apps and the dark web. Because there are no affiliations, it means these types of attacks are difficult for intelligence agencies to track. Social media algorithms also accentuate biases, pushing disaffected youth towards more radicalised content. In Europe, one in five persons arrested for terrorism is legally classified as a child.

In Europe, terrorist incidents doubled to 67, including attacks by IS and Hamas. The resurgence of attacks was particularly notable in seven Western countries - Sweden, Australia, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Switzerland, with Germany being the worst ranked nation at 27th on the Index. There are now seven Western countries ranked amongst the 50 most impacted countries on the GTI. Meanwhile, in the US, antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes escalated sharply following the start of the Gaza war, with FBI-recorded incidents targeting the Jewish community rising by 270 per cent in just two months. Similar patterns emerged in Europe and Australia, where attacks on synagogues were reported throughout the year.

Terrorism in the Sahel has increased significantly, with deaths rising nearly tenfold since 2019. In 2024, the Sahel accounted for 51 per cent of all terrorism deaths, while overall conflict deaths in the region exceeded 25,000 for the first time since the inception of the Index. Of these, 3,885 were attributed to terrorism. Terrorism deaths here are now ten times higher than in 2019.

The Sahel remains the global epicentre of terrorism, accounting for over half of all terrorism-related deaths in 2024 with the number of countries affected increasing. Five of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in this region. Although Burkina Faso remains the most affected country, both deaths and attacks declined, falling by 21 and 57 per cent respectively, however the country is still responsible for a fifth of all terrorism deaths globally. Niger highlights how fragile progress in reducing terrorism deaths can be. In 2024, the country recorded the largest increase in terrorism deaths globally, rising by 94 per cent to a total of 930, reversing previous improvements from 2022 when it had the second largest improvement. Niger's example may mean that the improvements in Burkina Faso are transitory.

Geopolitical changes continue to shape security dynamics across the Sahel. The Alliance of Sahelian States, comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, has moved away from the West, instead strengthening ties with Russia and China. This shift, along with the bloc's withdrawal from ECOWAS, has created opportunities for groups such as JNIM to expand their activities into coastal West Africa. Togo recorded its worst year for terrorism since the inception of the Index, reflecting the broader spread of terrorist activity beyond the Sahel's traditional hotspots.

Competition over natural resources, especially gold, has also played a role in the region's instability. Niger, the world's seventh largest uranium producer, has also attracted growing international interest as global powers seek to secure access to critical

materials. Russia and China have strengthened their presence in the region, offering security and economic support with fewer conditions than Western counterparts. Meanwhile, France has continued its military withdrawal from West Africa, signalling a broader shift in influence away from the West.

Russia's war in Ukraine has had an impact on its operations in sub-Saharan Africa, with some of its resources being diverted towards the war. Russia's growing involvement in the Sahel has included influence campaigns aimed at reshaping local perceptions of Western governments, including their counterterrorism efforts. These campaigns have materially influenced rising anti-French sentiment in Sahelian countries.

IS continues to function as a global network, maintaining its presence across multiple regions through affiliated groups. In 2024, it was active in 22 countries across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Despite counterterrorism efforts, the group's ability to coordinate, inspire, and execute attacks highlights its resilience and evolving operational strategies.

Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were the countries most affected by IS activity in 2024. Syria alone accounted for 369 of the 559 IS attacks globally and resulted in 708 deaths. The instability following the fall of the Assad regime has provided the conditions necessary for terrorist groups to regroup and expand, with IS capitalising on the shifting geopolitical landscape. Since 2020, traditional foreign influence in Syria has diminished, with Russia, China, and Iran reducing their roles while Türkiye emerges as a dominant regional power. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), once a key partner of the US in the fight against IS, now face mounting challenges. Türkiye's opposition to a strengthened SDF, coupled with the potential scaling back of US support, has created conditions that IS could exploit to regain strength. The new US administration's position on the SDF is still unclear.

In West Africa, Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) remains a major security concern. Although its activity has declined, the group remains locked in violent conflict with Boko Haram, leading to significant casualties and resource losses. In 2024 terrorism deaths attributed to the chapter declined by 46 per cent to 178. ISWA recorded no deaths in Benin, or Burkina Faso in 2024. These countries are now dominated by JNIM.

Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISK), originally formed to counter the Taliban, has expanded into one of the most active jihadist groups worldwide. Since its formation in 2015, ISK has steadily extended its reach beyond Afghanistan into Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and Central Asia. In 2024, ISK was responsible for two of the deadliest terrorist attacks, one in Iran and another in Russia. ISK has intensified its recruitment efforts, producing multilingual propaganda targeting South and Central Asia. ISK linguistic reach is particularly notable, with content produced in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Uzbek, Tajik, English, and more recently, Russian and Turkish. It also provides remote instruction in tactics, target selection, and weapons procurement from official ISK members.

The Sahel remains the global epicentre of terrorism, accounting for over half of all terrorism-related deaths in 2024 with the number of countries affected increasing.

In 2024, authorities disrupted 24 publicised plots linked to IS or its affiliates, including five in Israel, four in the US and others in Iran, Türkiye, Germany, France, Sweden and Russia, which included high-profile attempts at the Paris Olympics and a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna. As intelligence agencies rarely disclose such plots, the reported numbers likely represent a fraction of the total.

Over the next decade AI will be embraced by both terrorist organisations and counter-intelligence agencies. These technologies provide new avenues for terrorist expansion. AI can produce believable deep fake content, provide immersive experiences, better intelligence on targets and produce believable tailored propaganda, faster. This presents significant challenges for counter-terrorism efforts. However, the same technologies also offer opportunities for intelligence agencies to enhance their operations by improving the detection and removal of malicious sites, identifying radicalisation as it occurs in real time, and crafting targeted counter-narratives to reach those at risk. The future of terrorism in part will be decided by AI and its application.

Technology, particularly artificial intelligence, is rapidly changing the dynamics of how terrorist organisations communicate and recruit. For example, ISK is producing content that ranges from high quality online magazines to AI-enhanced video, including news programs. This enables the quick production of high-quality. localised propaganda. The wide range of countries within which it is active demonstrates its ability to inspire and recruit from diverse nationalities. Encrypted messaging applications have given extremists secure channels for organising and communicating. Platforms like Telegram and Rocket provide private, invitation-only spaces. At the same time, the dark web provides a hub for illicit activities and ideological exchanges, further amplifying exposure and radicalisation risks.

Despite a decline in total terrorism deaths, the findings of the GTI 2025 underscore the shifting nature of global terrorism. As the intensity of attacks increases, new epicentres emerge, and geopolitical tensions shape security landscapes, terrorism remains a highly adaptive and persistent threat.

Key Findings

1 | Results

- Globally, terrorism remains a significant challenge.

- The number of countries with a recorded terrorist incident increased from 58 to 66 countries in 2024.

- Forty-five countries deteriorated, while 34 improved when compared to 2023.

- Although 2024 saw reductions in both deaths and attacks, these improvements were offset by the continued spread of terrorism.

- Deaths from terrorism fell to 7,555 in 2024, a 13 per cent reduction from the prior year. The fall follows the surge in deaths in 2023, driven by Hamas' October 7 attack in Israel.

- Without the 2023 Hamas attack, deaths in 2024 would have been nearly equal to those recorded in 2023.

- The number of terrorist attacks fell by three per cent in 2024 to 3,492 total attacks. This was driven by an 85 per cent decrease in terrorist activity in Myanmar. Without the reduction in Myanmar, attacks would have increased by eight per cent.

- The four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2024 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. Their combined influence continues to increase, with deaths attributed to these groups increasing by 11 per cent to 4,204 deaths.

- Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2024, and is active in 22 countries, one more than in 2023. Deaths attributed to the group and its affiliates declined by ten per cent, from 1,996 to 1,805 deaths.

- The Sahel is the most affected region globally, accounting for over half of all deaths from terrorism in 2024, and 19 per cent of attacks globally. Five of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in the Sahel region.

- Burkina Faso remains the country most impacted by terrorism this year, despite attacks and deaths falling by 57 and 21 per cent respectively. A fifth of all terrorism deaths globally were in Burkina Faso, followed by Pakistan and Syria.

- Niger and Pakistan had the largest increases in deaths from terrorism, with increases of 94 and 45 per cent respectively.

- Terrorism increased substantially in both Russia and Iran, highlighting the deteriorating security situation. Russia recorded 197 terrorism deaths while Iran recorded 163.

- Of the major terrorist organisations, TTP was responsible for the largest increase in deaths, which rose by 90 per cent to 558 deaths.

- Deaths attributed to JNIM experienced the second largest increase, rising by 46 per cent to 1,454 total deaths. Its attacks also tended to be the deadliest, with an average of ten deaths per attack.

2 | Trends in Terrorism

- Since 2007, deaths from terrorism have fluctuated, peaking at 10,882 in 2015 and reaching a low of 6,824 in 2022. Over this period, terrorism dynamics have remained highly fluid, with its epicentre shifting towards countries with weaker government institutions.

- The largest percentage falls in terrorist activity since 2007 have occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Thailand. Thailand fell from 184 deaths in 2012 to 12 in 2024.

- The largest rises in terrorist activity since 2007 have occurred in Pakistan, Syria, and Mali.

- In Iraq, deaths from terrorism have fallen 99 per cent since 2007 when 6,249 deaths were recorded to 59 in 2024.

- Over the last two decades, the epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa into the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa.

- The Sahel region now accounts for over half of all deaths from terrorism globally. Terrorism deaths have increased almost tenfold since 2019. In 2007, the Sahel accounted for only one per cent of global deaths.

- Fatal terrorist attacks have become more concentrated over the past decade. The number of countries recording at least one death from terrorism was 45 in 2024, down from 57 in 2015.

- Of the 163 countries in the GTI, only 25 have not recorded a single terrorist incident since 2007.

- In the West, terrorist incidents dropped significantly since their peak in 2017. However, the number of attacks has increased by 20 to 52 in 2024 when compared to the prior year. Attacks in the West peaked in 2017 with 176 attacks recorded.

- There has been a sharp increase in antisemitic violence and hate crimes across the West, with attacks on synagogues recorded in Europe, Australia, and the US. The number of antisemitic incidents in the US rose by over 200 per cent in 2024. The number of FBI recorded hate crime incidents targeting the Jewish community rose by 270 per cent in the two months after the start of the Gaza war.

- The number of terrorist incidents in Europe doubled over the past year, from 34 attacks in 2023 to 67 in 2024, including attacks carried out by IS and Hamas.

- Over the past decade the average impact of terrorism has increased in three regions of the nine regions: Europe, South America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Every other region has recorded a decrease in the average impact since 2014.

- Total deaths from terrorism are now considerably higher in sub-Saharan Africa than any other region. Sub-Saharan Africa has recorded the most deaths from terrorism for the past eight years.

- Sub-Saharan Africa, The Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia have far more deaths from terrorism than other regions. Collectively they accounted for just under 95 per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2024.

- In North America since 2007, there have been 84 politically motivated attacks compared to 21 religiously motivated attacks. Of these attacks, 58 were linked to individuals with far-right sympathies or connections.

3 | The Sahel

- The Sahel accounted for 51 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2024.

- Conflict deaths in the Sahel reached their highest level since the inception of the GTI, surpassing 25,000 for the first time.

- Weak governance, ethnic tensions, and ecological degradation have fuelled terrorism, worsened by transnational jihadist growth and geopolitical competition.

- Terrorist groups such as JNIM continue to expand carrying out attacks in coastal West Africa, with Togo recording its worst year for terrorism in 2024 since the inception of the GTI.

- The Alliance of Sahelian States, comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, are changing alliances by removing Western involvement in security and economic sectors and withdrawing from ECOWAS. Instead, the alliance has strengthened ties with Russia and China, which provide support with fewer conditions attached.

- In August 2023 the UN panel of experts on Mali declared that IS-Sahel had doubled the amount of territory they controlled in the country, while JNIM had continued to expand operations.

- Gold is increasingly a critical source of revenue for state and non-state armed actors alike across the Sahel, impacting local and international relations.

- Niger is the 7th largest producer of uranium and can be an important source for countries such as China who wish to expand their nuclear power plants. However, terror attacks in Niger have reached their highest levels on record.

- Russia is conducting influence operations across the continent, particularly in the Sahel, often framing them around Western failures in counterterrorism. Outside these high-profile and visible efforts, China has been steadily building economic and political influence.

- The wars in Ukraine and Syria have directly influenced the conflict in the Sahel. Ukraine has supported rebels opposing Russian-backed regimes, while the collapse of the Assad regime affects Russia's control of a key logistical hub, potentially increasing the importance of its influence in Mali and other regions.

- Ukraine's invasion of Kursk prompted Russia to withdraw military advisors from Burkina Faso, highlighting the delicate balancing act Moscow faces in its African operations.

- Russian information campaigns are actively shaping sentiment across the Sahel, influencing attitudes toward both Russia and former colonial power France. In Burkina Faso, the rise in Russian influence has corresponded with an increase in negative sentiment toward France in media coverage.

- The collapse of the 2015 Algiers peace agreement has worsened an already dire security situation in Mali. JNIM appear to be taking advantage, staging symbolically damaging attacks on government targets in Bamako in September 2024.
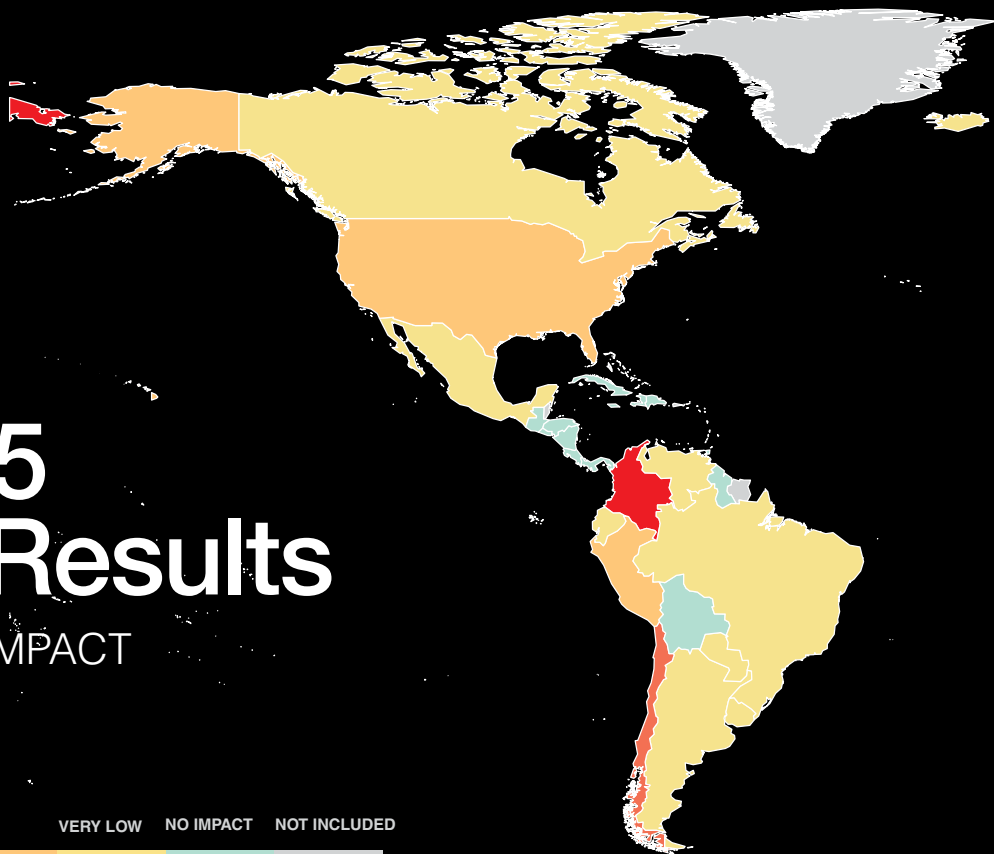
4 | Islamic State and Affiliates

- Islamic State operates as a decentralised network of affiliates, encompassing nine jihadist groups and affiliated entities. Each group acts independently.

- In 2024, these affiliates were responsible for attacks across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe, highlighting the group's continued transnational reach and operational capacity.

- Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were the most affected by IS activity in 2024, experiencing the highest number of fatalities. Syria alone accounted for 369 of the 559 IS attacks.

- Since 2020, foreign influence in Syria has shifted, with the roles of Russia, China, and Iran diminishing and Türkiye rising as a key player.

- Instability following the fall of the government of the Assad regime could provide fertile ground for IS to regroup and rearm, increasing the risk of resurgence.

- While ISWA's activity has declined, it remains a significant regional threat, underscored by the recent escalation in violence with Boko Haram, which resulted in heavy casualties and substantial resource losses.

- ISK has evolved into one of the most active jihadist groups globally, expanding its operations beyond Afghanistan into Pakistan, Iran, Russia and Central Asia. It carries out more deadly attacks outside of Afghanistan than within, highlighting its growing transnational threat.

- ISK has extensive multilingual skills and a sophisticated online presence in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Uzbek, Tajik, English and, more recently, Russian and Turkish, mainly targeting youth.

- ISK's ability to operate and expand in Afghanistan and beyond remains an international concern, prompting heightened security and counterterrorism efforts by the EU, Russia and Central Asian states.

- In addition to the attacks that occurred, in 2024, a total of 24 publicised plots linked to IS or affiliated groups were foiled, including a high-profile plot targeting Taylor Swift concerts in Vienna. In view of the rarity of intelligence services disclosing such incidents, it may be that many more such plots were foiled last year.
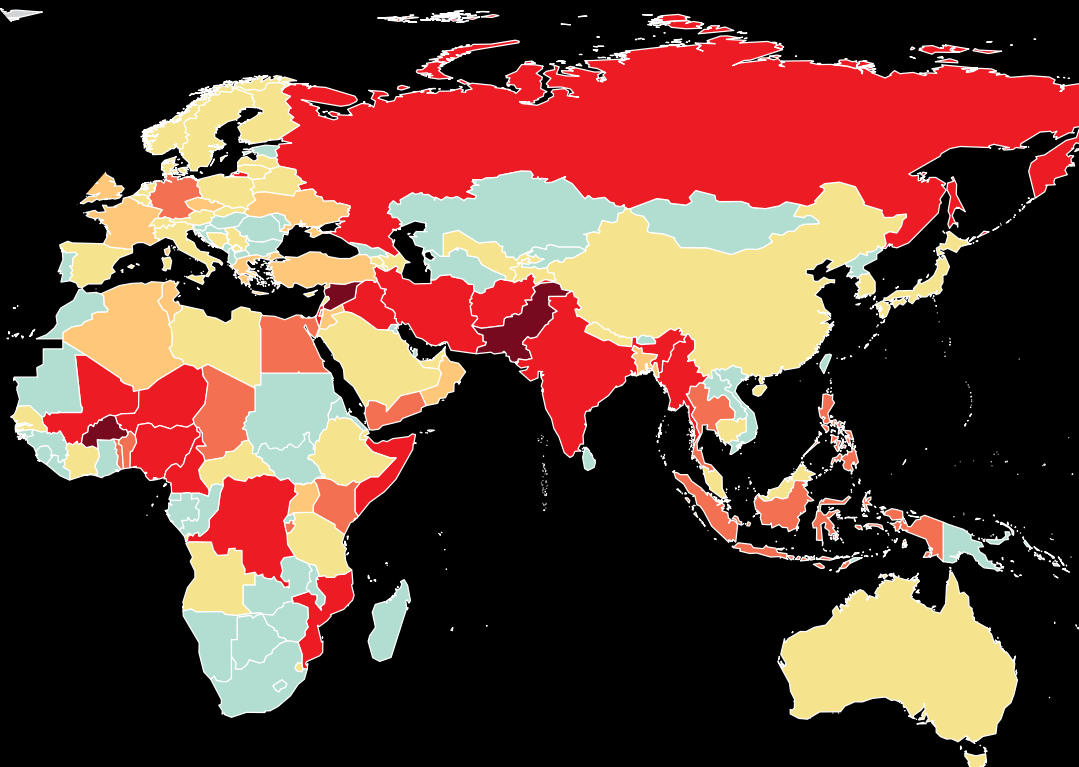
GTI 2025
Overall Results

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM

THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM

VERY HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	VERY LOW	NO IMPACT	NOT INCLUDED
10	8	6	4	2	0	

RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE
1	Burkina Faso	8.581	↔
2	Pakistan	8.374	↑ 2
3	Syria	8.006	↑ 2
4	Mali	7.907	↓ 1
5	Niger	7.776	↑ 5
6	Nigeria	7.658	↑ 2
7	Somalia	7.614	↔
8	Israel	7.463	↓ 6
9	Afghanistan	7.262	↓ 3
10	Cameroon	6.944	↑ 2
11	Myanmar	6.929	↓ 2
12	Democratic Republic of the Congo	6.768	↑ 1
13	Iraq	6.582	↓ 2
14	India	6.411	↔
15	Colombia	6.381	↑ 1
16	Russia	6.267	↑ 21
17	Mozambique	6.251	↓ 2
18	Iran	6.056	↑ 7
19	Kenya	5.366	↓ 1
20	Philippines	5.166	↓ 1
21	Chile	5.162	↓ 4
22	Yemen	5.08	↑ 1
23	Chad	5.032	↓ 2
24	Togo	5.004	↑ 2
25	Palestine	4.93	↓ 4
26	Benin	4.802	↓ 2
27	Germany	4.748	↑ 13

RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE
28	Thailand	4.63	↑ 1
29	Egypt	4.416	↓ 9
30	Indonesia	4.17	↓ 2
31	Burundi	4.043	↑ 1
32	Turkiye	3.968	↓ 2
33	Uganda	3.702	↓ 6
34	United States of America	3.517	↓ 3
35	Bangladesh	3.03	↓ 1
36	Greece	2.928	↓ 1
37	Oman	2.927	↑ 57
38	Jordan	2.913	↑ 40
39	Czechia	2.906	↓ 6
40	France	2.712	↓ 2
41	United Kingdom	2.639	↑ 2
42	Algeria	2.415	↑ 4
43	Tunisia	2.184	↓ 4
44	Peru	2.062	↓ 3
45	Ukraine	2.003	↑ 12
46	Australia	1.973	↑ 13
47	Poland	1.962	↑ 33
48	Canada	1.87	↑ 5
49	China	1.863	↑ 27
50	Sweden	1.842	↑ 22
51	Angola	1.657	↓ 6
52	Malaysia	1.626	↑ 35
53	Libya	1.612	↓ 11
54	Senegal	1.578	↓ 7

RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE
55	Tanzania	1.573	↓ 11
56	Ecuador	1.55	↑ 33
57	Djibouti	1.461	↓ 7
58	Côte d'Ivoire	1.454	↓ 9
59	Brazil	1.43	↓ 8
60	Netherlands	1.402	↑ 17
61	Belgium	1.347	↓ 7
62	Switzerland	1.265	↑ 12
63	Spain	1.256	↓ 8
64	Lebanon	1.237	↓ 6
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.218	↑ 29
66	Norway	1.198	↓ 10
67	United Arab Emirates	1.178	↑ 18
68	Nepal	1.113	↓ 20
69	Slovakia	1.023	↓ 1
70	Tajikistan	0.999	↑ 1
71	Central African Republic	0.957	↓ 10
72	Finland	0.949	↑ 22
72	Japan	0.949	↓ 6
74	Italy	0.929	↓ 14
75	Saudi Arabia	0.845	↓ 13
76	Argentina	0.801	↓ 13
77	Ethiopia	0.787	↓ 13
78	Kosovo	0.782	↓ 13
79	Armenia	0.72	↓ 6
79	Denmark	0.72	↑ 15

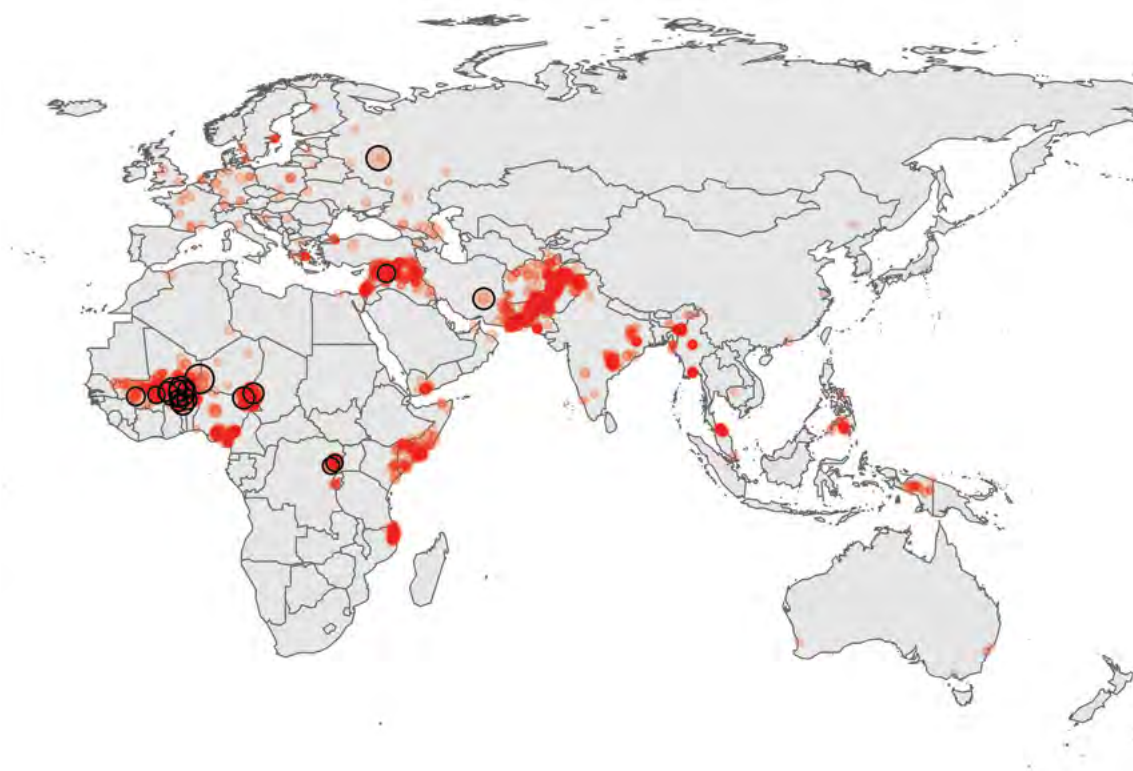| RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE	RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE	RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE
81	Venezuela	0.71	↓ 14	100	Equatorial Guinea	0	↓ 6	100	Nicaragua	0	↓ 6
82	Austria	0.582	↓ 12	100	Eritrea	0	↓ 6	100	North Korea	0	↓ 6
82	Mexico	0.582	↓ 13	100	Estonia	0	↓ 6	100	North Macedonia	0	↓ 6
82	Serbia	0.582	↑ 12	100	Gabon	0	↓ 6	100	Panama	0	↓ 6
82	South Korea	0.582	↑ 12	100	Georgia	0	↓ 6	100	Papua New Guinea	0	↓ 6
86	Cambodia	0.423	↑ 8	100	Ghana	0	↓ 6	100	Portugal	0	↓ 6
86	Latvia	0.423	↑ 8	100	Guatemala	0	↓ 6	100	Qatar	0	↓ 6
86	Lithuania	0.423	↑ 7	100	Guinea	0	↓ 6	100	Republic of the Congo	0	↓ 6
89	Cyprus	0.347	↓ 14	100	Guinea-Bissau	0	↓ 6	100	Romania	0	↓ 6
90	Azerbaijan	0.233	↓ 10	100	Guyana	0	↓ 6	100	Rwanda	0	↓ 9
90	Belarus	0.233	↓ 10	100	Haiti	0	↓ 6	100	Sierra Leone	0	↓ 6
90	Ireland	0.233	↓ 11	100	Honduras	0	↓ 6	100	Singapore	0	↓ 6
90	Uzbekistan	0.233	↓ 10	100	Hungary	0	↓ 6	100	Slovenia	0	↓ 6
94	New Zealand	0.217	↓ 42	100	Jamaica	0	↓ 6	100	South Africa	0	↓ 6
95	Iceland	0.123	↓ 10	100	Kazakhstan	0	↓ 6	100	South Sudan	0	↓ 6
96	Eswatini	0.087	↓ 8	100	Kuwait	0	↓ 6	100	Sri Lanka	0	↓ 64
97	Paraguay	0.073	↓ 13	100	Kyrgyz Republic	0	↓ 6	100	Sudan	0	↓ 6
98	Bahrain	0.059	↓ 8	100	Laos	0	↓ 6	100	Taiwan	0	↓ 6
98	Uruguay	0.059	↓ 7	100	Lesotho	0	↓ 6	100	The Gambia	0	↓ 6
100	Albania	0	↓ 6	100	Liberia	0	↓ 6	100	Timor-Leste	0	↓ 6
100	Bhutan	0	↓ 6	100	Madagascar	0	↓ 6	100	Trinidad and Tobago	0	↓ 6
100	Bolivia	0	↓ 6	100	Malawi	0	↓ 6	100	Turkmenistan	0	↓ 6
100	Botswana	0	↓ 6	100	Mauritania	0	↓ 6	100	Vietnam	0	↓ 6
100	Bulgaria	0	↓ 6	100	Mauritius	0	↓ 6	100	Zambia	0	↓ 6
100	Costa Rica	0	↓ 6	100	Moldova	0	↓ 6	100	Zimbabwe	0	↓ 6
100	Croatia	0	↓ 6	100	Mongolia	0	↓ 6				
100	Cuba	0	↓ 6	100	Montenegro	0	↓ 6				
100	Dominican Republic	0	↓ 6	100	Morocco	0	↓ 6				
100	El Salvador	0	↓ 66	100	Namibia	0	↓ 6				

20 Deadliest Attacks

The 20 most fatal terrorist attacks in 2024

● All attacks in 2024 scaled by number of fatalities
○ Worst attacks in 2024

						Description
1	COUNTRY	**NIGER**	PROVINCE	**TAHOUA**	DEATHS	Over 300 assailants killed 237 soldiers in an attack near Tankademi town, Tahoua region, near the Malian border on 21 July. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but jihadists operate in the area.
	DATE	**21/07/2024**	GROUP	**JIHADIST (UNDETERMINED)**	**237**	
2	COUNTRY	**BURKINA FASO**	PROVINCE	**CENTRE-NORD**	DEATHS	Dozens of gunmen killed at least 200 civilians in Barsalogho town, Sanmatenga province, Centre-Nord region on the morning of 24 August. Reportedly, the attack lasted several hours. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.
	DATE	**24/08/2024**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**200**	
3	COUNTRY	**BURKINA FASO**	REGION	**SAHEL**	DEATHS	Gunmen killed at least 110 soldiers and 60 civilians and kidnapped an unconfirmed number of others in an attack on an army base in the Mansila commune, Yagha province, Sahel region on 11 June. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.
	DATE	**11/06/2024**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**170**	
4	COUNTRY	**RUSSIA**	PROVINCE	**MOSCOW CITY**	DEATHS	Four gunmen killed at least 144 civilians and wounded at least 551 others at a concert at Crocus City Hall, Krasnogorsk district, Moscow Oblast, Central Federal district on 22 March. The gunmen also set fire to the venue using flammable liquid, causing the roof to collapse. Russia's National Antiterrorism Committee on 23 March said it had arrested 11 alleged suspects linked to the attack, including the four gunmen. The perpetrators were reportedly Tajik nationals. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) claimed responsibility.
	DATE	**22/03/2024**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE - KHORASAN PROVINCE**	**144**	
5	COUNTRY	**NIGER**	PROVINCE	**TILLABÉRI**	DEATHS	Gunmen killed 91 soldiers and 47 civilians in Chatoumane village, Tera department, Tillaberi region on 10 December. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but jihadists operate in the area.
	DATE	**10/12/2024**	GROUP	**JIHADIST (UNDETERMINED)**	**138**	
6	COUNTRY	**BURKINA FASO**	REGION	**EST**	DEATHS	Assailants killed at least 100 people in an attack on the villages of Kpadiari, Nadiagou and Tindangou in Kompienga on 16 March. No group had claimed responsibility at the time of writing, and it is unclear as to whether jihadists, who operate in the area, or security forces were responsible for the attacks.
	DATE	**16/03/2024**	GROUP	**JIHADIST (UNDETERMINED)**	**100**	
7	COUNTRY	**NIGERIA**	REGION	**YOBE**	DEATHS	Around 150 gunmen on motorcycles opened fire on a market and set fire to shops and residences in an attack on Mafa village, Tarmuwa local government area, Yobe state on 1 September, killing between 100 and 150 people and wounding an unconfirmed number. The authorities attributed the attack to Boko Haram, saying that it was in retaliation for the killing of two militants by local vigilantes.
	DATE	**1/09/2024**	GROUP	**BOKO HARAM**	**100**	
8	COUNTRY	**IRAN**	REGION	**KERMAN**	DEATHS	Two bomb explosions killed at least 95 people and wounded at least 284 in Kerman city, Kerman county, Kerman province on 3 January. The incident occurred at the memorial of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander Qassem Soleimani during a commemorative ceremony marking his assassination. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	**3/01/2024**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE - KHORASAN PROVINCE**	**95**	
9	COUNTRY	**NIGERIA**	PROVINCE	**BORNO**	DEATHS	Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWA) attacked Boko Haram members in northeast areas of Lake Chad, Borno state, on 24 April. Fighting continued intermittently between the two groups until 26 April. Seventy Boko Haram and 10 ISWA members were reportedly killed in the clashes.
	DATE	**24/04/2024**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE WEST AFRICA (ISWA)**	**85**	
10	COUNTRY	**BURKINA FASO**	PROVINCE	**NORD**	DEATHS	At least 150 assailants attacked several villages, and killed at least 70 civilians in Goubre commune, Seguenega department, Yatenga province on 22 May. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	**22/05/2024**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**70**	

		Description
11	COUNTRY **BURKINA FASO** PROVINCE **EST** DEATHS DATE **30/06/2024** GROUP **JIHADIST (UNDETERMINED)** 70	A few hundred gunmen attacked a security forces camp in Partiaga, Partiaga department, Tapoa province, Est region on 30 June, killing at least 70 soldiers. A local media outlet reported that several dozen assailants were killed in the attack. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but jihadists operate in the area.
12	COUNTRY **MALI** REGION **BAMAKO** DEATHS DATE **17/09/2024** GROUP **JNIM** 60	Gunmen killed at least 60 soldiers in an attack on a Gendarmerie school in southern Bamako city, Bamako Capital district at around 0530hrs on 17 September. This was in conjunction with an attack on a military air base later that day. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.
13	COUNTRY **SYRIA** REGION **HOMS** DEATHS DATE **10/12/2024** GROUP **ISLAMIC STATE (IS)** 54	Assailants killed 54 regime soldiers near Kaziya in Al-Sukhna area, Homs governorate on 10 December. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but local sources said Islamic State (IS) was probably responsible.
14	COUNTRY **BURKINA FASO** REGION **EST** DEATHS DATE **7/02/2024** GROUP **JIHADIST (UNDETERMINED)** 50	Gunmen killed 50 civilians as well as kidnapping and wounding an unconfirmed number of others in Galgnoini village, Tibga commune, Gourma province, Est region on 7 February. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but jihadists operate in the area.
15	COUNTRY **NIGER** CITY **TILLABÉRI** DEATHS DATE **25/06/2024** GROUP **JNIM** 47	Gunmen killed at least 47 soldiers and wounded at least 18 others in an attack against the military in the Gotheye area, Tera department, Tillaberi region on 25 June. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.
16	COUNTRY **BURKINA FASO** REGION **CENTRE-EST** DEATHS DATE **29/05/2024** GROUP **JNIM** 46	Gunmen killed 39 security forces, 7 members of the Volontaires pour la defense de la patrie (VDP) and wounded an unconfirmed number of others in Kogo village, Koulpelogo province, Centre-est region at around 1000hrs on 29 May. Repelling forces killed 27 assailants. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.
17	COUNTRY **BURKINA FASO** REGION **CENTRE-EST** DEATHS DATE **26/06/2024** GROUP **JNIM** 45	Assailants killed at least 45 police force members in Yourkoudguen town, Koulpelogo province on 23 April. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.
18	COUNTRY **BURKINA FASO** CITY **BOUCLE DU MOUHOUN** DEATHS DATE **06/26/2024** GROUP **JNIM** 45	Gunmen killed at least 45 civilians and injured three members of the Volontaires pour la defense de la patrie (VDP) in Boanekuy village, Djibasso department, Kossi Province on 26 June. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but local sources said the Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) was probably responsible.
19	COUNTRY **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO** REGION **NORD-KIVU** DEATHS DATE **12/06/2024** GROUP **ISLAMIC STATE (IS)** 42	Assailants killed at least 42 civilians with melee weapons in Mayikengo village, Lubero territory, North Kivu province on the evening of 12 June. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack.
20	COUNTRY **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO** REGION **NORD-KIVU** DEATHS DATE **7/06/2024** GROUP **ISLAMIC STATE (IS)** 41	Assailants killed at least 41 civilians in Masala, Mapasana and Mahini village, Beni territory, North Kivu province on 7 June. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, attributing the attack to its 'Central Africa Province' and saying it targeted Christians.

66

The number of countries with a recorded terrorist incident increased from 58 to 66 countries in 2024.

13 %

Deaths from terrorism fell to 7,555 in 2024, a 13 per cent reduction from the prior year. The fall follows the surge in deaths in 2023, driven by Hamas' October 7 attack in Israel.

3 %

The number of terrorist attacks fell by three per cent in 2024, to 3,492 total attacks. This was driven by an 85 per cent decrease in terrorist activity in Myanmar. Without the reduction in Myanmar, attacks would have increased by eight per cent.

5/10

The Sahel is the most affected region globally, accounting for over half of all deaths from terrorism, and 19 per cent of attacks globally, in 2024. Five of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in the Sahel region.

Burkina Faso
1/5

Burkina Faso remains the country most impacted by terrorism this year, despite attacks and deaths falling by 57 and 21 per cent respectively. A fifth of all terrorism deaths globally were in Burkina Faso, followed by Pakistan and Syria.

Russia
197

Iran
163

Terrorism increased substantially in both Russia and Iran, highlighting the deteriorating security situation. Russia recorded 197 terrorism deaths while Iran recorded 163.

Niger
94% ↑

Pakistan
45% ↑

Niger and Pakistan had the largest increases in deaths from terrorism, with increases of 94 and 45 per cent respectively.

Terrorist Groups

The four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2024 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. Their combined influence continues to increase, with deaths attributed to these groups increasing by 11 per cent to 4,204 deaths.

Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2024, and is active in 23 countries, one more than in 2023. Deaths attributed to the group and its affiliates declined by ten per cent, from 1,996 to 1,805 deaths.

90% ↑

Of the major terrorist organisations, TTP was responsible for the largest increase in deaths, which rose by 90 per cent to 558 deaths.

1 Results

Terrorism in 2024

OVERVIEW

Globally, terrorism continues to be a significant challenge. While 2024 saw reductions in both deaths and attacks, these improvements were offset by the ongoing spread of terrorism and the lingering impact of exceptional events in 2023. The number of countries that experienced a terrorist attack increased from 58 to 66 countries in 2024. While 34 countries improved in 2024, 45 deteriorated, the most countries to deteriorate in a single year since 2018. Additionally, the world's four deadliest terrorist organisations substantially increased the number of people they killed, while also slightly expanding the number of countries within which they are active.

Niger, Pakistan, Russia and Iran recorded the largest increases in deaths caused by terrorism in 2024, with all four countries experiencing more than 100 additional deaths. Both Russia and Iran remain preoccupied with their ongoing wars, resulting in less focus on addressing domestic terrorism.

Both deaths from terrorism, and the number of attacks, declined in 2024, though these reductions were primarily driven by changes in a single country for each category. Deaths from terrorism decreased by 13 per cent to 7,555; however, if adjusted for the Hamas October 7 attack, the number of recorded deaths would have been the highest since 2017. That attack was the largest terrorist attack recorded since the inception of the index in 2007, and the largest since 9/11.

After adjusting for the 2023 Hamas attack, terrorism deaths would have remained within a narrow range since 2017, fluctuating between 6,824 in 2017 and 7,555 in 2024. This consistency underscores the persistent and intractable nature of terrorism.

The total number of attacks fell by three per cent to 3,492, the least number of attacks since 2009. This overall decline was largely driven by a reduction of 390 attacks in Myanmar. Without this significant drop in Myanmar, the total number of attacks would have risen by eight per cent.

The four major terrorist organisations, Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab continue to increase their activity, with deaths attributed to these groups increasing by 11 per cent to 4,204. In 2023, these groups were active in 29 countries, which increased to 30 countries in 2024.

In the West, attacks increased for the first time since 2017, with 52 attacks recorded in 2024, up from 32 in 2023. However, deaths were at their lowest in three years, with 15 deaths recorded in 2024 compared to 23 the year prior. Underscoring the spread of terrorism globally, six Western countries that had previously recorded no terror attacks in the prior five years recorded more than two attacks in 2024 – Sweden, Australia, Finland, Netherlands, Denmark and Switzerland. Sweden recorded eight attacks in 2024, its highest number since 2017; it also recorded no attacks in 2023. Australia recorded five attacks, the most since the inception of the Index, while France recorded nine attacks, its highest in two years.

Although most attacks in the West were carried out by unidentified groups, target analysis suggests that almost 31 per cent of all attacks in the West in 2024 were motivated by antisemitic or anti-Israel sentiment. While these attacks did not result in any deaths, the trends highlight the ongoing spread and evolving motivations of terrorism as a threat to the West.

Sub-Saharan Africa was the deadliest region for the eighth consecutive year, despite a five per cent decrease in deaths compared to 2023. Although deaths in Burkina Faso fell substantially in 2024, this was offset by Niger, which recorded the largest increase in deaths from terrorism globally. Most of the impact of terrorism in the region and globally is concentrated in the Sahel, contributing to over half of all terrorism deaths globally, and 19 per cent of attacks worldwide.

The Sahel region hosts five of the ten countries most affected by terrorism, reflecting the persistent insecurity driven by extremist groups such as JNIM and IS. Despite ongoing counterterrorism efforts, the volatile security environment continues to challenge state authorities and international interventions, exacerbating humanitarian crises in countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Burkina Faso retained its position as the country most impacted by terrorism in 2024, recording the most deaths from terrorism for the third consecutive year. Despite experiencing a 21 per cent reduction in terrorism deaths and a 57 per cent drop in attacks, it had 1,532 total deaths. Terrorism in Burkina Faso has become significantly more lethal, with an average of almost 14 deaths per attack in 2024, compared to just over seven per attack in 2023. A fifth of all deaths recorded globally occurred within its borders, highlighting the severity of the country's security crisis.

Burkina Faso's challenges are tied to the Sahel's instability, with extremist groups exploiting weak governance, porous borders, and local grievances, to sustain their operations. The country's

ongoing counterterrorism efforts, supported by regional initiatives like the Alliance of Sahel States, offer a measure of optimism. As evidenced by Niger, however, deaths can reduce sharply, only to rapidly increase in subsequent years. For example, from 2021 to 2022 in Niger, the number of deaths fell from 595 to 198, but over the next two years the number of deaths rose dramatically, reaching 930 in 2024, the highest number ever recorded in the country.

For the second consecutive year, Afghanistan was not among the five countries most impacted by terrorism, marking its best ranking since the Index's inception. This shift is attributed to the exclusion of Taliban activities from the Index, following the group's ascendance to government in 2021. Similarly, Myanmar saw a significant decline in terror deaths, recording a 93 per cent decrease, marking the first time since 2020 that it was not among the ten most-impacted countries.

GTI 2025 RESULTS

Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of deaths for the five countries recording the most terrorism deaths in 2024. Among these countries, only Burkina Faso and Mali recorded decreases in deaths over the past year.

Terrorist activity remains highly concentrated in a small number of countries, as shown in Figure 1.2 1.2. Just ten countries accounted for 86 per cent of all terrorism deaths in 2024. This concentration of terrorist activity has intensified over the past decade, with the proportion of total deaths occurring in the Sahel region increasing to over half, from 22 per cent a decade ago.

FIGURE 1.1

Total terrorism deaths by country, 2023–2024

Total terrorism deaths decreased by 13 per cent from 2023 to 2024.
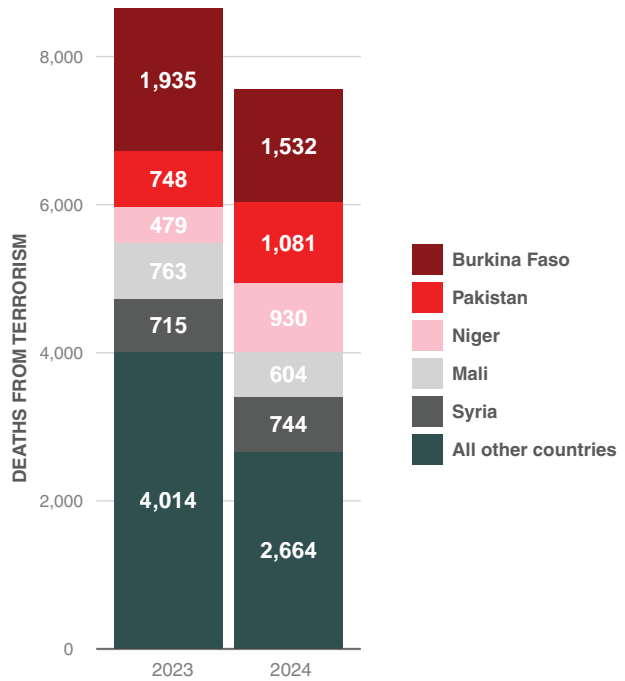
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 1.2

Distribution of deaths from terrorism by country, 2024

Ten countries accounted for 86 per cent of deaths from terrorism.
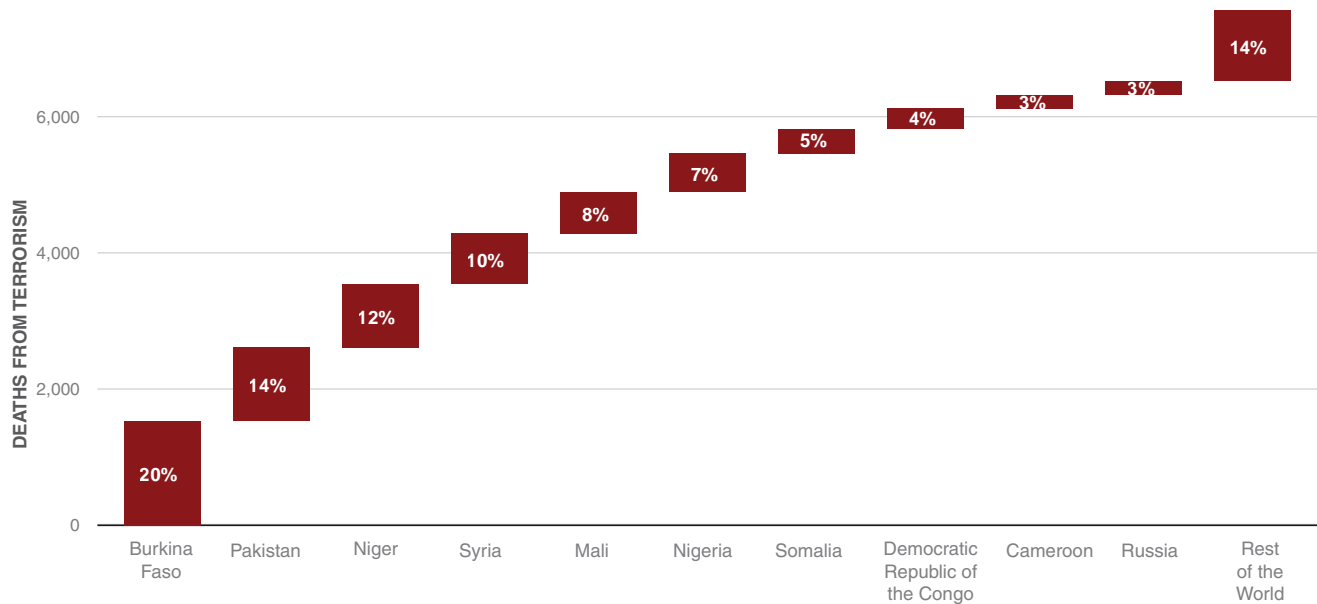
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

INCREASES AND DECREASES IN TERRORISM

Figure 1.3 highlights the countries with the largest decreases in terrorism deaths in 2024. Israel recorded the most substantial decline, with fatalities dropping from 1,160 to 18, representing a 98 per cent decrease. This is largely because most terrorism deaths in Israel during 2023 occurred on a single day, as a result of a series of coordinated attacks by Hamas militants. Most of Israel's deaths in 2024 occurred when assailants killed seven civilians in Tel Aviv in October. Hamas later claimed responsibility for the attack.[1]

Burkina Faso saw the second largest fall in terrorism in 2024, despite continuing to be the most impacted country. This decline came after 200 villagers and soldiers were killed in a JNIM attack in August 2024.[2] In response, the Burkinabé government vowed to prioritise counterterrorism in its security policies.[3] After this attack, only 27 attacks resulting in 144 deaths were recorded over the next four months, compared to 50 attacks and 777 deaths in the four months prior.

Deaths in Myanmar fell from 356 in 2023 to 24 in 2024. As the crisis in Myanmar deepens, the decline in terrorism deaths is likely linked to the growing strength of rebel groups. With more powerful capabilities, these groups appear to rely less on terror-style attacks, focusing instead on conventional warfare against the junta.[4]

Mali recorded the fourth largest decrease this year, with deaths falling from 763 in 2023 to 604 in 2024, a 21 per cent decrease. This improvement was driven by an 88 per cent decrease in the deaths attributed to Islamic State (IS) in Mali, as well as a halving in the number of attacks attributed to the group. Despite controlling parts of Mali's territory, IS has carried out fewer attacks due to intensified operations by the Malian military. The successful capture of two key IS leaders in January 2025 highlights the importance of ongoing counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel region.[5]

Figure 1.4 highlights the countries with the largest increases in terrorism deaths in 2024. Niger recorded the largest increase, with deaths rising from 479 in 2023 to 930 in 2024. This is the country's largest recorded death toll since the inception of the Index.

Pakistan recorded the second largest increase, with deaths rising by 45 per cent to 1,081. Terrorism has increased significantly in Pakistan since the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, with the number of attacks increasing fivefold since 2021. The most recent surge in terrorism in Pakistan was primarily driven by increased activity from Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is aligned with the Afghan Taliban. Deaths attributed to the group nearly doubled between 2023 and 2024.

Iran and Russia recorded their highest number of terrorism deaths in a decade, driven by significant attacks carried out by Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISK). These attacks are part of a broader trend of ISK expanding its operations beyond its traditional strongholds in Afghanistan, indicating a potential shift in the group's strategic focus. In Russia, the surge was largely due to the Crocus City Hall shooting in Moscow, which killed 144 people. ISK claimed responsibility for the attack, making it the group's deadliest of 2024 and the fourth deadliest attack globally that year. Iran recorded 163 deaths in 2024, an increase from 35 in 2023, with most casualties occurring during a memorial for Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leader Qasem Soleimani. A bombing at the event killed 95 people, with ISK also claiming responsibility.

FIGURE 1.3

Largest decreases in deaths from terrorism, 2023—2024

Israel experienced the largest decrease in deaths when compared to the previous year.
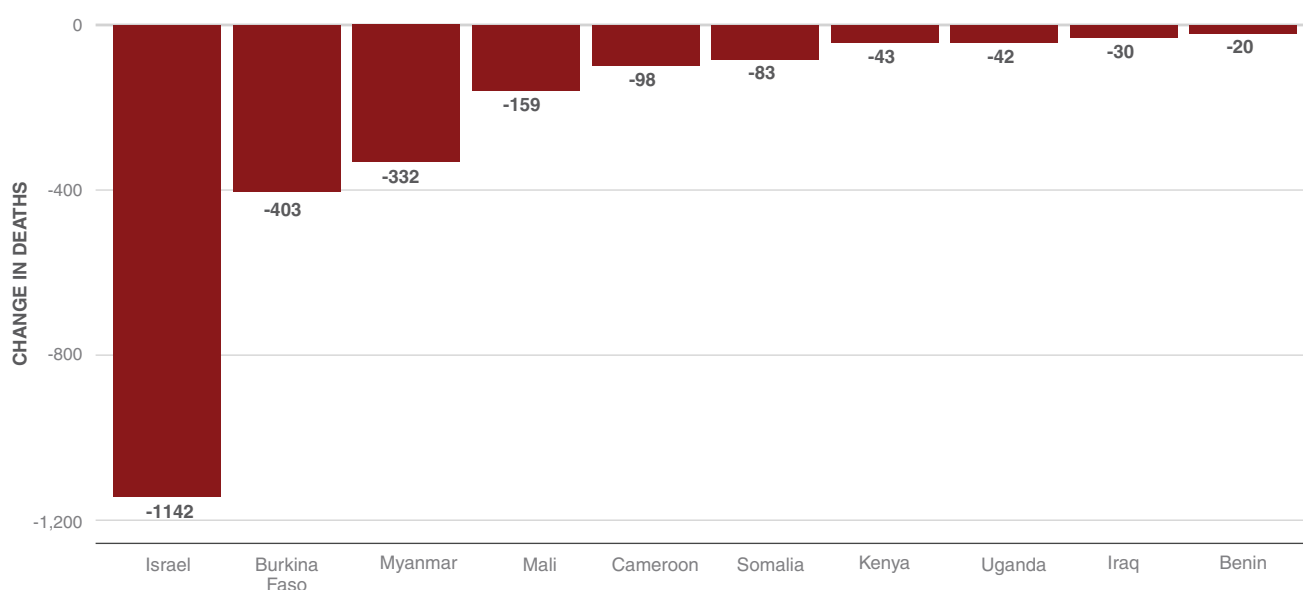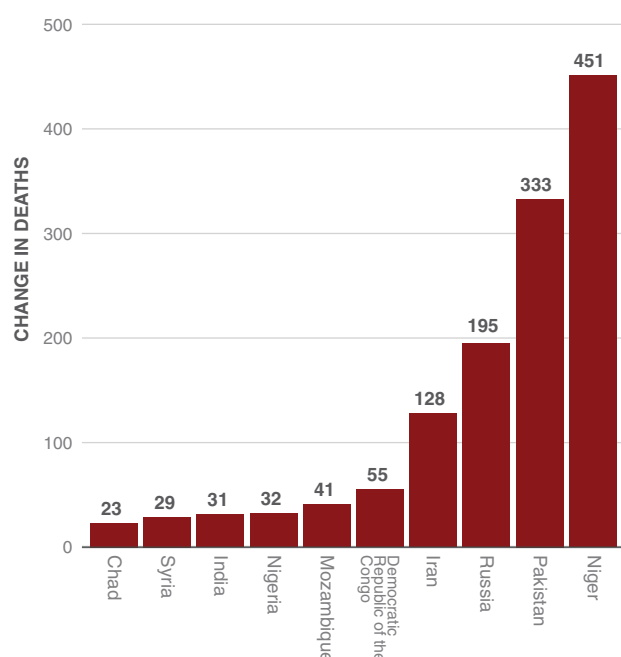

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 1.4
Largest increases in deaths from terrorism, 2023–2024
Terrorism deaths in Niger rose by over 400 in 2024.

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations
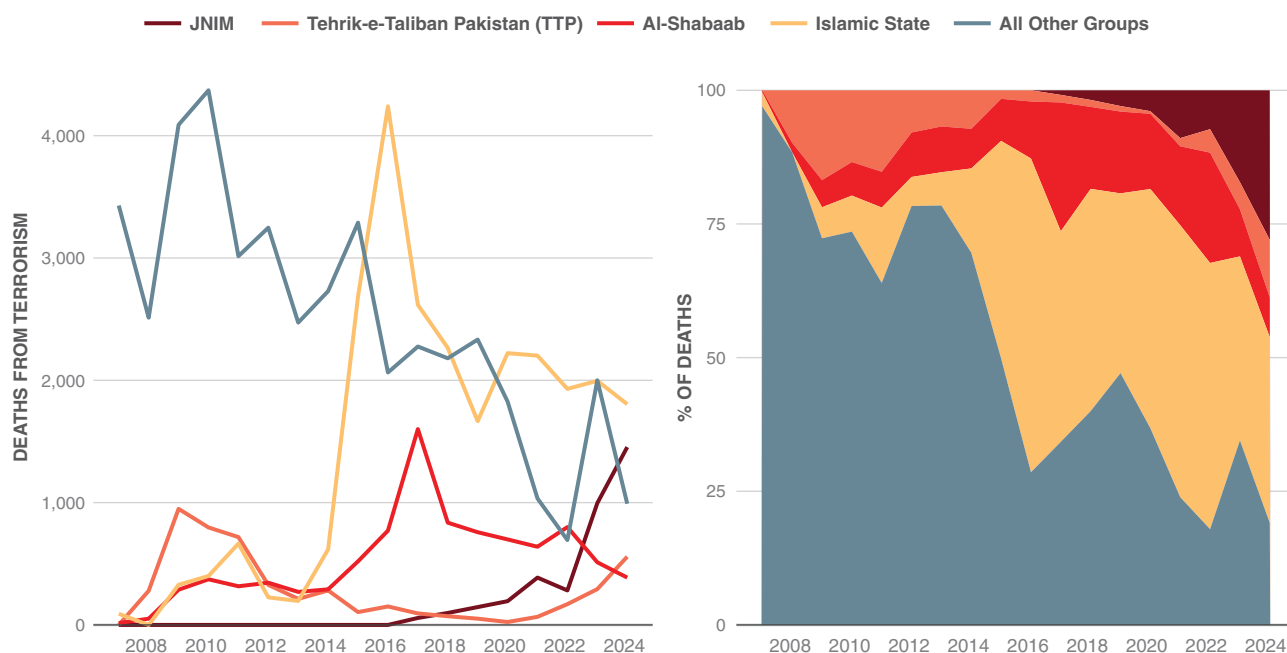
Terrorist Groups

The four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2024 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. The trend in deaths for these groups is shown in Figure 1.5. These four groups were responsible for 4,204 terrorism deaths, or 80 per cent of deaths that were attributed to a specific group. In 2014, these four groups were responsible for less than 40 per cent of terrorism deaths that were attributed to a group, highlighting the large global shifts in terrorism over the past decade. In 2014, most deaths were caused by Boko Haram and the Taliban, with these groups respectively accounting for 17 and five per cent of the global total.

In this report, IEP consolidates data on terrorist groups and their affiliated chapters operating under the same organisational name. For instance, Islamic State (IS), also known as Daesh, encompasses both the core group and its affiliated chapters, such as the Khorasan Province chapter (ISK) and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA). When referring to a specific affiliate, the chapter's name will be explicitly stated.

FIGURE 1.5
Attributed attacks by terrorist groups, 2007–2024
Islamic State were the deadliest terrorist group of 2024.

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

More terrorist attacks were attributed to a group in 2024 than in 2023. Of the 3,492 terrorist attacks recorded in 2024, 64 per cent were attributed to a group, an increase of nine per cent from 2023. The countries with the most attacks not attributed to a group were Pakistan, Mali and India.

Determining the most active terrorist groups by the deaths and attacks they are responsible for can be challenging. Many prominent organisations have affiliate groups or subdivisions that are still in partnership or partially commanded by a major group. In addition to this, it is not uncommon for groups to decline to take responsibility for the attacks they commit, often due to them occurring in areas of high conflict.

In conflict environments, attacks resulting in either high or low numbers of casualties often remain unclaimed. For attacks with minimal impact, terrorist groups may see little benefit in taking responsibility, as such incidents could be perceived as failures, undermining their influence. Conversely, groups responsible for highly lethal attacks may avoid claiming them to prevent backlash from governments or local populations, which could hinder recruitment efforts and provoke intensified counterinsurgency operations against them.[6]

The high level of unattributed attacks means that the total number of deaths for which certain terrorist groups are responsible is likely to be much higher than the officially attributed figure. It is possible to try to attribute these unknown attacks using a machine learning (ML) model. The results of one such model are shown in Figure 1.6, for the seven terrorist groups with the highest number of attributed deaths between 2007 and 2024. The model incorporates several factors,

including target type, weapon type, incident location and date, and number of people killed in the attack. The model is then trained on all terrorist incidents where the perpetrator is known and then applied to the set of incidents where the perpetrator is listed as either 'unknown' or 'unknown jihadists'.

Deaths attributed to IS, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and JNIM are much lower than the estimated total. Applying the model leads to a large increase in the number of deaths attributed to certain groups. For example, the total number of deaths attributed to IS would increase from just over 26,000 to just over 41,000, an increase of 58 per cent. The largest percentage increase for any group would be for AQI, whose estimated deaths would increase by 239 per cent. Deaths attributed to JNIM would also increase substantially, by 176 per cent.
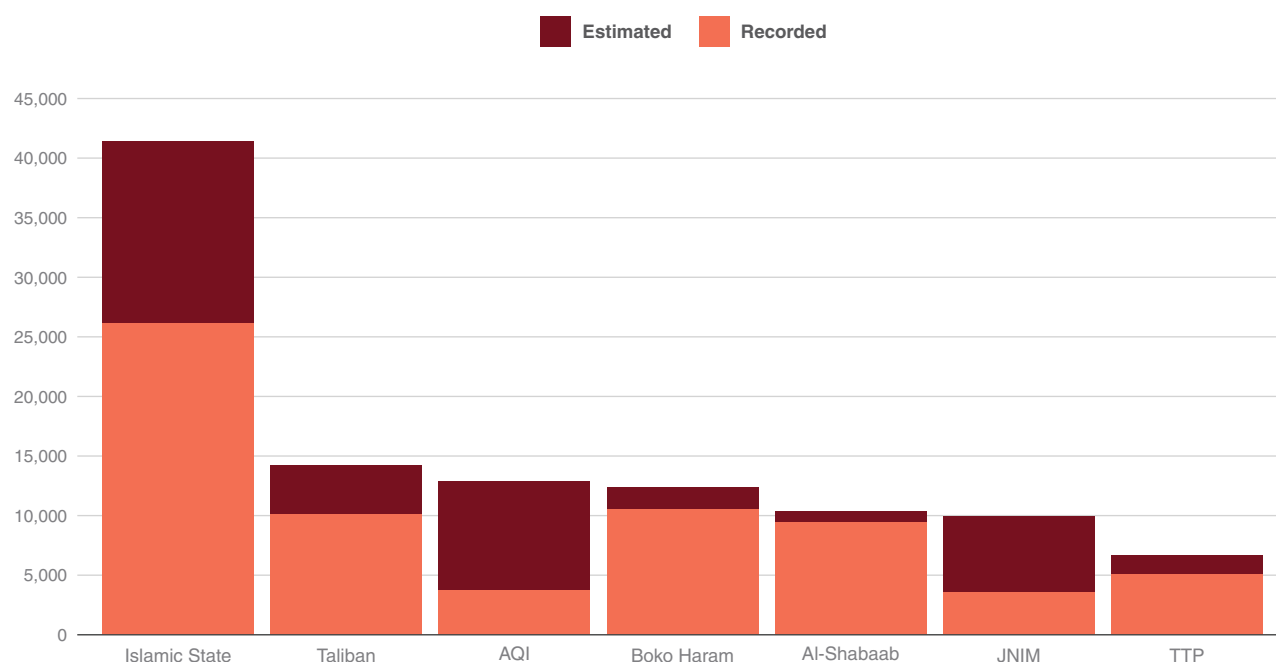
Islamic State (IS)

Islamic State (IS) is a Sunni extremist group which formed as an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq and Syria in 1999.[7] Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, IS participated in the Iraqi insurgency. In 2014, the group declared itself a worldwide caliphate.[8] IS primarily adheres to a global jihadist ideology, following an anti-Western interpretation of Islam and promotes violence against those who do not align with its ideology, including other forms of Islam. In this section, IS comprises Islamic State, Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISK), Islamic State Sinai Province (IS-SP), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA).

FIGURE 1.6
Estimated deaths from terrorism by group 2007–2024
Deaths attributed to IS, AQI and JNIM are much lower than the estimated total.

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

The original aim of IS was to establish a Salafist-oriented Islamic state spanning Iraq, Syria and other areas of the Levant.[9] It then expanded into other parts of the world through affiliate groups to promote their ideology, including ISK in Afghanistan and Pakistan and later the Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), which operates in the Sahel region. IS and its affiliates exploited tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq and Syria, using Sunni disenfranchisement to capture and consolidate its control over areas of Iraq and Syria. IS adopted similar tactics in the Sahel, taking advantage of political instability and local grievances as a means of recruiting followers.

The overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), has resulted in a significant power vacuum in Syria, of which IS has taken advantage, increasing attacks by almost 50 per cent.[10] Although HTS actively opposes IS and other terrorist groups, its limited alliances with major international powers may hinder the implementation of effective counterterrorism measures within Syria.[11] The instability has created an opportunity for IS to exploit the crisis, potentially allowing the group to regain influence in the region after years of reduced activity. In response, the United States deployed additional temporary forces to Syria in December 2024 to address this emerging threat and prevent IS from re-establishing a foothold.[12]

Changes since 2023

IS remained the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2024, despite deaths attributed to the group and its affiliates falling by ten per cent to 1,805. Confirmed attacks by IS and its affiliates represented 16 per cent of all attacks globally in 2024. However, the actual number is likely to be much higher, as a high percentage of attacks are not attributed to any group and frequently occur in regions where IS operates. The total number of confirmed IS attacks increased from 525 in 2023 to 559 in 2024, an increase of six per cent.

IS was active in 22 countries in 2024, one more than in 2023, with attacks occurring in six of the nine GTI regions: Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), sub-Saharan Africa, Russia and Eurasia, and South Asia. This marks the highest number of countries affected by IS attacks since 2020, when attacks were recorded in 30 countries.

Syria was the country most affected by IS terrorist attacks for the second consecutive year, recording 369 attacks in 2024, an increase of almost 50 per cent from the 250 recorded in 2023. The most deaths from IS attacks also occurred in Syria for the third consecutive year, with 708 deaths in 2024, a third higher than the 534 in 2023. While IS activity remained static in most other regions, the number of attacks fell significantly in Nigeria and Iraq, falling by 75 and 56 per cent in 2024. IS became slightly less lethal in its attacks, from an average of 3.8 deaths per attack in 2023 to 3.2 in 2024.

The deadliest attack attributed to IS in 2024, in March, was a mass shooting of civilians in the Crocus City Hall music venue on the outskirts of Moscow. Using guns, knives and incendiary devices, the attackers killed at least 144 civilians and injured at least 551 more. ISK claimed responsibility for the attack.[13] It is also the fourth deadliest attack attributed to any terror group in 2024.

In 2024, IS activity in sub-Saharan Africa declined considerably, with deaths dropping by 44 per cent, from 1,185 in 2023 to 664 in 2024. The number of attacks mirrored this trend, falling by almost a third, from 148 in 2023 to 100 in 2024. Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger each recorded reductions of over 100 deaths attributed to IS attacks compared to the previous year. However, Nigeria and Niger experienced a notable increase in deaths not attributed to any specific group. Given IS activity in the region, it is likely that the group was responsible for at least some of these attacks.

IS maintained a persistent presence across several regions, including Europe, South Asia, Asia-Pacific and MENA, with the number of incidents and deaths in these areas remaining consistent with the previous year. However, escalating tensions in Syria and the broader Middle East may contribute to increased activity by the group and its affiliates in the near future.

Tactics favoured by Islamic State

The most common target for IS attacks continues to be the military, representing almost half of all IS attacks in 2024. However, civilians surpassed the military in casualties from the group's attacks, comprising over a third of such deaths. Armed attacks remained IS's favoured tactic for the sixth consecutive year, followed by bombings. In 2024, there were 397 armed attacks, resulting in 1,309 people killed, a decline compared to the 1,605 deaths from armed attacks in 2023.

Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)

Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) was formed in 2017 in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa as a coalition of Salafi-jihadist insurgent groups, including Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.[14] Since its emergence, JNIM has expanded across the Central Sahel, committing acts of violence against civilians, local security forces and counterterrorism operations made up of international militaries and UN peacekeepers.[15] JNIM claims its aims are to incite Muslims to oppose oppression, expel occupying powers from the Sahel region and implement Islamic governance. JNIM's leaders have declared its enemies to be France and other countries assisting France.[16]

Recent counterterrorism efforts have focused on disrupting JNIM's growing influence in the Sahel region, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso, where the group remains the dominant insurgent force. Malian armed forces backed by Africa Corps, formerly the Wagner Group, launched targeted operations against a key JNIM stronghold in Tinzaouatene, near the Algeria-Mali border. JNIM succeeded and took control of the

territory, highlighting the ineffectiveness of the counterterrorism measures currently being undertaken in Mali.[17] This operation is part of broader efforts to dismantle JNIM's infrastructure, which continues to pose significant challenges to security forces.

JNIM maintains considerable territorial control, particularly in central Mali's Mopti, Segou and Timbuktu regions, where it operates with relative impunity. Its ability to embed itself in local communities and exploit weak governance has solidified its position as the most prominent insurgent group in the region.[18] While IS affiliates maintain a presence, their influence and activity remain limited compared to JNIM. The group's strategic use of porous borders and challenging terrain has allowed it to evade direct confrontations, even as counterterrorism forces ramp up operations.

The persistence of JNIM underscores the complexity of the security environment in the Sahel. Governments face mounting pressure to not only address the group militarily, but also to tackle the underlying socio-economic and governance issues that fuel its recruitment and local support. Continued military campaigns, along with enhanced regional collaboration and international support, will be crucial to curbing JNIM's influence and securing long-term stability in the region.[19]

Changes since 2023

JNIM was the second deadliest terrorist group in 2024, with 1,454 deaths from 146 attacks being attributed to it. However, the group's actual impact is likely much greater, given the significant number of unclaimed attacks in the region where it operates. Last year marked the first time JNIM was confirmed to be responsible for more than 1,000 terrorism-related deaths in a single year.

Deaths from terrorism attributed to JNIM are now at their highest level since the group's emergence in 2017, with deaths increasing by 46 per cent since 2023. The number of JNIM attacks also increased by more than a quarter. JNIM's lethality rate is also now at its highest level, with an average of ten people killed per attack, making it the most lethal terror group in 2024.

Of the 1,454 deaths attributed to JNIM in 2024, 67 per cent occurred in Burkina Faso and a further 22 per cent occurred in Mali. Niger experienced a sharp increase in attacks carried out by the group, with 13 incidents in 2024 compared to only two in the previous year. These 13 attacks killed 109 people, an almost 14-fold increase in JNIM deaths from the eight recorded in Niger in 2023. This is the first year JNIM have killed more than ten people in Niger.

JNIM has also continued its campaign outside of the Sahel, with Benin and Togo experiencing three and four attacks, respectively. The group's death toll in Togo was the highest on record, with 41 deaths in 2024, compared to 12 in 2023. This underscores the continued spread of JNIM's influence beyond the Sahel region and into coastal West Africa.

JNIM's deadliest attack in 2024 occurred in August when gunmen attacked a town in Burkina Faso, claiming to target militia members affiliated with the army. Both soldiers and civilians were attempting to dig trenches, as they had been warned of an impending attack. Various sources reported that the attack resulted in anywhere from 200 to 600 deaths, many of which were reported to be women and children.[20]

JNIM's activity in Burkina Faso surged in 2024, with deaths and attacks increasing by over 50 per cent compared to the previous year. Most of JNIM attacks continue to occur in the Centre-Nord region, which saw 12 attacks resulting in 327 deaths in 2024, compared to eight attacks and 161 deaths in 2023. JNIM appears to be expanding its reach both north and south of Centre-Nord, with a four- and fivefold increase in deaths in the neighbouring Sahel and Centre-Est regions, respectively. Civilians represented 38 per cent of JNIM casualties in Burkina Faso in 2023, but this figure surged to 67 per cent in 2024. Military were the next most targeted group by JNIM in Burkina Faso, with 141 military personnel killed in 16 attacks.

JNIM's activity in Mali was concentrated in the eastern regions of the country, bordering parts of Burkina Faso and Niger. JNIM activity in Koulikoro decreased by 75 per cent; however, deaths in the region increased by a quarter. Attacks more than doubled in Mopti, while Segou experienced decreased activity from the group. Bamako, the capital of Mali, experienced the country's deadliest attack of 2024, when 60 soldiers were killed in a two-stage attack on a military academy, followed by an air base later that same day. JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack, marking the first time the group had attacked the city since its inception.[21]

Tactics favoured by JNIM

As JNIM largely operates within existing conflict zones, most of its attacks are targeted against the military. In 2024, nearly half of all JNIM attacks were directed at the military; however, military personnel accounted for less than one-third of deaths. Civilians accounted for the largest share of deaths, comprising over half of all fatalities attributed to JNIM. Civilian deaths more than doubled in a single year, increasing from 343 in 2023 to 761 in 2024. Armed assaults remain JNIM's most lethal tactic, responsible for 98 per cent of all fatalities and 82 per cent of all attacks attributed to the group. Deaths from armed assaults increased by 60 per cent compared to 2023, exceeding 1,000 deaths for the first time.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, is an Islamist militant group active primarily in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Formed in 2007, the group shares a common ideology with the Afghan Taliban and has assisted the Afghan Taliban several times during the 2001-2021 war.[22] The TTP is an umbrella organisation comprising many smaller Islamist armed militant groups that operate along the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan.[23] The TTP's main stated objective is to overthrow the Pakistani government by committing acts of

terrorism against the Pakistan armed forces and members of the state.

Following the TTP's deadliest attack on record, in which a school was targeted and 141 people were killed in December 2014, the Pakistani government introduced the National Action Plan (NAP) to combat terrorism and extremism, with a particular focus on the TTP.[24] This initiative led to the launch of Operation Azm-e-Istehkam in June 2024; a counter-insurgency campaign designed to accelerate the implementation of the NAP.[25] The campaign includes airstrikes aimed at eliminating militants and capturing key leaders of insurgent groups. As part of these efforts, Pakistan conducted targeted airstrikes in Afghanistan's Paktika province, focusing on TTP camps. However, Taliban forces claimed these strikes resulted in mainly civilian casualties comprising of women and children.[26] While the TTP does not hold direct territorial control within Pakistan, its influence remains significant in areas such as North and South Waziristan and within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. The group continues to take advantage of the mountainous terrain in order to facilitate movement and maintain operational mobility across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.[27]

Changes since 2023

The TTP was the third deadliest terrorist group in 2024, responsible for 558 deaths across 482 attacks, the second highest number of attacks by any single group last year. After a period of reduced activity between 2017 and 2021, the group has experienced a resurgence, with attacks more than doubling in the past year alongside a 90 per cent increase in deaths. The number of attacks attributed to the TTP was at its highest ever on record in 2024, while deaths caused by the group were at their highest level since 2011.

The TTP's activity is confined largely to Pakistan's northern border with Afghanistan, with 96 per cent of the TTP's 2024 attacks occurring in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, likely due to its proximity to Afghanistan's capital. TTP activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province more than doubled last year, from 182 attacks resulting in 265 deaths in 2023 to 462 attacks and 545 deaths in 2024. The deadliest TTP attack in 2024 occurred in the province, where TTP militants killed 16 Pakistani soldiers at an army outpost. The TTP claimed the attack was in retaliation for the killing of senior TTP commanders.[28] Terrorist activity remained relatively low in other regions, with only 13 of the 558 deaths from terrorism occurring outside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Tactics favoured by TTP

Aligning with its anti-state objectives, the TTP's most common targets were police and military personnel, accounting for 51 per cent and 16 per cent of attacks, respectively. Civilians were the next most targeted group, comprising 16 per cent of attacks and 19 per cent of terrorism-related deaths.

Armed attacks remain the TTP's most common tactic in 2024, accounting for almost two-thirds of attacks and 72 per cent of deaths. Bombing was the second most common tactic, with the number of bombings increasing almost threefold when compared to the previous year.

Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab is a Salafist militant group active in East Africa. It first emerged in a battle over Somalia's capital in the summer of 2006. As an Al-Qaeda affiliate based in Somalia and Kenya, al-Shabaab pursues Islamist statehood aspirations in Somalia. Al-Shabaab was estimated to have between 15,000 and 18,000 fighters as of 2022.[29] It gained global recognition following several deadly attacks concentrated around the capital city of Mogadishu, as well as attacks in the neighbouring states of Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda in the 2000s. African Union peacekeeping forces known as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) have been fighting al-Shabaab since 2007, supported by the US and United Nations.

In 2024, Somalia's offensive against al-Shabaab achieved significant gains, including the recapture of El Buur, a major militant stronghold.[30] However, progress stalled due to al-Shabaab's counterattacks and internal challenges, such as looting of military convoys by local militias.[31] Concerns over a potential security vacuum led Somalia to request a delay in the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) withdrawal, resulting in a four-month postponement. The year ended with the United Nations approving the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), set to begin in 2025, to strengthen counterterrorism efforts and support stabilisation initiatives.[32]

Changes since 2023

Terrorism deaths attributed to al-Shabaab fell from 512 in 2023 to 387 in 2024, a decline of almost 25 per cent. The total number of attacks attributed to al-Shabaab mirrored the trend in deaths, falling by over a third to 156 attacks in 2024, the fewest since 2014. Of the 387 deaths attributed to the group, 91 per cent occurred in Somalia and the remaining nine per cent occurred in Kenya. Al-Shabaab was responsible for 33 deaths in Kenya in 2024, a 57 per cent decrease compared to the year prior. The decreased al-Shabaab activity within Kenya can be attributed to enhanced counterterrorism operations, intelligence gathering, inter-agency collaboration and communications with local communities within the last year.[33]

Deaths in Somalia decreased by almost 20 per cent in 2024, driven by the success of the Somali government and allied forces' operations. The administrative region of Banaadir, home to the nation's capital, Mogadishu, has long been the epicentre of terrorist activity by al-Shabaab. While attacks in Banaadir dropped by almost a third, deaths more than doubled from 63 in 2023 to 131 in 2024. Despite experiencing almost the same number of attacks as the year prior, deaths in the Shabeellaha Hoose region dropped by over a third. Deaths from terrorism remained relatively static in most other regions of Somalia. Al-Shabaab's deadliest attack of the year occurred in Mogadishu, where a suicide bomber and a gunman killed 37 people at a beach.[34]

Deaths attributed to al-Shabaab in Kenya in 2024 were concentrated in the Mandera region along the Somali border, which recorded eight attacks resulting in 23 fatalities. Half of these deaths were from one attack, where an explosion killed 12 civilians. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but local media attributed it to al-Shabaab.[35] This was Kenya's deadliest attack of 2024.

Tactics favoured by al-Shabaab

The highest proportion of al-Shabaab attacks in 2024 were targeted towards military, representing almost 40 per cent of the total, followed by civilians at 28 per cent. However, civilians made up the majority of casualties, with 132 deaths, a third of those killed in al-Shabaab attacks in 2024. Al-Shabaab killed an additional 121 military personnel, accounting for 31 percent of all the people they killed that year

Al-Shabaab has consistently utilised bombings and armed assaults as its main modes of attack. Just over half of terrorism deaths attributed to al-Shabaab in 2024 were the result of bombings, while armed assaults accounted for almost a third of deaths.

10
Ten Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism

Table 1.1 highlights the ten countries most impacted by terrorism in the GTI 2025, and how their ranks have changed since 2011. There has been considerable variation in these countries over this period. Only four of the ten countries in 2024 were ranked in the ten most affected in 2011.

The GTI is a composite measure that evaluates the impact of terrorism through a weighted analysis of incidents, deaths, injuries and hostages taken. To provide a nuanced perspective, the GTI incorporates a five-year weighted lag, acknowledging the prolonged effects terrorist activities can have on a nation's social and psychological wellbeing. Detailed information on the methodology used to calculate the index is available in Appendix C.

Burkina Faso remains the most affected country for the second consecutive year, a significant change from its rank of 114th in 2011. Burkina Faso is followed by Pakistan and Syria in the worst three. Pakistan reached its highest position since 2014, moving up to second place after dropping two positions compared to last year. Syria rose two places while Mali fell one place to be third and fourth on the Index, respectively. Furthermore, Israel experienced a marked decline, falling six positions to eighth place, following the increase last year in the wake of the events of October 7, 2023. Cameroon appeared among the ten countries most impacted by terrorism for the first time since 2019, highlighting a notable shift in regional dynamics.

Niger experienced a sharp deterioration, rising five places to fifth position, its first appearance in the worst five and its worst ranking since the inception of the GTI. Afghanistan dropped three places, moving from sixth to ninth, while Somalia remained steady at seventh place. Nigeria's position shifted from eighth to sixth, while Syria moved from fifth to third. Pakistan, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Somalia have consistently ranked among the ten most affected countries since 2011, indicating ongoing challenges in addressing terrorism.

The Sahel region has witnessed the most significant deterioration in rankings since 2011. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which were all ranked outside the top thirty in 2011, continue to be among the most affected by terrorism consistently since 2017. This underscores a geographic shift in the epicentre of terrorism away from the Middle East and towards the Sahel, with substantial implications for regional stability.
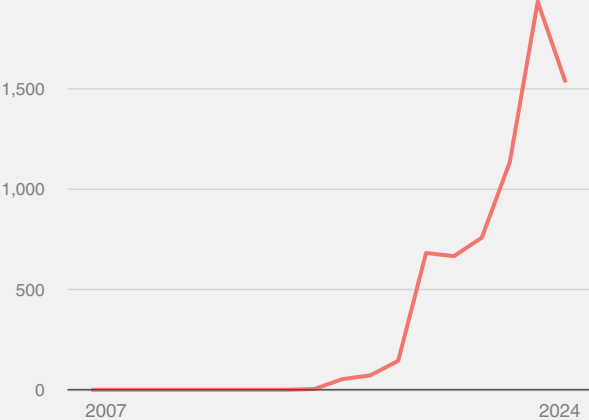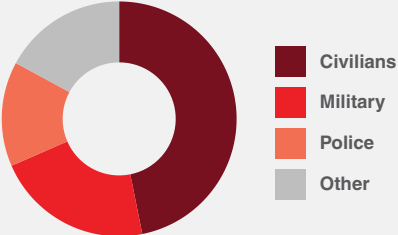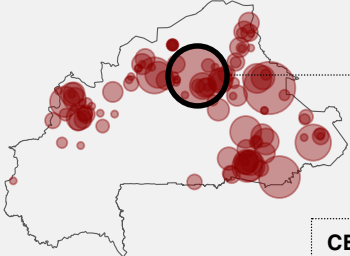
TABLE 1.1
Ten countries most impacted by terrorism, GTI rankings 2011–2024
Burkina Faso recorded the highest impact of terrorism for the second consecutive year.

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022	2024
Burkina Faso	114	113	111	110	52	30	21	15	7	6	4	2	1	1
Pakistan	2	2	2	2	4	4	5	5	5	8	9	7	4	2
Syria	19	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	6	5	6	5	5	3
Mali	40	22	19	21	16	13	10	9	8	7	7	4	3	4
Niger	50	60	45	34	19	19	18	19	14	12	8	10	10	5
Nigeria	8	5	5	3	2	2	4	4	4	4	5	8	8	6
Somalia	5	7	7	7	8	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	7	7
Israel	22	18	22	23	29	31	33	31	34	34	35	26	2	8
Afghanistan	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	6	9
Cameroon	49	57	58	19	11	11	12	10	10	11	12	11	12	10

Source: IEP

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Burkina Faso

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
1	**8.581**	**1,532** DEAD
		206 INJURED
		111 INCIDENTS

In 2024, Burkina Faso held its place as the country most impacted by terrorism for the second consecutive year. Despite this, deaths fell by a fifth, declining from 1,935 in 2023 to 1,532 in 2024. Terror attacks mirrored this trend, with attacks falling by 57 per cent from 260 in 2023 to 111 in 2024. This is the third consecutive year that over a thousand people were killed in terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso.

Northern and central-eastern Burkina Faso, near the country's borders with Mali and Niger, experienced the most terror attacks, accounting for over two-thirds of all attacks in 2024. Of the country's 1,532 deaths in 2024, 682 occurred along the Niger border in Centre-Nord and Est, with the former region recording the highest death toll of the country's 11 regions. Centre-Nord was the location of Burkina Faso's deadliest attack of 2024, when JNIM militants launched a large-scale assault targeting both soldiers and civilians. The victims were engaged in digging defensive trenches for the army and the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), a civilian armed group supporting Burkina Faso's military efforts. Reports estimate the death toll to be between 200 and 600 deaths, with hundreds more injured.[36]

JNIM continues to be the most prominent terrorist group in Burkina Faso, claiming almost half of the country's attacks in 2024. JNIM activity has increased in the last year, with both attacks and deaths increasing by over half. After a recent increase in activity, IS operations in Burkina Faso declined in 2024, with the group claiming responsibility for only one attack, compared to eight in the previous year. The number of deaths from terrorism also fell by 91 per cent, from 175 in 2023 to 15 in 2024. However, it is likely that the actual number of deaths attributable to both JNIM and IS is significantly higher, as 55 per cent of attacks and 35 per cent of deaths in the country were attributed to unknown jihadist groups.

Despite Burkina Faso's improvements, its ranking in the 2025 GTI highlights the significant and ongoing threat of terrorism in the country. The Alliance of Sahel States, formed by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, represents a regional effort to combat terrorism following the withdrawal of French and United Nations troops. Despite these efforts, the security situation remains fragile, with reports of human rights abuses by both insurgents and government forces. The military junta, led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, has extended its rule until 2029, delaying elections and drawing criticism from international observers concerned that prolonged undemocratic governance could exacerbate instability and provide opportunities for terrorist groups. While the government has taken steps such as freezing the assets of individuals accused of financing terrorism,

6,982 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Civilians
- Military
- Police
- Other

Worst Attacks

CENTRE-NORD
Dozens of gunmen killed at least 200 civilians in Centre-Nord province on the morning of 24 August. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.

and prioritising counterterrorism efforts, it is unclear whether the recent decline in terrorism deaths signals lasting progress or a temporary fluctuation.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Pakistan

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	1,081 DEAD
2	**8.374**	1,548 INJURED
		1,099 INCIDENTS

The impact of terrorism increased significantly in Pakistan, with the number of deaths from terrorist attacks rising by 45 per cent over the past year to 1,081. This is the fifth consecutive year in which an increase in terrorism deaths has been recorded and the largest year-on-year increase in the last decade in the country. This trend was mirrored by a rise in the number of terror attacks, which more than doubled from 517 in 2023 to 1,099 in 2024. This is the first year that attacks have exceeded 1,000 since the inception of the Index.

Pakistan has experienced a significant rise in terrorism since the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan. Militant groups operating from Afghanistan have intensified their attacks, particularly along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remain the most heavily affected regions, with these western border areas accounting for over 96 per cent of terrorist attacks and deaths in Pakistan in 2024.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) remains the deadliest terrorist organisation in Pakistan for the second year. The TTP was responsible for 52 per cent of deaths in Pakistan in 2024. In 2024, the TTP carried out 482 attacks, resulting in 558 deaths, an increase of 91 per cent from the 293 deaths in the preceding year. This is the most active that the group has been since 2009.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) was responsible for Pakistan's deadliest terror attack of 2024, when a suicide bomber killed at least 25 civilians and soldiers at Quetta railway station in Balochistan province.[37] Baloch militant groups such as the BLA and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) continue to take advantage of ongoing instability within Pakistan. Attacks by these groups have increased significantly from 116 in 2023 to 504 in 2024. Deaths surged over fourfold to 388, from 88 in the previous year.

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, TTP has capitalised on increased operational freedom and access to safe havens across the border. This has allowed the group to plan and execute attacks with greater impunity.[38] The TTP has continuously targeted security forces and infrastructure to undermine state authority and disrupt military operations.[39] In response, the Pakistani government has introduced counterterrorism initiatives, such as Operation Azm-e-Istehkam.[40]

Additionally, the surge in Baloch militant group activity has significantly contributed to the heightened levels of terrorism in Pakistan in 2024. The BLA has openly opposed the government's policies on resource extraction, citing the exploitation of Balochistan's natural resources without equitable development
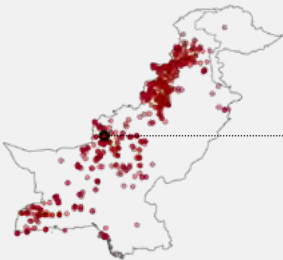
16,532 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Police
- Military
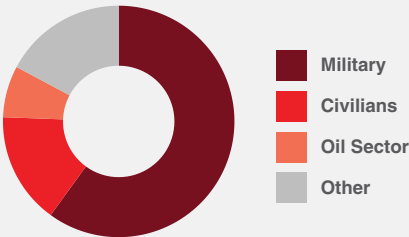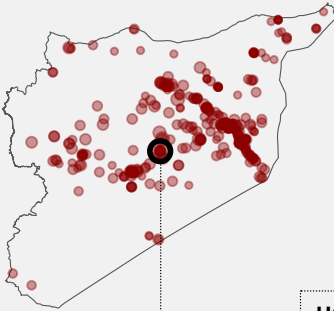- Civilians
- Other
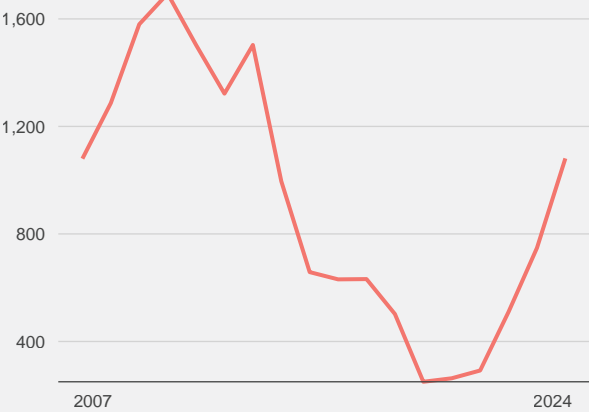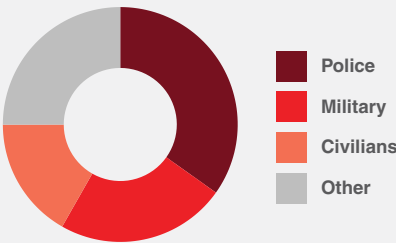
Worst Attacks

BALOCHISTAN
A bomb killed at least 25 civilians and soldiers and injured at least 50 others at a railway station in Balochistan province on 9 November. The Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack.

or compensation for the local population. The group has also targeted foreign investments, particularly Chinese initiatives under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which it claims marginalise the Baloch people.[41] In line with this opposition, the BLA has escalated attacks on Chinese nationals and infrastructure, aiming to disrupt these projects and draw international attention to their cause.[42]

This dual threat from the TTP and Baloch militant groups underscores the multifaceted security challenges facing Pakistan in 2024, requiring a combination of military, political, and socio-economic measures.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Syria

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
3	**8.006**	**744** DEAD
		408 INJURED
		430 INCIDENTS

Terrorism in Syria remains a significant threat, with attacks rising by 16 per cent to 430 in 2024. Deaths mirrored this trend, increasing four per cent to 744 deaths, compared to 715 in 2023. Increased activity by IS drove the increase, with the group responsible for 48 per cent more attacks and 33 per cent more deaths when compared to the previous year. The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 has sparked fears that IS could reclaim its lost territory and reestablish its former power, though the long-term impact remains uncertain.[43] Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) attacks are excluded from the GTI as they occurred within the context of the Syrian Civil War. Since 2017, HTS has also acted as a de facto authority in Idlib Governorate, where most of their attacks were concentrated.

The eastern border governorates were the areas most affected by terrorism in 2024, with 76 per cent of attacks occurring in Deir ez-Zor and Homs, both of which share a border with Iraq. Deaths in this area rose by 11 per cent compared to the previous year, with Homs remaining the governorate with the most deaths with 252, followed by Deir ez-Zor with 248 and Al-Raqqah with 154.

IS remained the deadliest group in Syria in 2024, maintaining this position for over a decade. The group was responsible for 95 per cent of all deaths and 86 per cent of all incidents in the country. IS also recorded its highest number of attacks and deaths in Syria this year, with 369 attacks causing 708 deaths. A notable shift in IS strategy has been observed, with a focus on targeting military personnel, who accounted for 63 per cent of IS-attributed deaths in 2024.

IS was likely behind Syria's deadliest attack of the year, which killed 54 soldiers in the Homs Governorate. The attack occurred two days after the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024. In the 23 days following Assad's fall, IS launched 23 attacks that killed 91 people, making December the most lethal month for IS activity in 2024.

While the future of Syria remains uncertain, the fall of Assad has coincided with a surge in IS activity, with experts warning that the regime collapse could trigger a resurgence of IS in Syria.[44] Although it is still too early to determine the full impact, the United States anticipated this risk and launched strikes on IS strongholds immediately after Assad fled in December.[45] Alternatively, IS may continue to prioritise its operations in sub-Saharan Africa, capitalising on the momentum it has built there rather than refocusing on Syria. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the group's intentions, the rise in attacks and deaths highlights that IS remains a significant threat in Syria.

7,587 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Military
- Civilians
- Oil Sector
- Other

Worst Attacks

HOMS
Assailants killed 54 regime soldiers in Homs Governorate on 10 December. No group have claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but local sources say Islamic State (IS) was probably responsible.

Mali

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
4	**7.907**	**604** DEAD **158** INJURED **201** INCIDENTS

Terrorism deaths in Mali fell for the second year in 2024, with the country recording 604 deaths from 201 attacks, a 21 per cent reduction in both deaths and attacks compared to the previous year. Despite falling levels of terrorism within the country, extremist groups continue to exploit the ongoing instability in Mali. The country has yet to restore civilian rule since the 2021 coup, with the deadline set for elections passing in March 2024 and no further date being set.[46]

Mali's border with Niger and Burkina Faso continues to be the area most impacted by terrorism, with almost three-quarters of attacks and deaths occurring in those regions. Terrorism has decreased in most regions of Mali, including Gao, Segou, Koulikoro and Timbuktu, which saw fewer attacks and terrorism-related deaths in 2024. However, Mali's capital, Bamako, experienced terror activity for the first time since 2016, with three attacks in 2024 resulting in 70 deaths, the most ever recorded in the city. The country's deadliest attack in 2024 occurred in Bamako, when 60 people were killed in concurrent armed attacks on a school and a military air base. JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack, its deadliest attack in Mali in 2024.[47]

JNIM remains the most prominent terrorist group in Mali, recording 77 attacks and 322 deaths in 2024, its second-highest death toll since the group's inception in 2017. However, its activity has declined this year, with both deaths and attacks attributed to the group falling by three per cent. IS activity also declined in Mali, recording an 88 per cent drop in deaths and a 45 per cent drop in attacks compared to the previous year. However, 58 per cent of Mali's total attacks and 45 per cent of total deaths were attributed to undetermined jihadist groups, which are likely unclaimed attacks by either JNIM or IS militants.

The involvement of Africa Corps, formerly the Wagner Group, within Mali has exacerbated tensions between Mali and its international partners. Despite the group's presence, attacks and deaths attributed to terrorism have remained prevalent in the region. Notably, in July 2024, Africa Corps suffered significant losses during an ambush by Tuareg rebels near Tinzaouaten, raising questions about the effectiveness of the group in the region. Furthermore, the group's involvement may be driven more by economic interests, such as the extraction of the region's rich natural resources, rather than a genuine commitment to stabilising Mali.[48]

Tensions within Mali escalated when, in November 2024, Prime Minister Choguel Maïga was dismissed by the junta leader, General Assimi Goïta, after Maïga publicly criticised the military
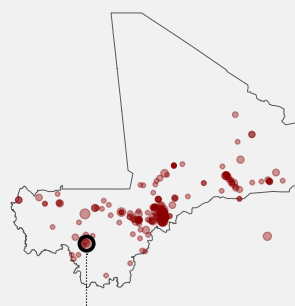
4,809 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007
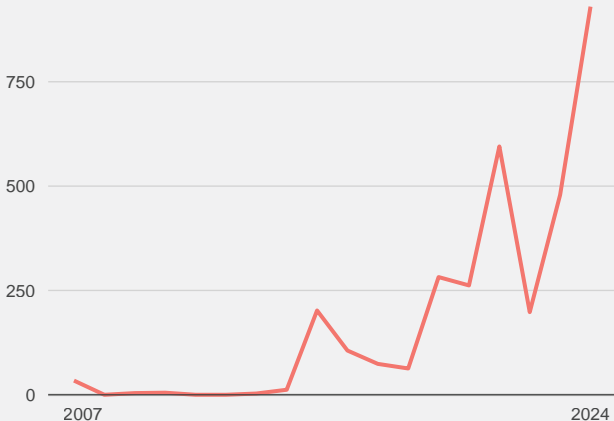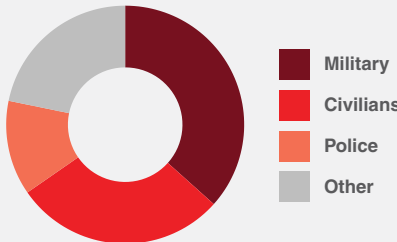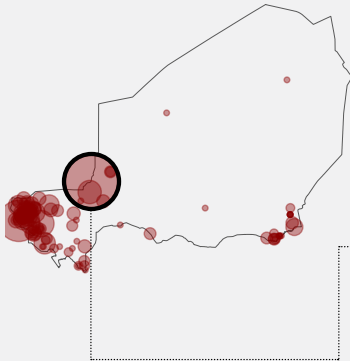

Attack Targets in 2024

- Civilians
- Military
- Police
- Other
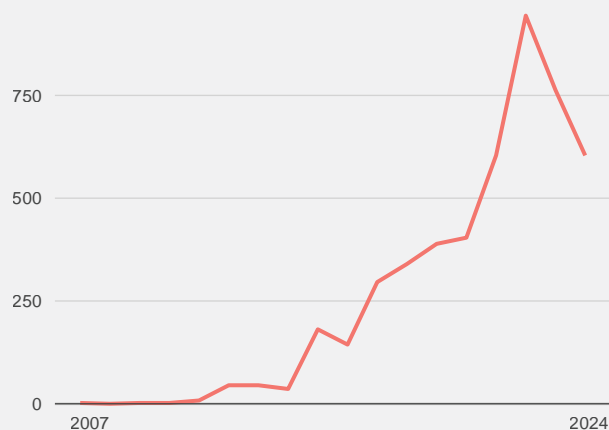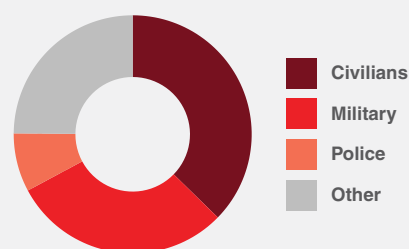
Worst Attacks

BAMAKO
Gunmen killed at least 60 soldiers in an attack on a Gendarmerie school in Bamako Capital district on 17 September. This was in conjunction with an attack on a military air base later that day. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.

regime for delaying elections without consultation.[49] This move further consolidated military control and delayed the transition to civilian rule. This internal instability, combined with the setbacks faced by Africa Corps, is likely to fuel a further increase in terrorism within the near future.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Niger

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
5	**7.776**	**930** DEAD
		158 INJURED
		101 INCIDENTS

Terrorism in Niger reached unprecedented levels in 2024, continuing the sharp rise in activity seen in 2023. The number of terrorist attacks rose to 101 in 2024, up from 62 the previous year, while deaths nearly doubled, with 930 recorded in 2024 compared to 479 in 2023. Civilian deaths in Niger increased almost threefold in 2024, while military deaths rose to 499, from 340 in the previous year, accounting for more than half of all deaths in the country. Niger now holds the highest military death toll from terrorism of any country in 2024.

Niger's deadliest attack of 2024 occurred when over 300 gunmen killed 237 soldiers in an attack in the Tahoua region, near the Malian border. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but jihadists operate in the area.[50] This attack was also the deadliest globally in 2024.

The Tillabéri region remained the area with the highest level of terrorism. This region is in the unstable tri-border area shared with Burkina Faso and Mali and has been severely impacted by the Islamic insurgency in the Central Sahel. Terrorist attacks occurred in all eight of Niger's regions, with Tillabéri recording 63 per cent of the country's terrorist attacks and 67 per cent of fatalities. This has spread into neighbouring regions such as Tahoua, with deaths there increasing over fivefold since 2023.

JNIM activity in Niger saw a substantial increase in 2024, with the group claiming responsibility for 13 attacks that caused 109 deaths, representing an almost fourteenfold increase in fatalities and marking the highest number of deaths and attacks by JNIM in the country to date. IS also remained active, though attacks remained steady from the previous years and deaths attributed to the group halved to 108. However, the full extent of activity by these groups remains unclear, as 75 per cent of deaths and 66 per cent of attacks in 2024 were not claimed by any terrorist group.

The political and security upheaval following the July 2023 coup has created an environment ripe for exploitation by Islamic militant groups. Niger's shift toward partnerships with Russia, accompanied by a decline in collaboration with Western allies, has contributed to a sharp rise in terrorist attacks and fatalities.[51] Russian military instructors arrived in April 2024 to replace departing Western forces, but their efforts have been hindered by limited experience in the Sahel and a focus on supporting the ruling junta.[52] The US withdrawal in August 2024 further exacerbated the security vacuum, raising concerns about militant groups expanding their influence.[53] The disruption of existing counterterrorism operations, combined with severed ties to Western powers like the US and France, has provided groups such as JNIM and IS with opportunities to escalate their activities in the region.

3,249 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Military
- Civilians
- Police
- Other

Worst Attacks

TAHOUA
Over 300 assailants killed 237 soldiers in an attack in Tahoua region on 21 July. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but jihadists operate in the area.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Nigeria

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
6	**7.658**	565 DEAD
		177 INJURED
		99 INCIDENTS

While attacks in Nigeria decreased by 37 per cent, deaths from terrorism continued to rise, increasing by six per cent to 565 in 2024. This marks the highest death toll since 2020, driven by ongoing conflict between ISWA and Boko Haram. Together, fatalities attributed to these groups accounted for nearly 60 per cent of all terrorism-related deaths in the country.

Civilians became the most targeted group in 2024, accounting for 62 per cent of all deaths, a significant increase from 21 per cent in 2023. In contrast, terrorists and militants, who represented 38 per cent of deaths in 2023, accounted for only 15 per cent in 2024.

Boko Haram has overtaken Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) as Nigeria's deadliest terrorist group for the first time since 2019. In 2024, the group was responsible for 31 per cent of deaths and nearly a quarter of all attacks in the country. Despite a decrease in attacks from 28 in 2023 to 22 in 2024, Boko Haram's death toll rose by 18 per cent to 175, the highest number since 2020. On average, the group has become more lethal, with deaths per attack increasing from five to eight.

ISWA deaths fell significantly in 2024, with 15 attacks resulting in 158 deaths, a sharp decrease from the 64 attacks and 288 deaths recorded in 2023. However, ISWA's attacks became more lethal, with average deaths per attack rising from five in 2023 to 11 in 2024. A single attack targeting Boko Haram accounted for the majority of ISWA deaths in 2024, resulting in 85 deaths.[54]

Terrorist activity has de-escalated in Borno State, where attacks halved, and deaths decreased by 23 per cent. Activity appears to have shifted to neighbouring Yobe State, which recorded 14 attacks and 158 deaths, a threefold increase in deaths compared to 2023. This was driven by the deadliest attack of the year taking place in Yobe State, where assailants killed at least 100 civilians whom they accused of collaborating with the Nigerian Army. .[55]

Conflict over territory and internal factional fighting within and between Boko Haram and ISWA continues to shape Nigeria's security landscape. The country also faces significant economic challenges that have fuelled social unrest and weakened governance, conditions that often facilitate terrorist recruitment and escalate militant activity.[56] Regional observers have emphasised the importance of sustained peace initiatives in states most affected by terrorism, particularly Borno State. They have also called for expanded defector rehabilitation programs and improved access to rural services to weaken recruitment efforts and promote stability.

11,873 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Civilians
- Police
- Military
- Other
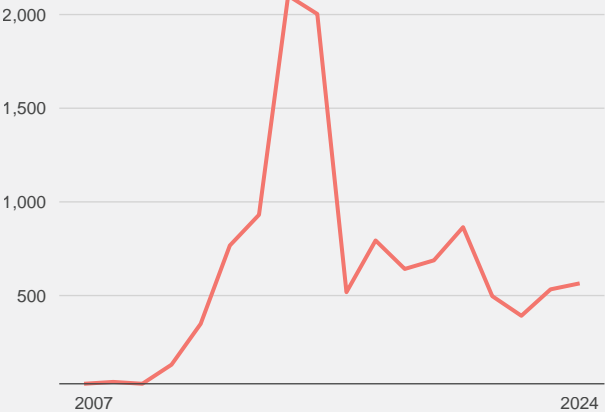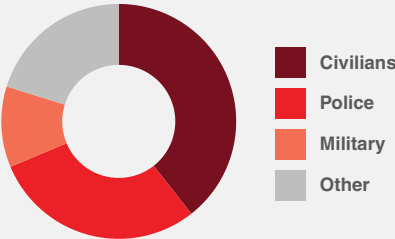
Worst Attacks
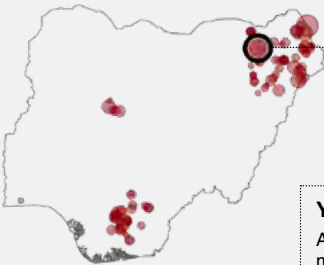
YOBE

Around 150 gunmen on motorcycles opened fire on a market and set fire to shops and residences in an attack on Mafa village, Tarmuwa local government area, Yobe state at around 1600hrs on 1 September, killing between 100 and 150 people and wounding an unconfirmed number. The authorities attributed the attack to Boko Haram, saying that the attack was in retaliation for the killing of two militants by local vigilantes.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Somalia

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
7	**7.614**	359 DEAD
		543 INJURED
		144 INCIDENTS

The impact of terrorism in Somalia declined in 2024, continuing a trend that began six years ago. There were 359 deaths and 144 incidents in 2024, a fall of 19 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively, compared to the previous year. This reduction marked the sixth-largest global decrease in deaths and Somalia's lowest death toll since 2015, driven by reduced al-Shabaab activity.

Al-Shabaab, Somalia's most lethal terrorist group, was responsible for 96 per cent of recorded terrorist attacks and 99 per cent of deaths in 2024. Deaths attributed to al-Shabaab declined by 19 per cent, driven by successful military campaigns led by the Somali government, bolstered by collaboration with local militias in the fight against al-Shabaab. Additionally, support from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and US military interventions have strengthened Somali forces, improving their ability to counter al-Shabaab effectively.[57]

Terrorism became more concentrated in and around Banaadir, the home of Somali's capital, Mogadishu, in 2024. While terrorist activity in the region decreased by 36 per cent, deaths doubled, rising from 63 to 131. The majority of these deaths occurred in a single al-Shabaab attack, a suicide bombing and armed assault on a Mogadishu hotel that killed 37 people, making it the deadliest attack in Somalia that year.[58] Al-Shabaab also expanded its operations into regions bordering Banaadir, with the Bay region experiencing 12 attacks that caused 31 deaths, the highest in four years. In contrast, activity declined sharply in Hiraan, where incidents fell by 89 per cent and deaths by 92 per cent.

Significant progress has been made in reclaiming territories from al-Shabaab through the combined efforts of the Somali government, US forces and the African Union. These coordinated operations have contributed to a sustained decline in terrorism-related incidents and deaths. However, disputes between the Somali government and clan militias have further complicated the country's security landscape. These internal conflicts risk undermining counterterrorism initiatives, potentially allowing terrorist groups to regroup and regain strength, threatening the hard-won gains in regional stability.[59]

9,867 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Military
- Civilians
- Police
- Other
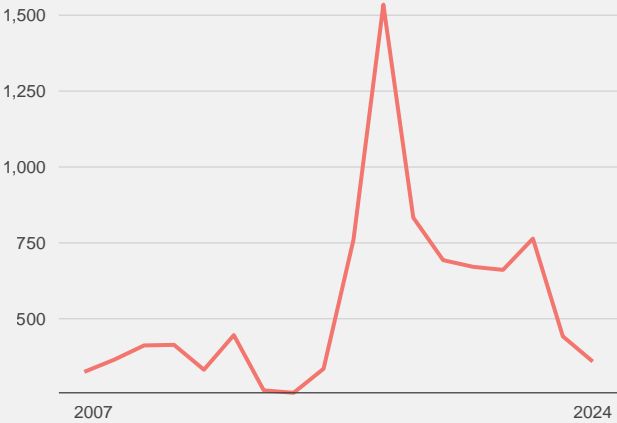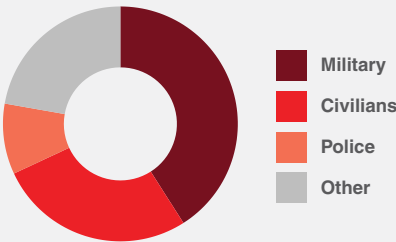
Worst Attacks
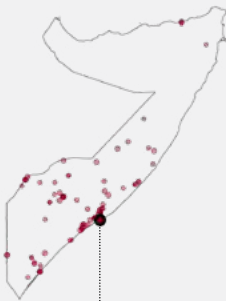
MOGADISHU

A suicide bomber detonated his explosives vest near the Beach View Hotel located on Liido beach Mogadishu on 2 August. Several gunmen then opened fire on civilians at the beach and in the vicinity of the hotel. Assailants killed at least 37 people and wounded at least 200 others. After an exchange of fire, security forces neutralised the assailants, killing at least three and capturing one. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack via its affiliated radio station.

Israel

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
8	**7.463**	18 DEAD
		108 INJURED
		27 INCIDENTS

In 2024, terrorism-related deaths in Israel dropped significantly, returning to pre-2023 levels, with 18 deaths compared to 1,160 in 2023, a 98 per cent reduction. This decline is largely attributed to the October 7 Hamas attacks, which accounted for most deaths in 2023. Despite the decrease in deaths, the number of attacks rose slightly, from 21 in 2023, to 27 in 2024.

In 2024, the conflict between Hamas and Israel intensified significantly. Following the October 7 attack, Israel launched airstrikes and a ground offensive targeting key areas in Gaza, including Gaza City and Khan Younis. By December, Israeli forces reported the killing of Yahya Sinwar, a senior Hamas leader. The conflict resulted in severe humanitarian consequences, with over 55,000 Palestinians reported dead and more than two million displaced.[60] International mediators have consistently sought to broker a ceasefire, with a six-week ceasefire and hostage exchange deal being announced on January 15, 2025. This conflict further resulted in a wider scale conflict and the destabilisation of neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Syria.

Israel experienced its highest number of terror attacks since 2019. Although most attacks caused no deaths, nine incidents involving Palestinian militants not linked to specific organisations resulted in one or two deaths. The deadliest attack of 2024 occurred at a light rail station in Tel Aviv, where gunmen killed seven civilians. Hamas later claimed responsibility for the incident.[61]

Terrorism in Israel is expected to remain a significant challenge due to ongoing regional instability, evolving militant tactics, and unresolved political conflicts. Groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis may increasingly target critical infrastructure through drones, missiles, and cyberattacks. Tensions in the occupied West Bank and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict could also fuel localised or lone wolf attacks. The ceasefire deal reached on January 15, 2025 between Hamas and Israel raises questions about the future of regional stability. It remains to be seen how this agreement will influence the broader landscape of insecurity and instability in the region.[62]

1,280 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024
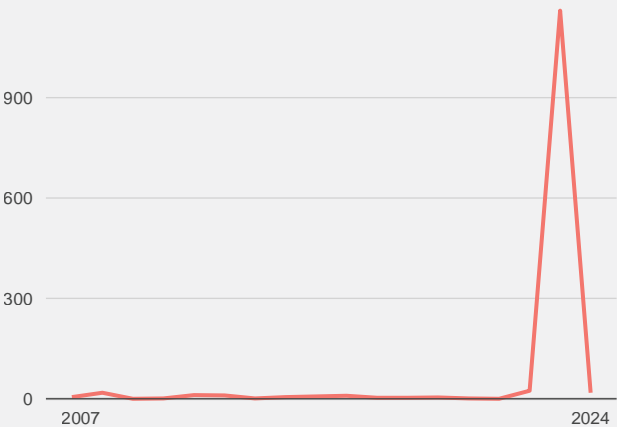
- Civilians
- Military
- Police
- Other
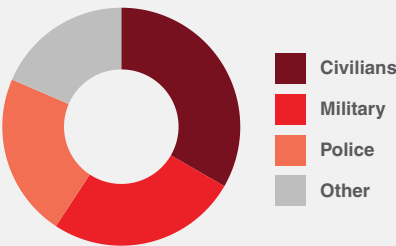
Worst Attacks
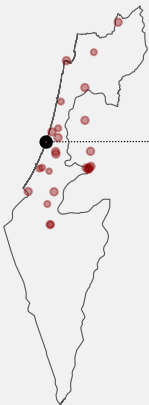
TEL AVIV CITY

Assailants armed with a knife and a gun killed seven civilians and injured 16 others in the Jaffa part of Tel Aviv City on 1 October. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Afghanistan

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	113 DEAD
9	**7.262**	190 INJURED
		87 INCIDENTS

Terrorism remained a persistent threat in Afghanistan in 2024, with incidents rising by nearly 20 per cent despite a slight decrease in deaths. The country recorded 113 deaths, a 12 per cent decline, while incidents increased from 73 in 2023 to 87 in 2024. This year marked Afghanistan's lowest position on the GTI since its inception, remaining outside the top five for the second consecutive year.

While terrorist activity in Afghanistan has fallen significantly in recent years, this does not indicate that peace has been restored. The GTI does not account for acts of state repression or violence committed by state actors. As such, actions carried out by the Taliban are no longer included within the scope of the report. Despite the downward trend in terrorism, widespread reports persist of repression and violence targeting civilians, the media, human rights officials, and former government officials.[63] Afghanistan is considered the world's most repressive country for women, who face severe institutionalised gender-based discrimination, including bans on education and strict requirements to cover their faces and bodies.[64]

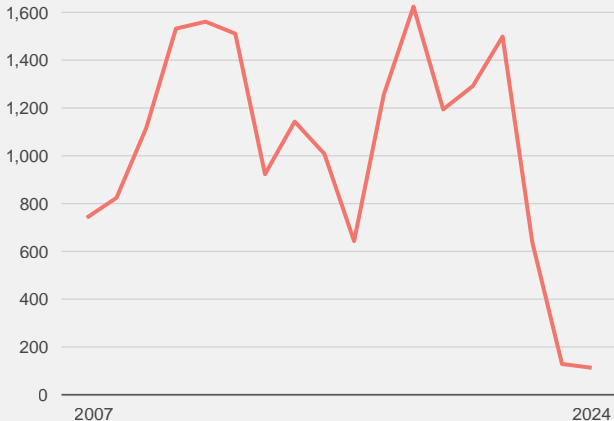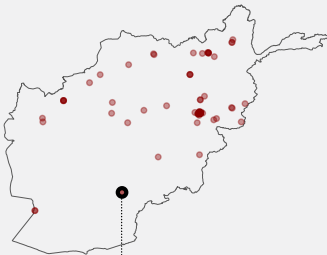Terrorism in Afghanistan remains concentrated in the northern provinces, with Kabul and Takhar recording the highest number of attacks in 2024. Kabul saw 27 deaths from 41 attacks, making it the province with the most terrorism deaths. Despite remaining the most terrorism-affected province for the 11th consecutive year, Kabul experienced a 48 per cent decrease in deaths even as the number of attacks rose by 78 per cent.

Most attacks in Afghanistan were carried out by anti-Taliban groups, including the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) and the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF). However, Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISK) remained the deadliest group in the country, responsible for 57 per cent of deaths and a fifth of attacks in 2024. ISK was responsible for Afghanistan's deadliest attack of 2024, when a suicide bomber killed 21 people at a bank branch in Kandahar province.[65]

Entering their fourth year in power, the Taliban continue to maintain internal stability while facing resistance from armed opposition groups such as the AFF and NRF, which challenge their governance. Relations with Pakistan have also worsened, highlighted by cross-border tensions and Pakistani airstrikes on suspected TTP hideouts in Afghanistan.[66] These developments reflect the complexities of Afghanistan's political landscape as it grapples with security concerns and internal opposition.

18,747 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Government
- Undetermined
- Civilians
- Other

Worst Attacks

KANDAHAR

A suicide bomber killed at least 21 people and wounded at least 30 others outside a bank branch in Kandahar province on 21 March. Islamic State - Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for the attack.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Cameroon

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	205 DEAD
10	**6.944**	200 INJURED
		153 INCIDENTS

For the first time since 2019, Cameroon is among the ten countries most affected by terrorism. Following a sharp rise in activity in 2023, Cameroon saw a slight decline in 2024, with attacks falling by 13 per cent to 153 and deaths dropping by one-third to 205. Cameroon's security challenges are primarily driven by ongoing separatist conflicts and threats posed by Islamic militant groups, particularly Boko Haram.

Boko Haram remained the most active and lethal terrorist organisation in Cameroon in 2024, responsible for 107 deaths and 69 attacks, or half of the deaths and attacks recorded in the country. Despite this, the number of attacks and deaths attributed to the group declined by 28 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, compared to the previous year. Furthermore, the ongoing Ambazonia separatist insurgency, also referred to as the Anglophone crisis, accounted for approximately half of all terrorist attacks and one-third of deaths within the country during the same period. The insurgency remains a complex element of Cameroon's security landscape, with the government's use of anti-terrorism laws to address the Anglophone crisis adding further challenges to an already sensitive situation.[67]

Terrorism declined across all regions of Cameroon in 2024, but Extrême-Nord remained the most affected region, recording the highest number of attacks and deaths. In this region, 92 per cent of attacks and 98 per cent of deaths were attributed to Boko Haram. The group's activity in Extrême-Nord is largely driven by its ongoing conflict with ISWA, which maintains a strong presence in neighbouring countries such as Niger and Nigeria. Cameroon's deadliest attack in 2024 occurred in Extrême-Nord, where Boko Haram militants killed 27 fishermen. The local fishing community, composed primarily of Nigerian nationals, may have been targeted due to suspicions of connections with ISWA.[68]

Cameroon continues to face significant challenges related to governance and peace. In the Global Peace Index 2024, the country ranked 137th out of 163, highlighting ongoing instability. Two persistent conflicts continue to shape the security landscape: the Anglophone separatist crisis and the insurgencies involving ISWA and Boko Haram. While terrorism declined in 2024, tensions remain high. The outlook remains uncertain, as the interplay between separatist pressures and extremist insurgencies poses ongoing threats to peace and stability in the years ahead.

2,382 Deaths From Terrorism Since 2007

Attack Targets in 2024

- Civilians
- Military
- Police
- Other
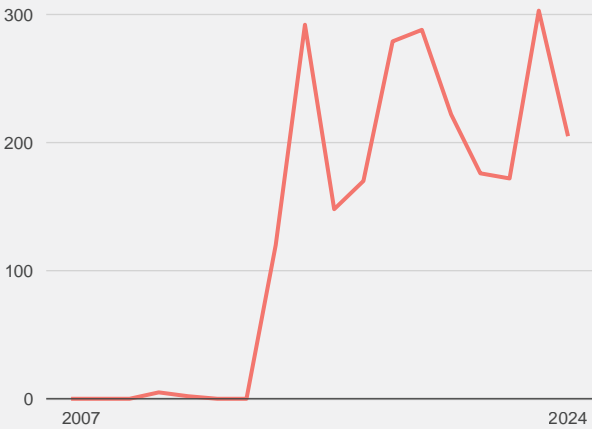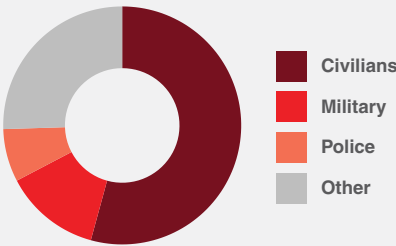
Worst Attacks
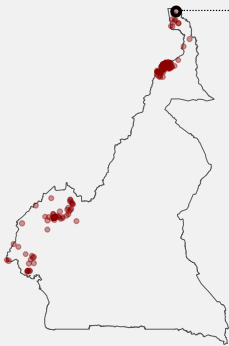
EXTREME NORD
Assailants killed at least 27 fishermen and abducted at least three others in Extreme Nord region on 11 April. The unconfirmed number of victims were from Nigeria. The assailants reportedly accused abductees for being Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) informants. No group has claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but Boko Haram operates in the area.

2015
10,882

2022
6,824

Since 2007, deaths from terrorism have fluctuated, peaking at 10,882 in 2015 and reaching a low of 6,824 in 2022. Over this period, terrorism dynamics have remained highly fluid, with its epicentre shifting towards countries with weaker government institutions.

Over the last two decades, the epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa into the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa.

The Sahel region now accounts for over half of all deaths from terrorism globally. Terrorism deaths have increased almost tenfold since 2019. In 2007, the Sahel accounted for only one per cent of global deaths.

25/163

Of the 163 countries in the GTI, only 25 have not recorded a single terrorist incident since 2007.

In North America since 2007, there have been 84 politically motivated attacks, compared to 21 religiously motivated attacks. Of these attacks, 58 were linked to individuals with far-right sympathies or connections.

Over the past decade the average impact of terrorism has increased in three of the nine regions: Europe, South America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Every other region has recorded a decrease in the average impact since 2014.
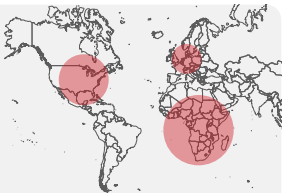
The largest rises in terrorist activity since 2007 have occurred in Pakistan, Syria and Mali.

2007
6,249

2024
59

In Iraq, deaths from terrorism have fallen 99 per cent since 2007, when 6,249 deaths were recorded, to 59 in 2024.

The largest percentage falls in terrorist activity since 2007 have occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan and Thailand.

2012
184

2024
12

Thailand fell from 184 deaths in 2012, to 12 in 2024.

Trends in the West

There has been a sharp increase in antisemitic violence and hate crimes across the West, with attacks on synagogues recorded in Europe, Australia, and the US.

The number of antisemitic incidents in the US rose by over 200 per cent in 2024. The number of FBI-recorded hate crime incidents targeting the Jewish community rose by 270 per cent in the two months after the start of the Gaza war.

2023   **2024**
34   67

The number of terrorist incidents in Europe doubled over the past year, from 34 attacks in 2023 to 67 in 2024, including attacks carried out by IS and Hamas.

2 Trends in Terrorism

Trends in Terrorism

TRENDS SINCE 2007

Figure 2.1 shows that there have been several distinct phases in terrorist activity since 2007. In 2007 and 2008, most terrorist activity was concentrated in Iraq and Afghanistan in response to the US and its allies' interventions. This impacted Pakistan, leading to an escalation in terrorist activities from 2008 to 2013. The Arab Spring and the rise of Islamic State (IS) triggered a surge in terrorism across the Middle East from 2011 to 2013, particularly in Syria and Iraq, while the growth of Boko Haram led to terrorism increasing in Nigeria. At its peak in 2015, almost 11,000 people were killed in terrorist attacks in a single year.

From 2016, deaths from terrorism began to decline. Iraq saw a marked reduction in terrorism starting in 2017, whereas Afghanistan experienced an increase in terrorism from 2016 to 2021, followed by a notable decline in 2022 after the Taliban's ascension to power. During the same period, the Sahel region saw a significant rise in terrorist incidents and deaths, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Somalia. Since 2009 both deaths and attacks have risen by roughly tenfold.

2022 marked the lowest global death toll from terrorism since 2007, but in 2023, deaths surged to levels comparable to those seen in 2017. This increase, the first since 2020, was primarily due to the October 7 attack by Hamas on Israel, which resulted in over 1,200 fatalities and the capture of more than 200 soldiers and civilians.[1] Deaths decreased by 13 per cent in 2024, primarily due to the surge in deaths caused by the Hamas attack in 2023. However, without this attack, deaths would have risen slightly in 2024 by half a per cent, reaching their highest level since 2017.

The Sahel remains the epicentre of terrorism, despite a decline in deaths in 2024 and renewed violence in MENA. The region accounted for 51 per cent of total terrorism deaths globally in 2024, compared to 48 per cent in 2023 and just one per cent in 2007. Niger, Chad and Nigeria saw increases in deaths over the past year, with Niger and Chad recording rises of over 80 per cent. However, these increases were offset by declines of more than 20 per cent in Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon, and Senegal, leading to an overall four per cent decline in deaths across the Sahel in 2024. Despite this reduction, 2024 recorded the second-highest death toll in the Sahel since the inception of the Index.

FIGURE 2.1

Deaths from terrorism, 2007–2024

Total deaths have decreased 31 per cent from their peak in 2015.
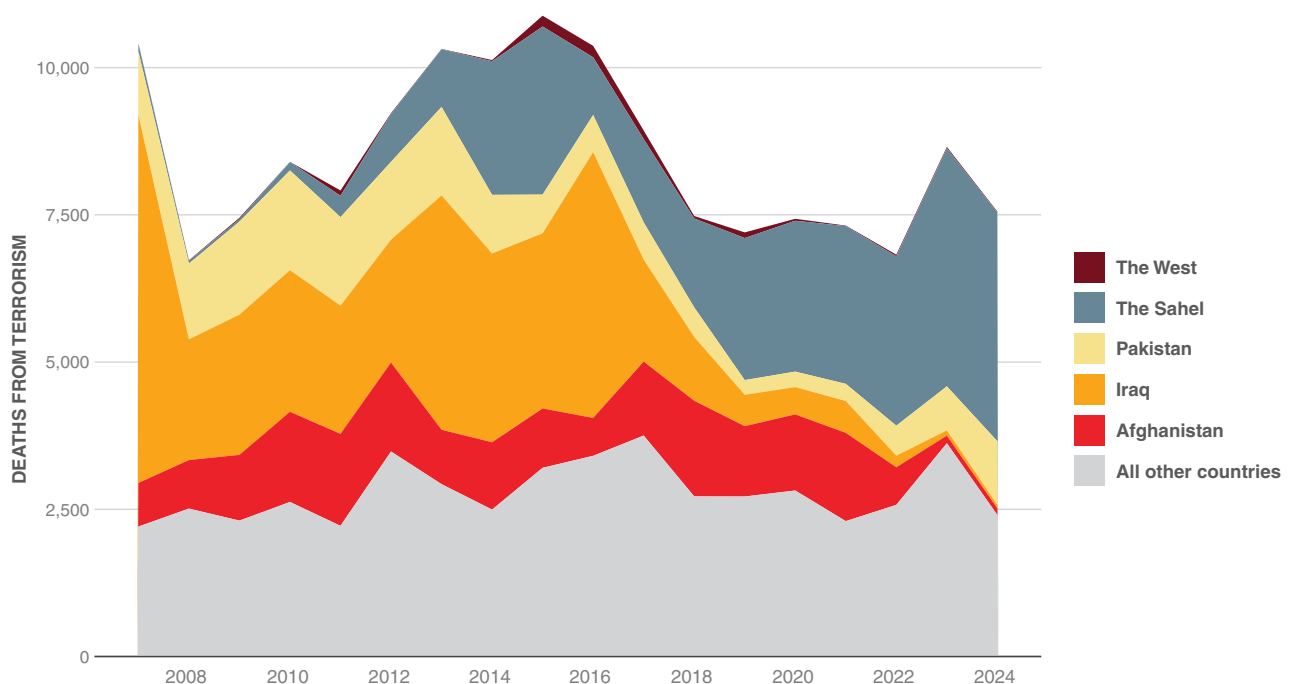
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Globally, deaths from terrorism have declined by almost a third since the peak of terrorism in 2015, with Iraq and Nigeria recording the largest decreases. Deaths in Nigeria peaked in 2014 at 2,101, before declining to 392 deaths in 2022, the lowest level since 2011. Deaths from terrorism in Nigeria increased in the two subsequent years, rising by 34 per cent in 2023 to 533 and 565 in 2024. The resurgence of violence in Nigeria continues to be driven by intensified conflict between ISWA and Boko Haram, with both groups responsible for almost 60 per cent of deaths in 2024 in the country.

Deaths from terrorism in Iraq have fallen by 99 per cent since their peak in 2007. This is indicative of a broader trend in the MENA region, where terrorist activities have lessened, especially over the last eight years. Contributing factors include the de-escalation of the Syrian civil war, IS' operational shift from MENA to the Sahel region, and enhanced counterterrorism cooperation at both national and international levels.

While attacks and deaths have declined by more than half since 2007 in the MENA region, the late 2023 resurgence of violence in Israel and Palestine has had a ripple effect on conflict in the region. Israel responded to the October 2023 Hamas attack by invading southern Lebanon, due to Hezbollah's support for Hamas. This resurgence in conflict coincided with the fall of the Assad regime, leaving Syria in a power vacuum. Experts warn that the regime's collapse could lead to a resurgence of IS in Syria, prompting the US to launch strikes on IS strongholds immediately after Assad fled in December.[2]

While a resurgence in IS activity in Syria is anticipated, recent trends indicate that IS and its affiliates continue to shift their focus to sub-Saharan Africa and more specifically Sahelian countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. The Sahel has become increasingly more violent

during this period, with deaths increasing 30 times between 2007 and 2024. Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali recorded the largest increases, 1,532, 896 and 602 more deaths respectively in 2024 than in 2007. Groups such as IS and JNIM continue to wage a violent campaign in the region, capitalising on political instability and organised crime. Figure 2.2 shows the shift of terrorism away from MENA and towards the Sahel and, more specifically, the tri-border region between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

Terrorism has become more concentrated over the past few years, as shown in Figure 2.2. Despite total deaths from terrorism falling by 13 per cent, the number of countries that recorded at least one death from terrorism remained static, from 46 in 2023 to 45 in 2024. There are 65 countries with a GTI score of zero, meaning that they have not experienced a single incident of terrorism in the past five years. By contrast, in 2015 when terrorism was most widespread, there were only 57 countries with a GTI score of zero. Of the 163 countries in the GTI, only 25 have not recorded a single terrorist incident since 2007.

CONFLICT AND TERRORISM

Conflict has been the primary driver of terrorism since 2007. There were 153,234 terrorism deaths between 2007 and 2024, of which 98 per cent occurred in countries that were involved in a conflict at the time of the attacks. In 2024, the 20 countries most impacted by terrorism were all defined as being in conflict.[3] Chile is ranked 21st on the GTI and is the only country in the 25 most impacted of the Index that was not classified as being in conflict in 2024.

Most significant changes in deaths from terrorism, 2021–2024
Apart from a surge in Israel, Palestine and Syria, terrorism has shifted from MENA to the Sahel within the last three years.

Increasing

Decreasing
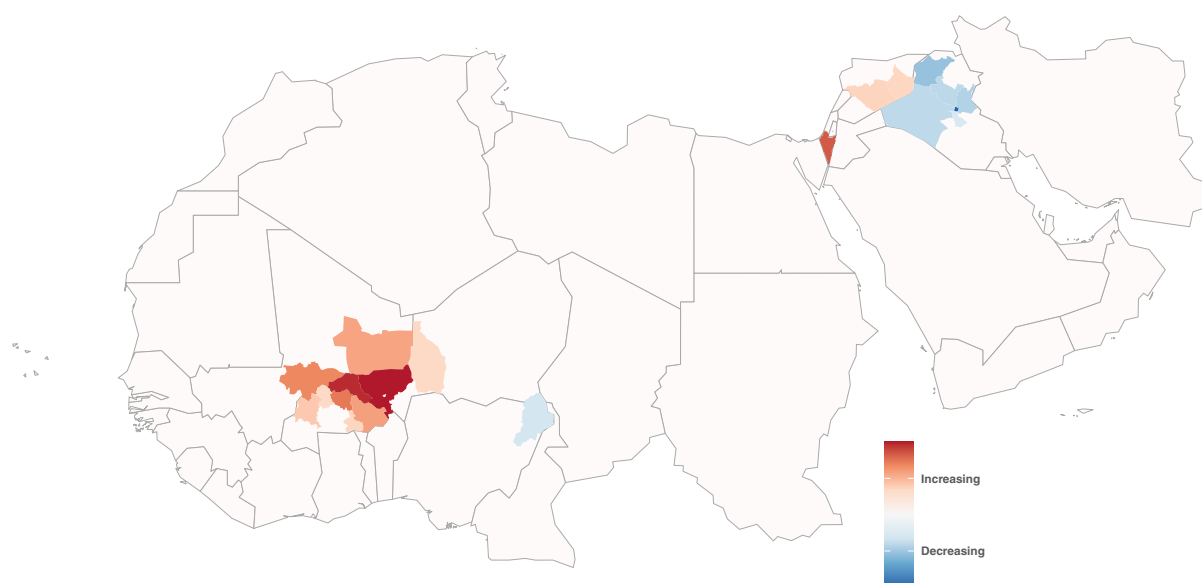
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 2.3

Distribution of deaths by terrorism, 2007–2024

45 countries recorded at least one death from terrorism in 2024.
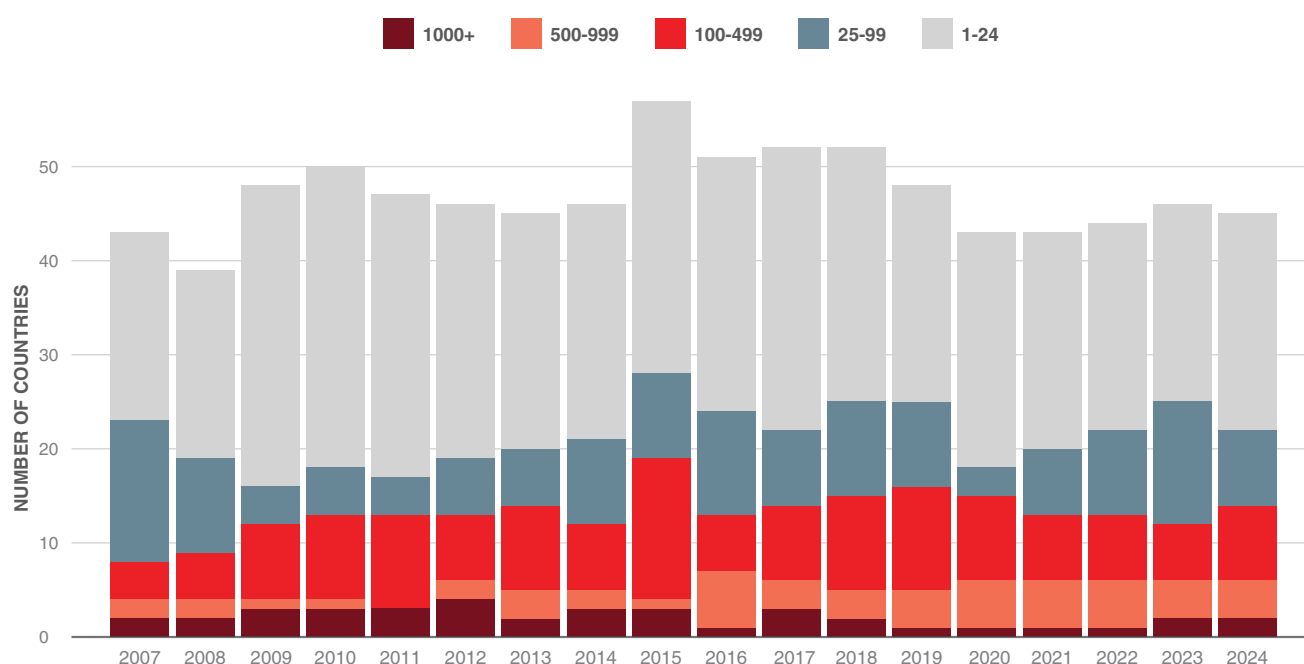
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Figure 2.4 illustrates the trend in deaths from terrorism by conflict type. In 2024, 98 per cent of terrorism deaths occurred in countries experiencing some level of conflict. The concentration of terrorism deaths in conflict zones has remained above 95 per cent since 2015. Terror attacks in countries in conflict also tend to be deadlier than those committed outside conflict zones, with attacks in conflict countries killing 2.2 people per attack in 2024 compared to 0.9 people per attack outside conflict zones.

Although deaths from terrorism in wars have declined since their peak in 2017, deaths in minor conflicts have risen, with almost 2,400 terrorism deaths in minor conflict situations recorded in 2024. Even with the decline since 2023, terrorism deaths in minor conflict situations remain high. While deaths in non-conflict countries are well below the peak of 2015, they have also risen in the last two years, with a 25 per cent increase in the last year alone. The increase was driven by non-conflict countries bordering the Sahel, with Togo reporting 42 deaths and Chad 40, their highest death tolls on record. Despite the increase, terrorism deaths in non-conflict countries remain below 200.

FIGURE 2.4

Deaths from terrorism by conflict type, 2007–2024

In 2024, 98 per cent of deaths from terrorism occurred in countries currently experiencing conflict.

Source: Terrorism Tracker; UCDP; IEP Calculations

Countries involved in conflict are more susceptible to terrorism in part because of the lack of a fully functioning state. Terrorism is also one of many tactics employed by insurgencies and paramilitaries in a civil conflict. For example, terrorist groups like IS and Boko Haram carry out conventional military attacks in the context of their respective conflicts, as well as undertaking extensive terrorist activity.

TRENDS IN THE WEST

In the West, total deaths from terrorism peaked in 2016 when 194 people died, while attacks peaked a year later when 176 incidents were recorded. Most of these deaths were caused by Islamic jihadists. However, both religious and politically motivated terrorism have subsided significantly in the last five years in the West, as shown in Figure 2.5. Between 2017 and 2024, the total number of yearly attacks in the West fell by 70 per cent, from 176 to 52. Deaths also fell significantly, with total deaths over the same period falling from 146 to 15, a 90 per cent decrease

Most terrorist attacks in the West since 2007 have either been politically motivated or had no clear ideological motivation, with 429 political attacks recorded over the last 18 years. However, religiously motivated attacks were more lethal, with 494 people killed in the West in religiously motivated attacks over the same period. All the religiously motivated deaths in this period were caused by jihadists groups or individuals with a jihadist ideology.

Recent events have led to concerns about a resurgence in jihadist attacks in the West. The most recent incident occurring in early January 2025, when an individual who had pledged allegiance to IS drove a truck into a crowd in New Orleans, killing 15 people.[4] It was an attack reminiscent of the wave of IS inspired terrorism seen in the West in the mid-2010s. There have also been fears that the war in Gaza would lead to an increase in terrorist activity in Europe. Security services in Europe foiled several planned terrorist attacks in December 2023. These attacks were linked to Hamas, with some reported to have been targeting Jewish institutions in Germany.[5]

While the predicted increase in terrorism owing to the conflict in Gaza did not eventuate, there has been a sharp increase in antisemitic violence and hate crimes across the West, with attacks on synagogues recorded in Europe, Australia, and the US. The FBI's hate crime data shows a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents in the US, with total incidents increasing by over 270 per cent between September 2023 and November 2023.

Concerns have also been raised about the possibility of a spike in politically motivated violence and political terrorism, given the levels of political polarisation and instability that have been seen over the past five years. In recent years, most terrorist attacks have been politically motivated. Figure 2.6 shows trends in the US Political Violence database,[6] which shows incidents of political violence that have led to at least one fatality. The data ranges back to 1780. For almost 200 years, the predominant form of political violence in the US was violent rioting, followed by lynching. However, over the past 40 years, almost all incidents of fatal politically motivated violence in the US have been terrorist attacks. From 2020 to 2024, 75 per cent of fatal political violence incidents in the US were terrorist attacks, up from 48 per cent between 1975-1979.

FIGURE 2.5

Terrorist attacks and fatalities in the West by ideology, 2007–2024

Both politically and religiously motivated terrorism in the West has fallen since 2017.
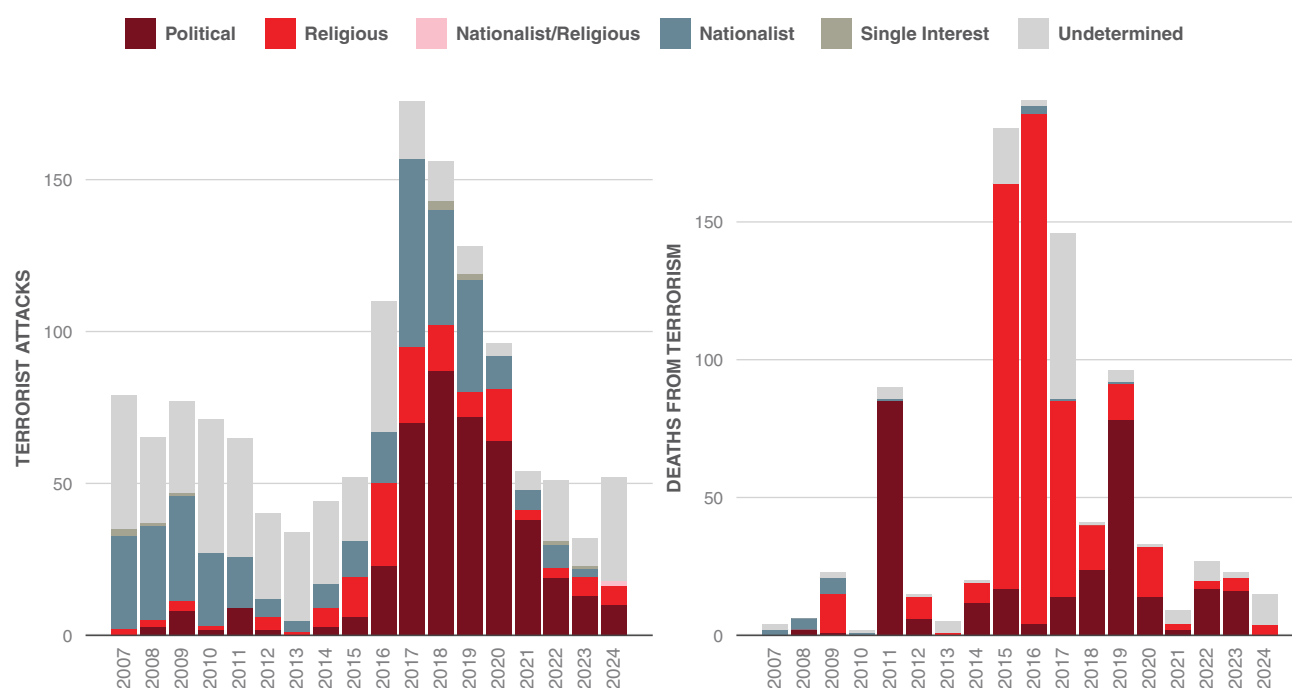
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 2.6

Fatal political violence events in the US by 5-year increments, 1780–2024

Terrorism has become the most common form of fatal political violence in the US over the past 40 years.

75%

From 2020 to 2024, 75 per cent of fatal political violence incidents in the US were terrorist attacks, up from 48 per cent between 1975-1979.
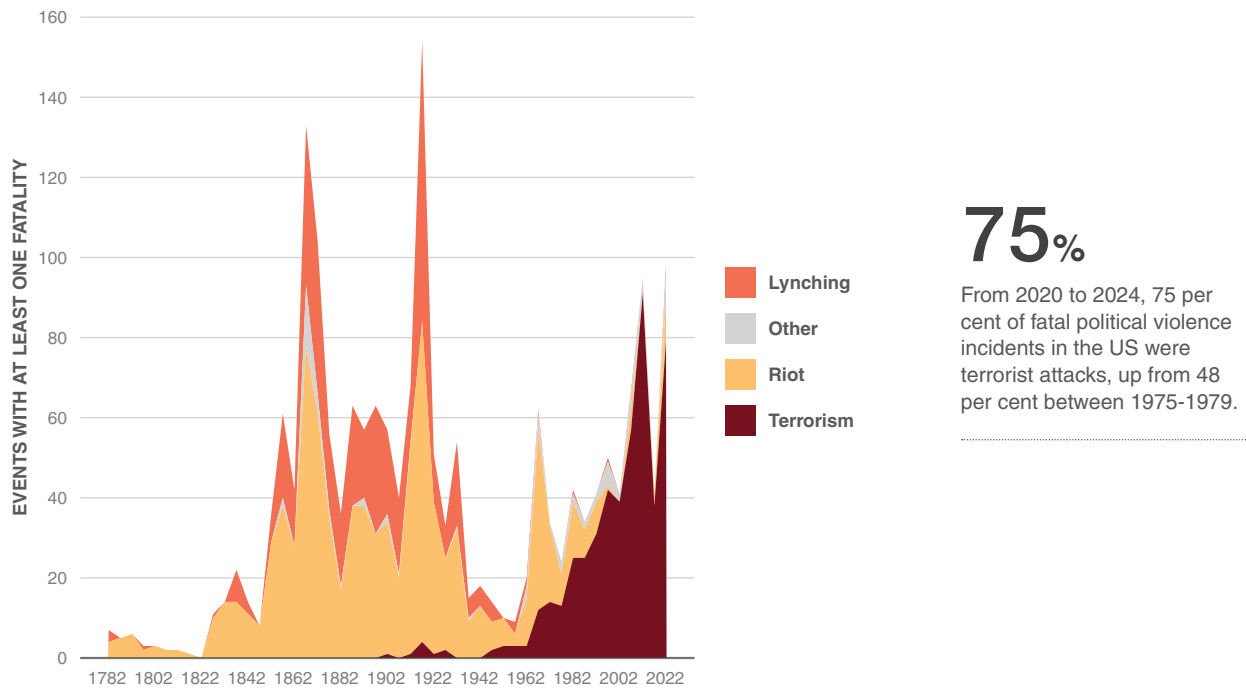
Source: USPV

Much of the debate around political terrorism in the West has centred around which political ideologies have been responsible for the most attacks or most deaths from terrorism. Figure 2.7 looks at incidents of terrorism and deaths from terrorism by far-left and far-right groups and individuals. It shows that far-left groups were responsible for more terrorist attacks, particularly between 2016 and 2022. The vast majority of far-left terrorism in the West occurred in Western European countries. However, far-right terrorism over the same period was more lethal, with 292 people being killed in far-right attacks from 2017 to 2024, with fatal attacks occurring in Europe, North America, and Asia-Pacific. It should be noted however that almost all of these attacks, across both ideologies, were carried out by individuals who were not affiliated with a particular terrorist group.

FIGURE 2.7

Far-left and Far-right terrorism in the West, 2007–2024

While far-left groups have recorded more attacks, far-right groups have recorded more deaths.
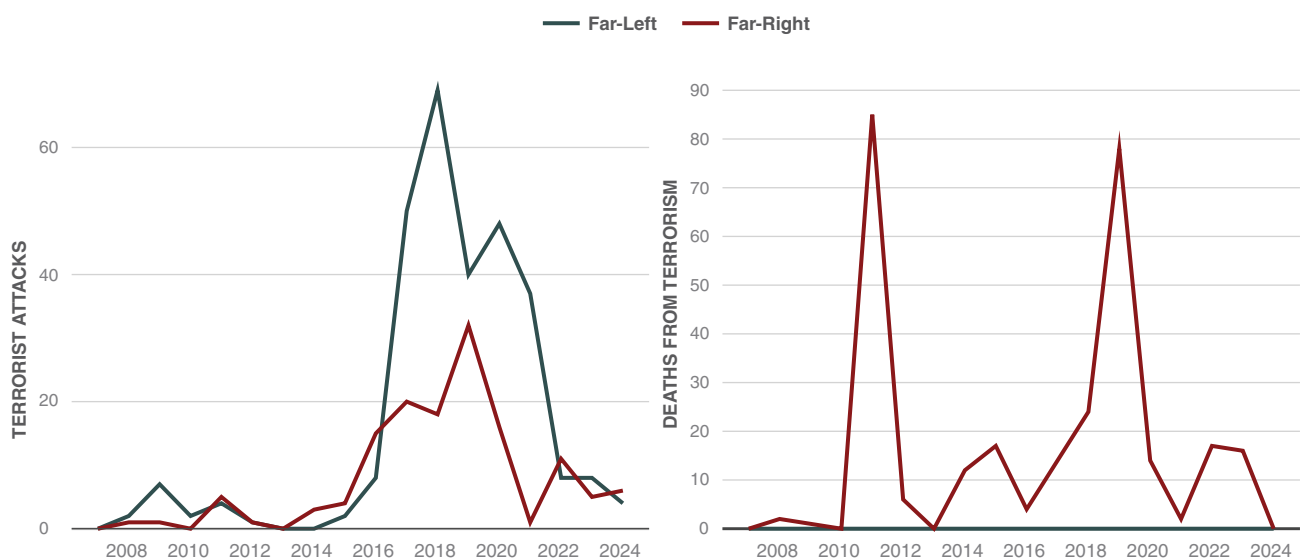
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

The rise in undetermined or unaffiliated terrorism has been a consistent feature of terrorist attacks in the West over the past two decades, as shown in Figure 2.8. In 2007, 44 per cent of attacks could be attributed to a specific group or organisation. However, this figure has not been higher than 26 per cent in the last decade, and in the last year under eight per cent of attacks could be attributed to a specific group.

Between 2014 and 2023 there was a sharp rise in terrorist attacks carried out by individuals who were affiliated with a specific ideology, but not operating as part of a specific group. These ideologically aligned attacks rose from 20 per cent of attacks in the West in 2014, to a high of 76 per cent of attacks in 2020. Almost all of these attacks were individuals with a broad jihadist, far-left, or far-right motive.

However, in the past few years there has been a noticeable rise in the percentage of attacks that cannot be attributed to any group at all. In 2024, 65 per cent of attacks could not be tied to either a specific group or a specific ideology. While part of this increase can simply be attributed to a lack of information about certain attacks, it may also reflect the rise of ideologically confused or unclear attacks, reflecting the broader political and social uncertainty.

Lone-actor terrorists often construct their own ideologies by piecing together elements from various, and sometimes contradictory, belief systems. This blending of ideologies isn't about strict allegiance to a single group or cause but rather reflects an attempt to justify violent actions. This approach complicates counterterrorism efforts, as it makes these actors unpredictable and harder to profile.[7]

FIGURE 2.8

Responsibility for terrorist attacks in the West, 2007–2024

The percentage of attacks that could not be attributed to a group rose from 55 per cent to 92 per cent.
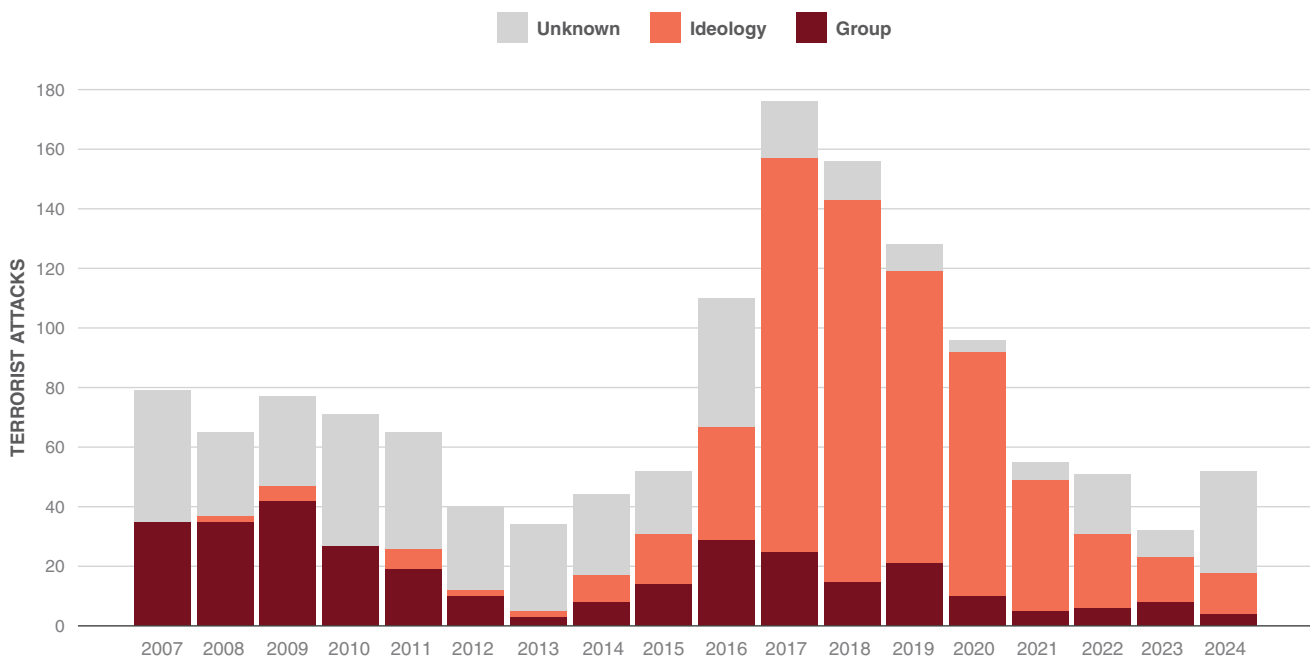
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Regional Trends

Table 1 shows the regions of the world by their average GTI score for 2024, as well as changes in score over the last decade and the prior year. The impact of terrorism fell in five of the nine GTI regions in 2024. The largest improvement occurred in South Asia, with Afghanistan recording its third consecutive year of declines in deaths and attacks. North America and South America followed, recording falls in the number of incidents of 27 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded its first improvement in GTI score since 2020, driven by decreases in deaths in Mali and Burkina Faso of 21 per cent each in the last year.

South Asia continues to be the most impacted region globally by terrorism, a position it has held since 2007. Similarly, Central America and the Caribbean remained the least impacted region for terrorism in 2024 for the 13th consecutive year. A total of 33 terrorism deaths have been recorded in the Central America and the Caribbean since 2007, with 24 per cent of those occurring in 2009. The region recorded no attacks in 2024 for the first time in three years.

Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the most significant regional deterioration over the past decade, with attacks and deaths rising by 157 and 73 per cent, respectively, since 2014.

By contrast, the trends in MENA and Europe improved over the past decade, with attacks in MENA declining by 77 per cent, and fatalities decreasing by 66 per cent.

TABLE 2.1

Average GTI score and change by region

South Asia continues to have the highest average impact of terrorism in 2024, despite an improvement of 15 per cent since 2023.

Region	Average Score	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
South Asia	3.741	-0.627	-0.659
MENA	2.895	-1.011	0.175
North America	2.694	-0.184	-0.343
sub-Saharan Africa	2.205	0.579	-0.102
South America	1.657	0.065	-0.128
Asia-Pacific	1.501	-0.051	0.083
Europe	1.07	0.241	0.155
Russia and Eurasia	0.891	-0.8	0.257
Central America and Caribbean	0.048	-0.426	-0.039

In Europe, attacks increased in 2024 for the second time since 2016, driven by increases in terrorist activity in Poland, France and Greece in the last year. However, deaths have remained almost static, recording the lowest terrorism death toll in the region in three years.

Figure 2.9 shows the total number of attacks and deaths from terrorism since 2007. Between 2007 and 2024, the largest number of deaths from terrorism was recorded in the MENA region, at 54,904 deaths. Just over 45,000deaths were recorded in sub-Saharan Africa, with a further 41,000 in South Asia.

FIGURE 2.9

Attacks and deaths from terrorism by region, 2007–2024

The largest number of deaths were recorded in the MENA region, with almost 55,000 deaths from terrorism since 2007.
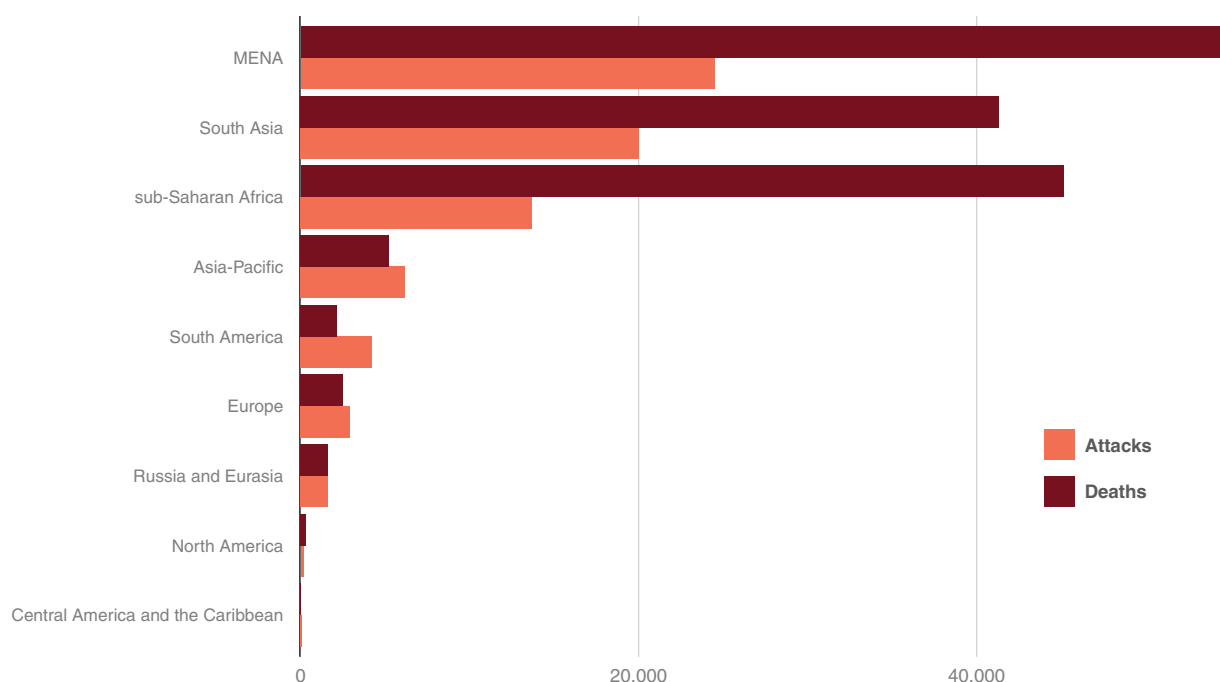
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Although MENA has recorded the highest number of terrorism deaths globally since 2007, the region has seen a significant decline, with decreases in six of the past ten years. MENA is no longer the region with highest number of deaths from terrorism and saw a sustained drop between 2016 and 2022. As a result, sub-Saharan Africa became the region with the most deaths from terrorism, overtaking MENA and South Asia. Figure 2.10 shows the trend in terrorism deaths for these three regions since 2007. Collectively they accounted for 95 per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2024.

FIGURE 2.10

Trend in rerrorism deaths by region, 2007–2024

Sub-Saharan Africa has had the most deaths of any region every year since 2017.
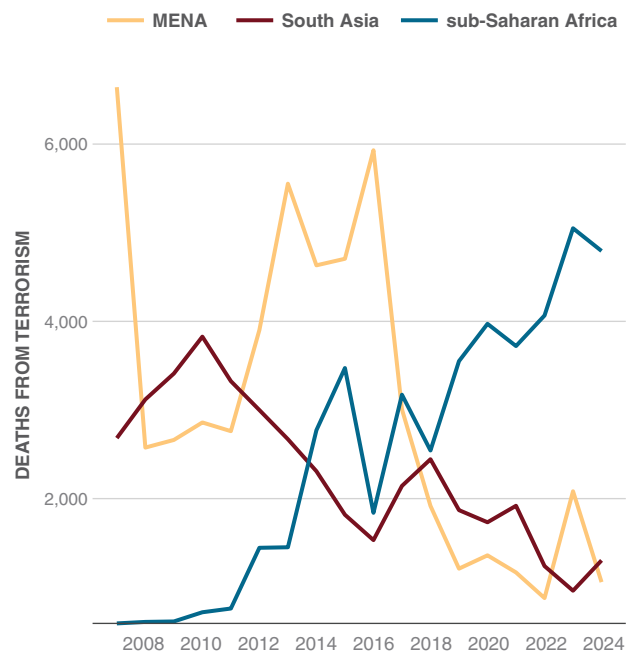
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Regional Profiles

Asia-Pacific

TABLE 2.2

Asia-Pacific GTI score, rank and change in score, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Myanmar	6.929	11	3.371	-0.614
Philippines	5.166	20	-1.058	-0.3
Thailand	4.63	28	-2.15	0.372
Indonesia	4.17	30	0.517	-0.118
Australia	1.973	46	0.423	0.498
China	1.863	49	-3.631	1.281
Malaysia	1.626	52	-0.327	1.434
Japan	0.949	72	0.949	-0.24
South Korea	0.582	82	0.582	0.582
Cambodia	0.423	86	0.139	0.423
New Zealand	0.217	94	0.217	-1.73
Laos	0	100	0	0
Mongolia	0	100	0	0
Papua New Guinea	0	100	0	0
North Korea	0	100	0	0
Singapore	0	100	0	0
Timor-Leste	0	100	0	0
Taiwan	0	100	0	0
Vietnam	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			-0.051	0.084

Five countries in Asia-Pacific improved in 2024, while six deteriorated, resulting in the impact of terrorism rising in the region after five years of consistent improvement. A further eight countries showed no change in score when compared to the previous year. Despite the deterioration within the last year, the average impact of terrorism in the region is three per cent lower than a decade ago.

Myanmar remained the most impacted country in Asia-Pacific for the fourth consecutive year, despite recording only 67 attacks and 24 deaths in 2024. This is a decline of 85 per cent in attacks and 93 per cent in deaths compared to 2023.

The Philippines, Myanmar, Japan, New Zealand and Indonesia all recorded improvements on the GTI in the past year. However, the Philippines still has the second highest level of terrorism in the region, recording 31 deaths from 22 attacks in 2024.

In 2024, Malaysia recorded the largest deterioration in the region, with its first terror attack in four years. The attack occurred when an assailant killed two people at a police station in May 2024. The assailant reportedly had connections with Islamic extremist group Jemaah Islamiya (JI).[8] Indonesia was the only other country in Asia-Pacific to record more deaths in 2024 than a decade ago, with ten deaths and 20 attacks in 2024, compared to three deaths and four attacks in 2014.

Several countries have recorded improvements over the last decade, with the Philippines, Thailand, China and Malaysia all improving since 2014. China recorded the largest improvement over the last decade, with deaths falling from 126 in 2015 to only one in 2024.

Central America and the Caribbean

TABLE 2.3

Central America and Caribbean GTI score, rank and change in score, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Mexico	0.582	82	-0.216	-0.458
Costa Rica	0	100	0	0
Cuba	0	100	0	0
Dominican Republic	0	100	0	0
Guatemala	0	100	-1.528	0
Honduras	0	100	-0.114	0
Haiti	0	100	0	0
Jamaica	0	100	0	0
Nicaragua	0	100	-2.771	0
Panama	0	100	-0.03	0
El Salvador	0	100	-0.446	0
Trinidad and Tobago	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			**-0.425**	**-0.038**

The Central America and Caribbean region have remained largely free from terrorism over the last decade. Eleven out of the twelve countries recorded a score of zero on the 2025 GTI. This signifies that these nations have not encountered a single terrorist attack in at least the past five years. Mexico is the only country in the region to have a GTI score above zero. Notably, in 2024, the country did not record a single terrorist attack. This marks only the third time since the inception of the index that Mexico has reported no attacks.

Terrorism in Mexico has historically been driven by ideological or political motivations. It is important to note that criminal activity by cartels is not classified as terrorism in this report. While the level of terrorism in Mexico remains very low, other forms of violent conflict in the country are reported to be extremely high, particularly against journalists and media workers. Hundreds of these workers have been killed or disappeared within the last decade, many of which go unsolved.[9] Additionally, Mexico continues to report one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Although incidents of terrorism in the country have declined, criminal activity driven by cartels remains prevalent in the crime landscape.[10]

Every country in the region that experienced terrorism in 2014 recorded an improvement in the last decade. The largest improvement occurred in Nicaragua, followed by Guatemala and El Salvador, with these countries not recording an attack since 2014. The decline in terrorism in these countries has been accompanied by significant reductions in homicide rates. The most notable improvement has been observed in El Salvador, where the homicide rate decreased dramatically from 103 per 100,000 inhabitants to 1.9 in 2024, the lowest in the Western Hemisphere.[11]

Europe

TABLE 2.4

Europe GTI score, rank and change in score, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Germany	4.748	27	3.632	1.933
Türkiye	3.968	32	-1.735	-0.2
Greece	2.928	36	0.519	-0.151
Czechia	2.906	39	2.906	-0.671
France	2.712	40	0.126	-0.258
United Kingdom	2.639	41	-0.795	0.217
Poland	1.962	47	1.962	1.539
Sweden	1.842	50	1.783	1.107
Netherlands	1.402	60	1.402	0.825
Belgium	1.347	61	-0.546	-0.557
Switzerland	1.265	62	1.098	0.638
Spain	1.256	63	0.464	-0.553
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.218	65	0.759	1.218
Norway	1.198	66	-2.036	-0.549
Slovakia	1.023	69	0.993	-0.069
Finland	0.949	72	0.949	0.949
Italy	0.929	74	0.008	-0.518
Kosovo	0.782	78	-0.863	-0.436
Denmark	0.72	79	0.661	0.72
Austria	0.582	82	0.582	-0.371
Serbia	0.582	82	-0.153	0.582
Lithuania	0.423	86	0.423	0.336
Latvia	0.423	86	0.423	0.423
Cyprus	0.347	89	0.288	-0.269
Ireland	0.233	90	-0.938	-0.21
Iceland	0.123	95	0.123	-0.11
Albania	0	100	-0.044	0
Bulgaria	0	100	-1.893	0
Estonia	0	100	-0.241	0
Croatia	0	100	-0.333	0
Hungary	0	100	-0.423	0
North Macedonia	0	100	-0.423	0
Montenegro	0	100	-0.03	0
Portugal	0	100	0	0
Romania	0	100	0	0
Slovenia	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			**0.24**	**0.155**

The impact of terrorism in Europe increased in 2024, following the region's lowest levels recorded in 2023 since the inception of the Index. There were 25 deaths from 67 incidents in 2024, almost double the attacks when compared to the prior year. Deaths declined by four per cent to the lowest level in three years. Even with the fluctuation, terrorism in Europe remains far lower than the peak of activity in 2016, when 736 deaths from 362 incidents were recorded. Seven countries recorded a death from terrorism in the past year, and nineteen of the 36 countries in the region didn't record a single incident in 2024.

However, 19 countries experienced a deterioration in score over the past decade, with the strongest occurring in Germany and Czechia. Germany recorded ten deaths in 2024, the most deaths in four years. Germany's deadliest attack was at a Christmas market in Magdeburg, where an assailant drove a vehicle into crowds resulting in the deaths of six people.[12] Czechia's deterioration was as a result of the shooting at Charles University in Prague in 2023 that, where a gunmen killed 14 people with the shooter had also killing a further three people prior, however, no attacks were recorded in Czechia in 2024.[13]

Türkiye was the second-most impacted country by terrorism in the region, although its score has improved by almost a third in the last decade. It recorded seven deaths from seven attacks in 2024, compared to its peak of 591 deaths from 247 attacks in 2016. The largest overall improvement in the last decade occurred in Norway, with the country's last attack being recorded in 2022 resulting in two deaths.

The number of terrorist incidents in Europe doubled over the past year, raising concerns about the potential spillover of conflict from the Middle East into the region. During major events in Europe in 2024, such as the Euros, Summer Olympics, and Taylor Swift concerts, several terrorist plots were successfully foiled.[14] Attacks carried out by both IS and Hamas were recorded[15], while the majority of foiled plots were attributed to IS-inspired lone-wolf actors. As tensions in the Middle East persist into 2025, there remains a possibility of an increase in terrorist activity within Europe.

Middle East and North Africa

TABLE 2.5

Middle East and North Africa GTI score, rank and change, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Syria	8.006	3	0.142	0.06
Israel	7.463	8	3.307	-0.656
Iraq	6.582	13	-3.087	-0.539
Iran	6.056	18	2.077	1.325
Yemen	5.08	22	-2.397	0.125
Palestine	4.93	25	2.003	-0.057
Egypt	4.416	29	-2.175	-0.805
Oman	2.927	37	2.897	2.927
Jordan	2.913	38	2.395	2.458
Algeria	2.415	42	-2.891	0.218
Tunisia	2.184	43	-2.268	-0.73
Libya	1.612	53	-4.335	-0.857
Lebanon	1.237	64	-4.58	-0.325
United Arab Emirates	1.178	67	-0.115	0.945
Saudi Arabia	0.845	75	-2.252	-0.521
Bahrain	0.059	98	-3.811	-0.064
Kuwait	0	100	-0.123	0
Morocco	0	100	-1.605	0
Qatar	0	100	0	0
Sudan	0	100	-3.407	0
Regional Average			-1.011	0.175

The impact of terrorism deteriorated slightly in the MENA region in 2024. However, there was a large level of variance across countries in the region, with nine countries recording improvements, and seven countries recording deteriorations. Four countries in the region registered scores of zero, meaning they had been free of terrorist activity for at least the past five years. The number of terrorist incidents in the region declined marginally from 666 in 2023 to 618 in 2024, whereas the total number of deaths halved from 2,083 in 2023, to 1,058 in 2024.

Two countries in the region, Israel and Syria, were ranked among the ten most impacted by terrorism globally. Israel experienced a significant improvement in deaths 2024 following the surge due to the Hamas attacks in 2023. Syria had the highest level of terrorism in the region and experienced a surge of terrorist activity in 2024. Total deaths in Syria rose from 372 to 430, and the level of terrorism has been steadily increasing in the last decade. IS activity has increased substantially in Syria, with the group conducting 368 attacks that resulted in 708 deaths. The deadliest attack in Syria in 2024 took place in December, when IS militants killed 54 Syrian soldiers who fled to the desert following the fall of the Assad government.[16]

The country showing the greatest deterioration in the region over the past year was Oman, which experienced its first attack since 2010. During the attack, Islamic State militants opened fire on people near a mosque in Muscat, resulting in the death of six people and injuring a further 28.[17] Jordan recorded the second-greatest deterioration in the region over the past year, with the country experiencing its first attacks since 2019. One of the attacks was targeting a small US outpost, causing the death of three US soldiers and injuring 30 others.[18]

Over the past decade, Libya recorded the largest improvement in the region. There were no incidents and no deaths from terrorism in Libya for the second consecutive year, and just ten deaths have been recorded in the past five years, compared to 463 in the five years prior to 2020.

The second largest improvement of the decade occurred in Egypt, which recorded only one attack resulting in one death in

2024. Egypt has experienced a significant reduction in terrorism within the last decade, with its overall GTI score falling for eight of the last ten years. At the peak of terrorist activity in 2015, 481 people were killed in Egypt from 257 terrorist attacks.

North America

TABLE 2.6

North America GTI score, rank and change, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
United States of America	3.517	34	-0.532	-0.633
Canada	1.87	48	0.163	-0.053
Regional Average			**-0.185**	**-0.343**

The impact of terrorism improved in North America over the past year, owing to an improvement in score in the US. There was one death from three attacks in the US in 2024, a large improvement from the 16 deaths from eight attacks in 2023, and the least activity since 2010. The single fatality recorded in the US in 2024 occurred when a spectator was killed during an assassination attempt on then former President Donald Trump in Pennsylvania.[19]

Similarly, Canada experienced an improvement in their GTI score, but to a much smaller extent. Canada recorded five attacks that resulted in no deaths in 2024 compared to one death from three attacks in 2023. This is the first year since 2019 that Canada recorded no terrorism deaths.

Over the last decade, politically motivated attacks have been more prevalent in North America than religiously motivated attacks. Since 2014, there have been 77 politically motivated attacks resulting in 114 deaths, compared to 17 attacks and 64 deaths driven by religious motivations. In 2024, there were no recorded religiously motivated attacks, however, 88 per cent of the attacks in that year had motivations that could not be determined. Terrorism in North America has predominantly been carried out by individuals unaffiliated with specific terrorist organisations. Most perpetrators have been influenced by ideologies but lack formal membership in any recognised group or party. Of the 172 attacks recorded between 2007 and 2024, only 21 were directly linked to known terrorist organisations. This trend highlights the growing prevalence of independent or loosely connected actors in shaping the terrorism landscape in the United States, underscoring the evolving challenges in identifying, understanding, and countering such threats.

Russia and Eurasia

TABLE 2.7

Russia and Eurasia GTI score, rank and change in score, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Russia	6.267	16	-0.009	3.199
Ukraine	2.003	45	-0.311	0.317
Tajikistan	0.999	70	-0.97	0.128
Armenia	0.72	79	0.72	0
Azerbaijan	0.233	90	-0.077	-0.19
Belarus	0.233	90	-1.884	-0.19
Uzbekistan	0.233	90	0.174	-0.19
Georgia	0	100	-1.933	0
Kazakhstan	0	100	-1.544	0
Kyrgyz Republic	0	100	-1.317	0
Moldova	0	100	0	0
Turkmenistan	0	100	-2.457	0
Regional Average			**-0.801**	**0.256**

Russia and Eurasia experienced the largest deterioration in 2024, driven primarily by a significant rise in terrorism in Russia. Ukraine and Tajikistan also recorded slight declines, while minor improvements were noted in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan. Six countries within the region recorded scores of zero, meaning they had no incidents of terrorism in the past five years.

Overall, the region recorded 18 attacks and 199 deaths from terrorism in 2024, the most deaths since 2010. While the region has experienced a significant decrease in terrorism over the past decade, the surge in attacks and deaths in 2024 represents a concerning reversal of this trend.

The most significant deterioration in the region occurred in Russia, with the country recording 13 attacks and 197 deaths in 2024, compared to five incidents and two deaths the year prior. This is the highest death toll in the country since 2010. The surge in deaths was due to the IS attack at the Crocus City Hall in Moscow that killed 144 civilians.[20] This attack was the fourth deadliest terrorist attack globally in 2024.

The second-most impacted country from terrorism was Ukraine, experiencing two attacks that resulted in two deaths. Terrorist activity in Ukraine has gradually decreased since its peak in 2015, where there were 56 attacks that resulted in ten deaths.

Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan were the only countries in the region to improve, with all three countries recording no terrorism in 2024. All three countries have not recorded any deaths from terrorism since 2010.

South America

TABLE 2.8

South America GTI score, rank and change in rank, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Colombia	6.381	15	-0.098	0.147
Chile	5.162	21	2.341	-0.542
Peru	2.062	44	-1.436	-0.68
Ecuador	1.55	56	1.317	1.383
Brazil	1.43	59	1.371	-0.558
Argentina	0.801	76	-0.087	-0.473
Venezuela	0.71	81	-0.053	-0.464
Paraguay	0.073	97	-2.701	-0.168
Uruguay	0.059	98	0.059	-0.055
Bolivia	0	100	0	0
Guyana	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			0.065	-0.128

The impact of terrorism improved in South America over the past year, with seven countries improving their score and two recording no change. However, Colombia and Ecuador saw their scores deteriorate between 2023 and 2024. Colombia recorded 94 deaths, an increase of one from the previous year, while Ecuador recorded its first death in five years. Terrorism has fluctuated in the region over the last decade, with attacks and deaths falling in five and eight of the last ten years. Although majority of countries have experienced declines in terrorism in the last ten years, deteriorations in Chile, Brazil and Ecuador have resulted in a minor deterioration in the region's average overall score. In total there have been 2,135 deaths from terrorism in South America since 2007, the fourth lowest of any region.

Colombia remains the most impacted country by terrorism in the region, a position it has held for the past decade, despite a slight overall improvement over the decade. In 2024, deaths from terrorism increased by one to 94, while the number of incidents rose from 183 to 221. Of the 94 deaths, 77 were attributed to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), with the National Liberation Army (ELN) responsible for the remaining 17 fatalities. The FARC carried out 161 attacks during the year, while ELN was responsible for 60.

Chile remains the second most impacted country by terrorism in South America. For the second consecutive year, the country recorded no deaths from terrorism, while attacks dropped significantly from 188 in 2023 to 52 in 2024. Chile is the highest-ranked country on the GTI not experiencing active conflict, with over 63 per cent of attacks attributed to Mapuche militants.

Peru recorded the most significant improvement in South America in 2024, with no attacks or deaths from terrorism. Over the past decade, Peru has seen the second largest improvement in the region, surpassed only by Paraguay.

South Asia

TABLE 2.9

South Asia GTI score, rank and change in score, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Pakistan	8.374	2	-0.292	0.407
Afghanistan	7.262	9	-1.285	-0.572
India	6.411	14	-0.485	0.059
Bangladesh	3.03	35	-0.056	-0.381
Nepal	1.113	68	-1.642	-1.05
Bhutan	0	100	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	100	-0.627	-3.072
Regional Average			-0.627	-0.658

In 2024, South Asia was the region with the highest average GTI score, a position it has held throughout the last decade. Despite the deterioration this year, which was driven primarily by Pakistan, terrorism has significantly declined compared to a decade ago, with all South Asian countries recording an improvement. This improvement is largely attributed to a decline in terrorist activity in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The region is home to two of the ten countries with the worst GTI scores, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Of the seven countries in South Asia, only Bhutan and Sri Lanka have a GTI score of zero, indicating that neither country has recorded a terrorist attack in the past five years.

The surge in terrorism in the region was primarily driven by Pakistan, with regional attacks increasing from 726 to 1399 and deaths rising from 961 to 1,303. Bangladesh and Pakistan were the only two countries in the region to record a deterioration in their score in 2024, resulting in Pakistan being the second most impacted country by terrorism globally for the second consecutive year.

Pakistan experienced the most significant deterioration in the region and remains the most impacted country in South Asia. In 2024, attacks in Pakistan more than doubled, rising from 517 incidents in the previous year to 1,099. This sharp increase was accompanied by a 45 per cent rise in deaths from terrorism, which rose from 748 to 1,081.

Sri Lanka was the most improved South Asian country in 2024, with the country recording no terrorist attacks or deaths for the fifth consecutive year since 2019. Nepal followed as the second most improved country, recording no attacks or deaths for the second consecutive year.

Sub-Saharan Africa

TABLE 2.10

Sub-Saharan Africa GTI score, rank and change in score, 2014–2024

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2014-2024	Change 2023-2024
Burkina Faso	8.581	1	8.581	0.001
Mali	7.907	4	2.759	-0.098
Niger	7.776	5	4.462	0.489
Nigeria	7.658	6	-0.922	0.071
Somalia	7.614	7	0.492	-0.21
Cameroon	6.944	10	1.564	-0.07
Democratic Republic of the Congo	6.768	12	2.681	0.243
Mozambique	6.251	17	3.817	-0.074
Kenya	5.366	19	-1.271	-0.299
Chad	5.032	23	4.945	0.045
Togo	5.004	24	5.004	0.334
Benin	4.802	26	4.802	-0.096
Burundi	4.043	31	1.741	0.111
Uganda	3.702	33	1.492	-0.692
Angola	1.657	51	0.742	-0.597
Senegal	1.578	54	1.464	-0.588
Tanzania	1.573	55	-1.232	-0.694
Djibouti	1.461	57	-0.03	-0.574
Côte d'Ivoire	1.454	58	-0.766	-0.606
Central African Republic	0.957	71	-1.972	-0.488
Ethiopia	0.787	77	-2.692	-0.485
Eswatini	0.087	96	0.087	-0.093
Botswana	0	100	0	0
Republic of the Congo	0	100	0	0
Eritrea	0	100	-0.85	0
Gabon	0	100	0	0
Ghana	0	100	0	0
Guinea	0	100	0	0
The Gambia	0	100	0	0
Guinea-Bissau	0	100	-0.423	0
Equatorial Guinea	0	100	0	0
Liberia	0	100	0	0
Lesotho	0	100	0	0
Madagascar	0	100	-2.588	0
Mauritania	0	100	-0.856	0
Mauritius	0	100	0	0
Malawi	0	100	0	0
Namibia	0	100	0	0
Rwanda	0	100	-2.666	-0.114
Sierra Leone	0	100	-0.465	0
South Sudan	0	100	-2.446	0
South Africa	0	100	0	0
Zambia	0	100	0	0
Zimbabwe	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			0.579	-0.102

The average GTI score improved slightly in sub-Saharan Africa in 2024. Only seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa experienced a deterioration, potentially indicating a positive shift. However, six of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism in 2024 are in sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, 22 countries in the region have a GTI score of zero, meaning they have not recorded a single terrorist incident in the past five years.

Total attacks in the region dropped to 947, compared to 1,253 in 2023, a decrease of 25 per cent and the least attacks since 2016. Deaths declined by a smaller margin, falling from 5,050 in 2023 to 4,794 in 2024, indicating an increase in the lethality of attacks across the region.

Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mozambique and Nigeria had the largest increases in terrorism deaths in the past year. Deaths in Niger rose by 94 per cent from 479 to 930 in 2024, the third-highest terrorism death toll recorded globally in 2024. Niger recorded the largest deterioration in GTI score in the region within the last year, experiencing the most deaths and attacks ever recorded in the country. The deadliest attack in Niger occurred in July where over 300 gunmen killed 237 soldiers near the Malian border.[21] No group claimed responsibility, but jihadists are known to operate in the area. This was also the deadliest terror attack globally in 2024.

Togo experienced the second largest deterioration in GTI score in the region in 2024, recording 10 attacks that resulted in 52 deaths. The country has seen a surge in activity from JNIM who carried out 4 attacks that caused 41 deaths. Togo's deadliest attack occurred in October, when armed JNIM militants attacked a group of soldiers near the country's border with Burkina Faso, killing nine soldiers and ten civilians.[22]

The DRC also recorded a significant deterioration in its score in 2024, driven by increased attacks from IS. Of the 30 attacks and 304 deaths from terrorism recorded in the country, 28 attacks and 299 deaths were attributed to IS.

Despite improvements in 2024, Mali continues to be the second most impacted country by terrorism in the region. Attacks and deaths within the country both fell by 21 per cent, with 201 incidents and 604 deaths recorded in 2024. Mali faces many of the same issues as Burkina Faso and Niger, with JNIM being the most prominent terrorist group in the country. However, as evidenced by Niger, terrorism deaths and attacks can fall substantially in a singly year, only to rise again shortly afterwards.

Tanzania was the most improved country in the region for the second consecutive year, with the country recording zero incidents for the third year in a row. The Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and Côte d'Ivoire also recorded no attacks for the second year in a row.

51%

The Sahel accounted for 51 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2024.

25,000

Conflict deaths in the Sahel reached their highest level since the inception of the GTI, surpassing 25,000 for the first time in 2024.

Weak governance, ethnic tensions and ecological degradation have fuelled terrorism, compounded by transnational jihadist growth and geopolitical competition.

Gold is increasingly a critical source of revenue for state and non-state armed actors across the Sahel, impacting local and international relations.

Niger is the 7th largest producer of Uranium and can be an important source for countries such as China who wish to expand their nuclear power plants. However, terror attacks have reached their highest levels on record.

The Alliance of Sahelian States, comprising Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, are changing alliances by removing Western involvement in security and economic sectors and withdrawing from ECOWAS. Instead, the alliance has strengthened ties with Russia and China, which provide support with fewer conditions attached.

Russia is conducting influence and propaganda operations across the continent, particularly in the Sahel, often framing them around Western failures in counterterrorism. Outside these high profile and visible efforts, China has been steadily building economic and political influence.

The wars in Ukraine and Syria have directly influenced the conflict in the Sahel. Ukraine has supported rebels opposing Russian-backed regimes, while the collapse of the Assad regime affects Russia's control of a key logistical hub, potentially increasing the importance of its influence in Mali and other regions.

Ukraine's invasion of Kursk prompted Russia to withdraw military advisors from Burkina Faso, highlighting the delicate balancing act Moscow faces in its African operations.

Terrorism in Sahel

Terrorist groups such as JNIM continue to expand by carrying out attacks in coastal West Africa, with Togo in 2024 recording its worst year for terrorism since the inception of the GTI.

x2

In August 2023, the UN panel of experts on Mali declared that IS-Sahel had doubled the amount of territory they controlled in the country, while JNIM had continued to expand operations.

The collapse of the 2015 Algiers peace agreement has worsened an already dire security situation in Mali. JNIM appear to be taking advantage, staging symbolically damaging attacks on government targets in Bamako in September 2024.

3 The Sahel

Summary

The Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa continues to suffer from the effects of increased political instability, amplified geopolitical tensions, and the use of hard counterterrorism measures to deter and destroy the threat from Salafi-jihadi groups. While sub-Saharan Africa recorded a five per cent decline in terrorism deaths in 2024 to 909 from the prior year, the Sahel has seen the steepest increases in terrorism deaths globally, with nearly 20,000 deaths since 2019 and 3,885 deaths in 2024.

The Sahel region faces many converging and complex social, economic, political and security challenges. These are likely to continue to undermine the development of the conditions necessary for stability, trapping the Sahel in a cycle of violence and vulnerability.

The region has seen large changes in its conflict dynamics with an array of armed state and non-state actors waging war, controlling large swathes of territory and using resource extraction and illicit economies to advance their strategic goals. The groups include national armies, state aligned paramilitaries and self-defence groups, separatist rebels, Salafist jihadist groups. Added to this, there have been multiple foreign interventions - from France, the United Nations, the US and more recently Russia, through state aligned private military companies, initially the Wagner Group and from 2024 onwards known as Africa Corps.

The conflict is driven by deep divisions within societies and conflicts between ethnic groups, between the central government and peripheral regions, and global geopolitics. While ideologies play a part, economics and power are more important drivers of conflict, and in both cases the continuation of conflict can be lucrative for the interested parties, and as such propels the conflict along with little hope of a sustainable resolution in the near future.

The inability of several Sahelian governments to provide effective security has resulted in terrorist groups controlling significant amounts of rural territory and making the Sahel increasingly violent. Salafi-jihadis and bandits have looked to exploit socio-economic, political vacuums as well as grievances.

Terrorist groups IS and JNIM continuing to gain momentum with their violent campaigns in the region, with the Sahel accounting 51 per cent of terrorism deaths globally in 2024, compared with just one per cent in 2007. As Figure 3.1 shows, the Sahel is increasingly representing more terrorism deaths than any other region globally.

BOX 3.1

The Sahel

Definitions of the Sahel vary. In this analysis, the Sahel region denotes the semi-arid region of western and central northern Africa, which is comprised of parts of ten countries:

- Burkina Faso
- Cameroon
- Chad
- The Gambia
- Guinea
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Senegal

FIGURE 3.1

Deaths from terrorism in Sahel vs sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world, 2007–2024

Deaths in the Sahel have exceeded both sub-Saharan Africa and rest of the world totals since 2022.
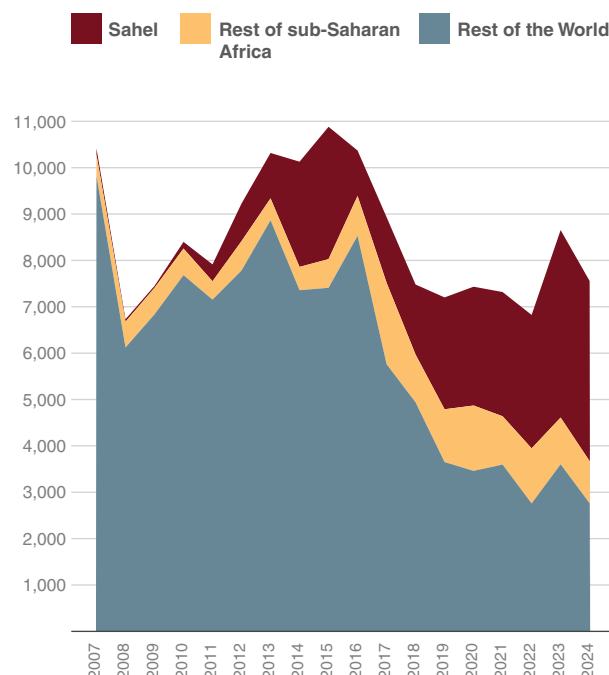
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Terrorism in the Sahel

Terrorism usually occurs as a tactic within a conflict setting, used by groups with asymmetric power capabilities looking to bring about political change. The current crisis in the Sahel has been driven by several factors, including ecological degradation, poor governance, ethnic polarisation, state security abuses, pastoral conflict, the growth of transnational Salafi-Islam ideology, disputes over natural resource extraction such as gold, and the involvement of external actors such as France and Russia.

The February Revolution in Libya, which led to the overthrow of Muammar al-Qaddafi in October 2011, precipitated a chain of events throughout North Africa and the Sahel. Qaddafi's violent removal, after 42 years, empowered the Malian Tuareg separatist movement. Ethnic Tuareg soldiers who had been part of the Libyan army returned to Mali. Salafi-jihadis joined them to play an important role in the 2012 Tuareg uprising in Mali, which eventually led this group to capture Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. The Salafi-jihadis were ultimately defeated, and the Tuareg-Salafi Islamic Emirate of Azawad split and lasted about one year.[1]

Failure by the Malian government and the international community to properly resolve the conflict in Northern Mali, by addressing its root causes, only increased tensions. It gave rise to political, social and economic problems that spread from the north, causing intercommunal violence in the Mopti and Ségou regions between Dogon and Fulani. This also exacerbated instability in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger increasing intercommunal violence and jihadi activity. Transnational Salafi Jihadist groups, including Al Qaeda and Islamic State, established local affiliates in the region by leveraging existing ethnic tensions and resource conflicts. These groups have used their ideology as a tool to mobilise support, overlaying it onto pre-existing divisions and disputes.

Figure 3.2 shows a significant increase in deaths from conflict across the Sahel from 2011 onwards. This is likely driven by the onset and increasing severity of conflicts in Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Burkina Faso. In 2024, conflict deaths in the Sahel exceeded 25,000 for the first time.

Groups such as Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and Katiba Macina initially focused on local issues, framing their actions through an ethnic-nationalist-religious lens. However, these groups are no longer active, having been absorbed into transnational jihadist organisations like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) was formed when Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and Macina Liberation Front merged with the al Qaeda Saharan branch, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2017. No deaths have been attributed to al-Qaeda since 2017.

With its challenging terrain, distinct local practices and porous borders, local leaders in the Sahel have tremendous autonomy. They operate as political entrepreneurs, making calculated

Sahel conflict deaths

The Sahel has seen steadily increasing deaths from conflict since 2011, with a severe spike from 2017 onwards.
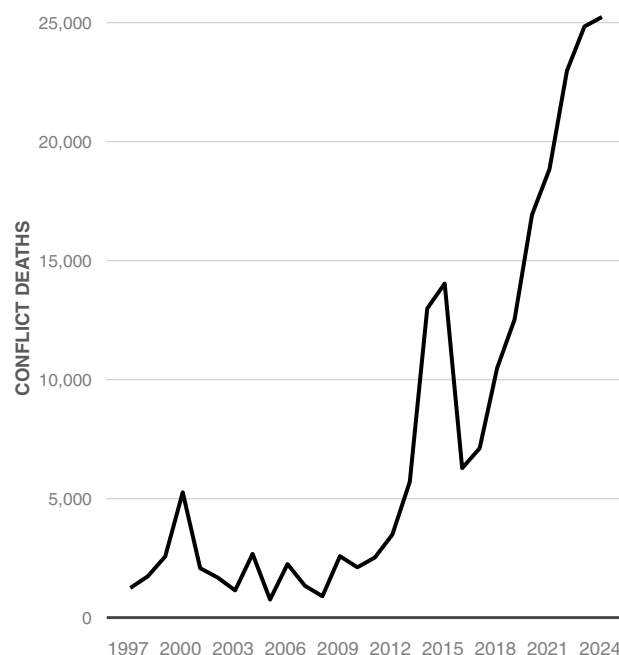
Source: ACLED; IEP Calculations

decisions as to where to operate, how and against whom. They exhibit greater willingness to negotiate or shift allegiances.[2] The implications for the security environment are substantial, as the head of a terrorist group may not be theologically wedded to the transnational jihadi networks. This varied operating context raises the prospect of a larger shift in jihadi strategic thinking. Historically, jihadis' commitment to ideological purity weakened their ability to build and hold a state, but this pragmatic shift raises the prospect of sustained, low-intensity conflict that may facilitate a future takeover.[3]

Weak governance is at the core of the persistent inability by successive Malian governments to resolve differences amicably; and gave rise to the emergence of the Dogon, Fulani and Bambara militia. Communities were compelled to arm themselves to ensure their safety, as the government could not protect them. Similar developments occurred in Burkina Faso, between the Mossi and the Fulani, leading to several clashes. Increased intercommunal violence has led to further recruitment by jihadi groups, particularly IS and JNIM.

Terrorism continues to affect the periphery regions of bordering states like Togo and Benin, countries that had been previously unaffected; although the number of terrorism deaths were relatively small when compared to neighbouring countries in the Sahel.

Togo recorded ten attacks and 52 deaths in 2024, the most attacks and deaths since the inception of the Index. Attacks were largely concentrated along the country's border with Burkina Faso, with JNIM claiming four of the attacks and likely responsible for the remaining six.

FIGURE 3.3

Intensity of deaths from terrorism in the Sahel, 2020–2024

Deaths across the Sahel have increasingly intensified in the tri-border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Increasing

Same

Decreasing

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

This marks the further transnationalisation of terrorism across the Sahel. Groups like IS and JNIM are also seeking safe havens and new theatres of operations. Many of these new areas like northern periphery areas of Togo and Benin are demographically, economically and ecologically similar to regions in Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and elsewhere, f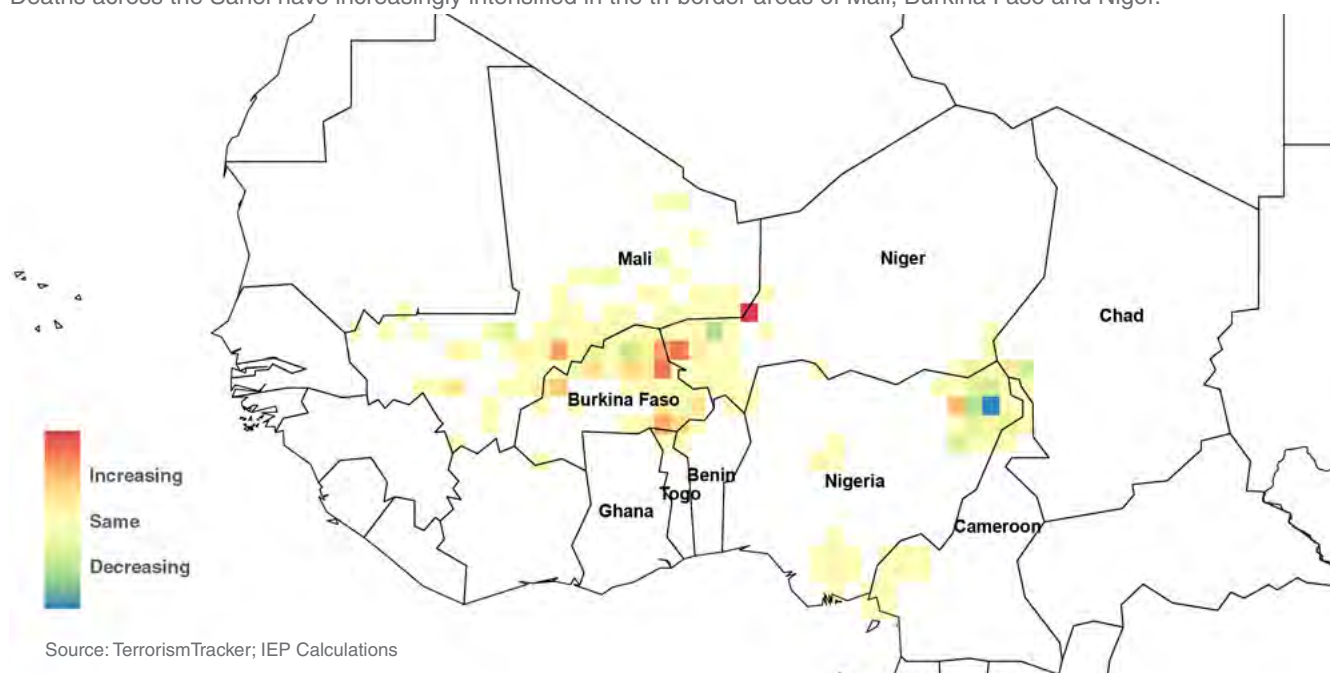rom which jihadi groups initially emerged over a decade ago. This trend is not uniform however, other Sahelian states such as Mauritania, Senegal and the Gambia continue to experience little-to-no terrorism.

Terrorist groups in the Central Sahel rely on a range of illicit economic activities to sustain their operations. Rather than directly engaging in organised crime, jihadist groups such as JNIM typically make money by imposing taxes or providing security and protection in exchange for payment.[4] This model not only generates revenue but also helps these groups integrate into local communities, strengthening their influence. Cattle rustling has become a lucrative illicit economy for terror groups in the Sahel. The theft and trade of livestock have long been a source of conflict in the region, particularly between semi-nomadic pastoralists and farming communities. Armed groups profit by controlling cattle trade routes and imposing taxes on herders, using these interactions to deepen their governance structures. By offering protection in exchange for loyalty, terrorist organisations exploit local ethnic tensions, further entrenching their power in contested areas.[5]

Drug trafficking represents one of the most financially lucrative illicit activities linked to terrorism in the Sahel. Although terrorist groups do not usually control drug production or trade directly, they provide protection to traffickers and levy taxes on smuggling operations passing through their territories. Since the 1990s, the Sahel has served as a major transit route for

South American cocaine en route to Europe. The response to drug trafficking has varied across the region, contributing to differing levels of conflict. In Niger, Tuareg rebels returning from Libya in 2011 were integrated into state-controlled smuggling networks, maintaining relative stability. In contrast, Mali's government sought to dominate smuggling routes, leading to conflicts with Tuareg groups and contributing to prolonged instability.[6]

Groups in the Sahel have generated significant revenue from kidnapping and ransom in the past two decades. Al Qaeda in the Greater Sahara, the forerunner to JNIM, financed much of its operations through kidnapping and ransoming foreign nationals in Mali and Algeria. The activity is now at the core of the economic operations of JNIM, with civilians who have some role in business or politics across Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger the most common targets. Kidnapping is also used strategically, with individuals taken for political leverage and intelligence gathering.[7] JNIM has been known to escalate its kidnapping activities when they seek to expand into new territory, then reduces them once control is established. For example, in 2023 the number of kidnappings increased significantly in the regions of Burkina Faso where JNIM was clashing with the pro-government militia group, Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP). In 2024 there was a 94 per cent decline in hostages in Burkina Faso falling from 144 to 8.

Geopolitics in the Sahel

The GTI 2025 examines the complex interaction between local, regional, and global geopolitical dynamics and their impact on both terrorism and efforts to counter it. The security crisis in the Sahel, which began in Mali in 2012 and has since engulfed neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, has been shaped by domestic political agendas and their interplay with regional and global geopolitics. Analyses of the Sahel region often present overly simplistic narratives, focusing on the dominance of a single great power, while overlooking the agency of domestic actors and political dynamics, which are often more critical to understanding the broader situation. The following section explores how the interaction between domestic and international politics has shaped the region's security crisis, both historically and in its current state.

The domestic and international politics of the region in most of the post-colonial period has been dominated by France, and a close relationship between the rulers of the Sahelian states and Paris. This has generally manifested in close security cooperation and the domination of French interests in areas like resource management.

Mali

In the security realm, Mali is critical for understanding this dynamic. Since 2012, several French- backed security operations have taken place in the Sahel. These include an EU Training Mission, French-led counterterrorism operations (such as Operation Serval, Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Initiative), and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Additionally, the G5 Sahel Initiative and other unilateral security operations, including the involvement of private entities, have been introduced to address insecurity in the region. However, none of these efforts have achieved significant success, and negative sentiment toward France has grown. The perceived failure of these missions to improve the overall security situation fostered the belief that France was more focused on protecting its own interests than serving the interests of Mali.

Withdrawal of Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA

The 2020 and 2021 coups in Mali significantly shifted the dynamics of the security relationship. Under Colonel Assimi Goita, Mali has pursued what it describes as a 'sovereigntist' approach to governance, seeking to rid Mali of foreign interests it believes exploit them. This approach has gained considerable support from segments of the population, particularly younger individuals frustrated by the inability of international actors to address the security crisis, and their perceived exploitation of the region's resources.

This is partly due to the model of French interventions, which prioritised direct involvement with professional soldiers over providing training, tackling corruption in the military or enhancing the capabilities of local forces. The significant increase in negative sentiment can be seen in Figure 3.4, which shows a sharp increase in the proportion of media articles in Mali expressing negative views about France following the first coup in 2020. IEP has produced the following analysis using machine learning, with source data supplied by ICEWS to show the changing sentiment between Mali and France. ICEWS was discontinued in 2023, a similar dataset POLECAT shows similar trends continuing in 2024.

FIGURE 3.4

Tensions between Mali and France, 1995–2023

Negative sentiment between Mali and France has risen precipitously since 2018, negative sentiment in Mali about France spiking from the first coup in 2020.
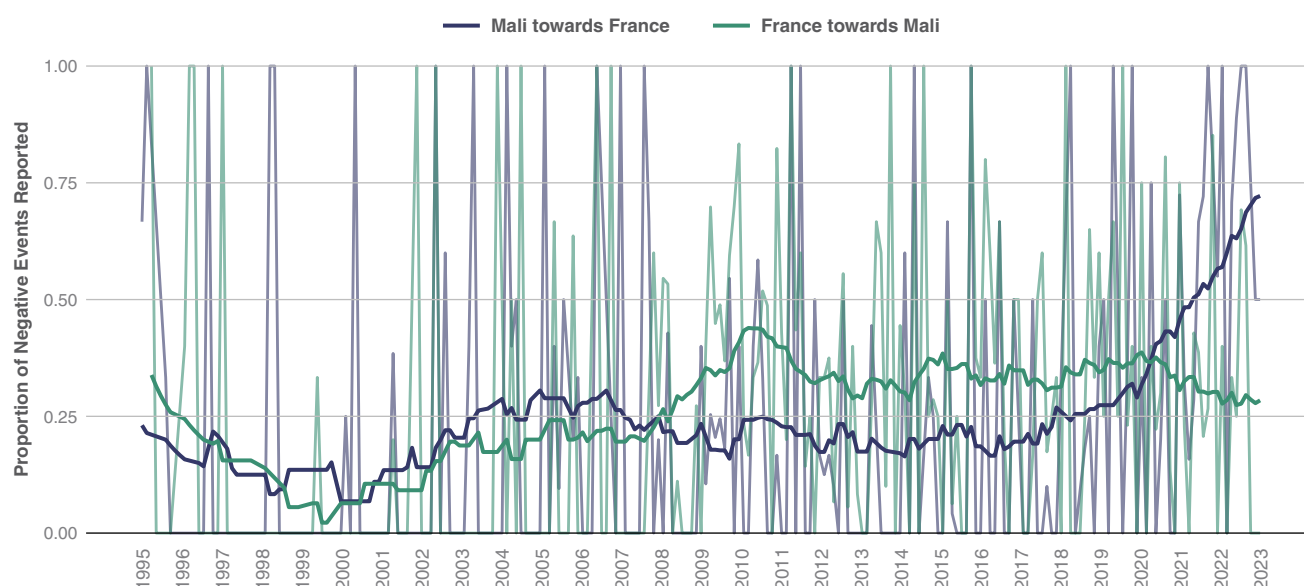
Source: ICEWS; IEP Calculations

The 2022 withdrawal of French forces under Operation Barkhane significantly impacted regional security. The responsibility for providing security transitioned from French to Malian Armed Forces, supported by pro-government militias and the Russian Wagner Group, now Africa Corps. Although Barkhane's overall effectiveness in securing Mali was limited, it did manage to maintain control around key urban centres, in collaboration with UN MINUSMA peacekeepers. Many of these areas are now under siege from JNIM and IS-Sahel.

In June 2023, the UN Security Council terminated MINUSMA's mission in Mali after the Malian government withdrew its support. Established in 2013, MINUSMA struggled with security provision outside its base areas, burdened by a massive operational area and infrastructural challenges. The phased withdrawal of peacekeepers, completed in December 2023, directly escalated violent conflict in areas previously under UN control.

Figure 3.5 shows the location of MINUSMA bases, as well as all conflict events in Mali since the withdrawal of UN forces. Fierce battles for control of former UN bases emerged, involving Malian forces, Africa Corps mercenaries, Tuareg rebels, and JNIM. The violence in Kidal in November 2023 marked some of the most severe active conflict between government and rebel forces since the 2015 peace deal. The agreement fully collapsed in January 2024, leading to escalating conflict in northern Mali.

Security threats persist, from jihadists who have become entrenched across the country and a resurgent rebel conflict in the north.[8] In August 2023, the UN panel of experts on Mali declared that IS-Sahel had doubled the amount of territory they controlled in the country, while JNIM had continued to expand operations.[9] The collapse of the Algiers peace agreement and the surge in violence, particularly in urban areas of central and

northern Mali, may create further opportunities for jihadist groups to expand their influence and consolidate control in the region. JNIM's attack on the military academy and air force base in Bamako in September 2024 showed a high level of frailty within the military regime's internal security.[10] Although large-scale attacks in urban areas have yet to materialise, a security vacuum in densely populated urban centres could further exacerbate the country's security crisis.

Russian involvement in the Sahel has significantly increased, with the region becoming an important theatre for their competition with the West. The Russian government, through their private military contractor Africa Corps, formerly the Wagner Group, deployed to Mali in December 2021 and operate alongside Malian forces in counterterrorism operations. Russian PMC troops are also potentially involved in operations against jihadist groups in Burkina Faso. The record of Russia and Africa Corp as security partners in the region is on a par with prior missions.

The Wagner Group, now Africa Corps, has been less effective in providing security and has been involved in mining and the extractive industry. Africa Corps' approach appears to be more appealing to the military regime than UN or French models, which focused on population-centred protection of civilians. Reportedly, the brutal counterinsurgency approach employed by Wagner, now Africa Corps, has brought significant approval from Malian troops and parts of the population, who were disillusioned by the failures of Western interventions.[11]

Following the failed uprising and the death of former Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, Russian PMCs have transitioned to the Africa Corps brand. While their operations in the region continue, they have been significantly impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Opinion polling of Malian

FIGURE 3.5

MINUSMA bases and conflict events, 2024

Conflict has intensified in areas around UN bases.

Before Withdrawal, Jan 2022-Jul 2023
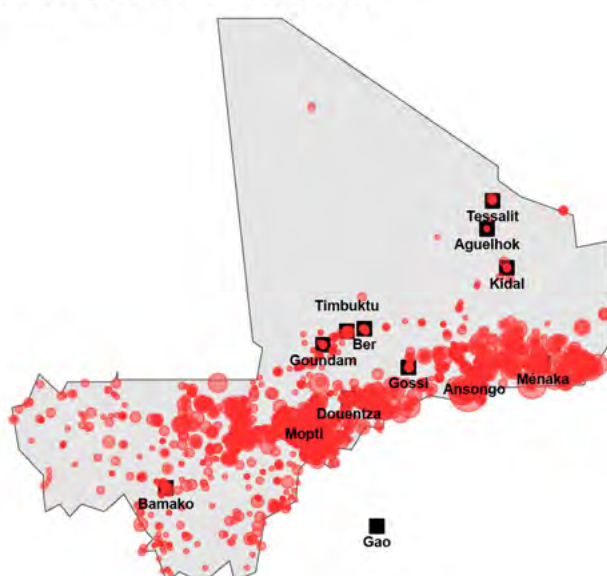
After Withdrawal, Jul 2023-Dec 2024
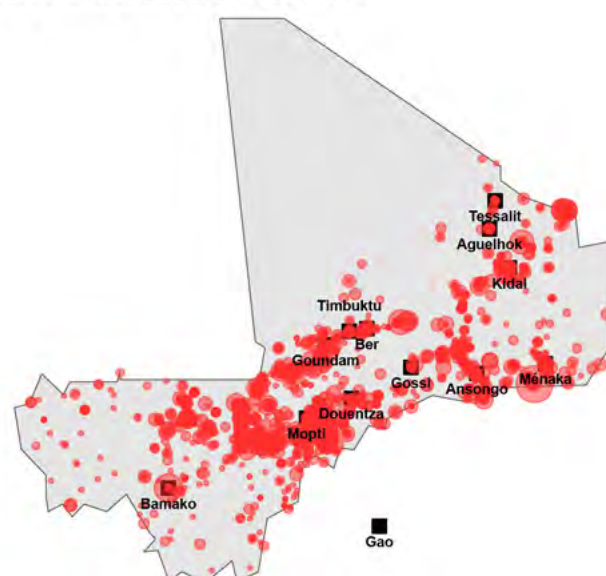
citizens in January 2024 was overall highly positive of both the junta's approach to security and relations with Russia, the latter with 82 per cent approval.[12] It is unclear whether this positive sentiment has continued. In July 2024 at least 84 Russian troops were killed after being ambushed by Tuareg rebels on the Mali-Algeria border. Offensives in Northern Mali have largely failed to improve the security situation and reports suggest many Russian troops are becoming less willing to participate in high-risk missions, and are increasingly withdrawing to the areas around their bases.[13] There are only around 1,000 Africa corps troops believed to be actively deployed in Mali, down from 2,000 and substantially less than the combined 13,000 UN peacekeepers and French troops that were deployed prior to the withdrawal of both missions.

Gold Mining: A Mechanism of Local and Global Influence

Terrorism and some of the broader intercommunal violence in the region can also be linked to natural resource exploitation, specifically gold. A rich vein of gold spanning much of the Sahel was discovered in 2012 in Sudan. Two main forms of gold mining exist in the region: large scale industrial mining, generally the purview of multi-national companies; and state entities and artisanal gold mining, local level operations that are largely not regulated and are a source of revenues for local governments, militias, terror groups, criminal organisations and other non-state armed actors like private military companies.

Artisanal gold mining has rapidly expanded across the region in the decade since, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Gold is central to the conflict dynamics in some of these areas, which often lack significant state presence or control. The revenue raised is potentially critical to funding group activities; however, control of the territories where gold is mined and transported is perhaps more crucial, as this territorial control increases the scale of their operations and provides the financial resources, security and power projection to influence the local population.[14] From 2018 onwards, attacks in Burkina Faso have increasingly targeted artisanal gold mines and areas around the mines.

Most of the time, terrorist groups in the Central Sahel don't directly extract, trade, or smuggle gold themselves. Instead, they control the areas where artisanal gold mining happens and collect taxes from miners. These illegal economies have often existed for a long time in places with weak governance. Both state and non-state groups have benefited from, and even coordinated, these activities.

Illegal activities need to be kept secret, so they depend on people within the state to protect them. In countries with weak governments, smuggling networks lead to competition among those who can offer protection and make money from these activities. This competition can cause violence as different groups fight to control the territory, and the profits. This struggle for control can then lead to instability in the state.[15]

Figure 1.5 shows the rates of terrorism deaths in the Sahel and locations of established gold mines. Concentrations of terrorism deaths in northern Burkina Faso correspond with the locations

FIGURE 3.6

Terrorism deaths and gold mines
Terrorism deaths in the Sahel are more likely in areas with established gold mines.
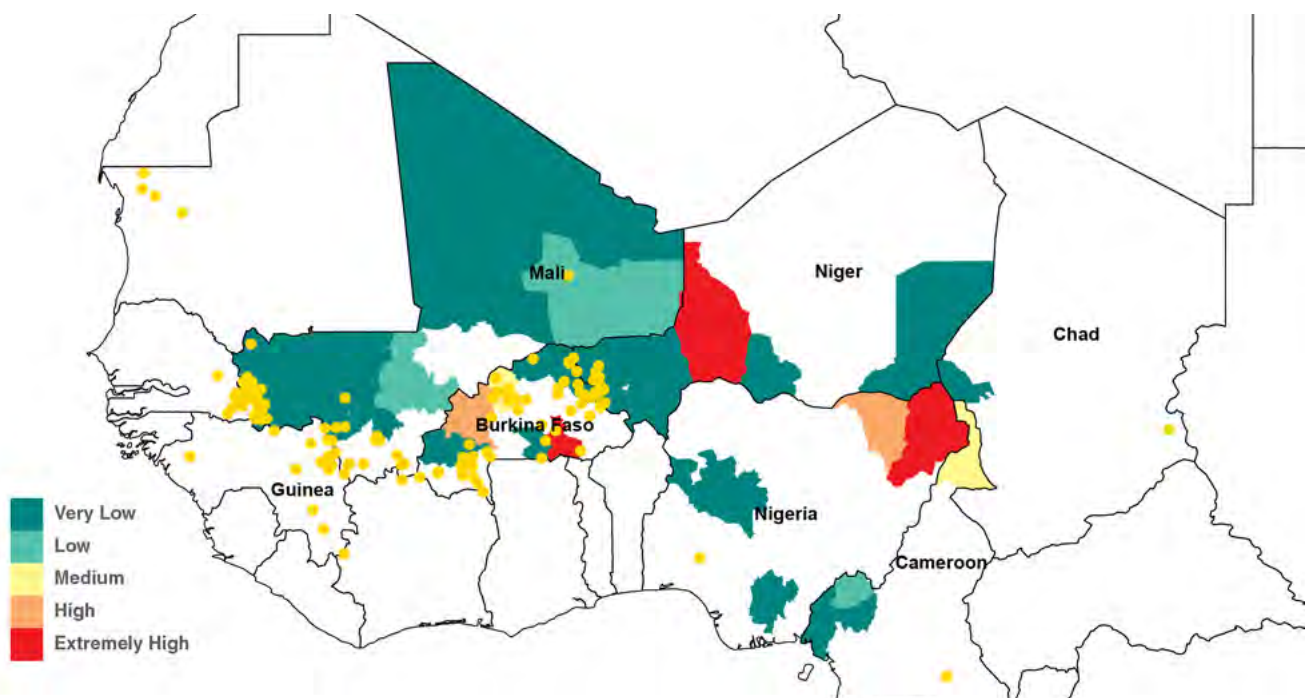
of gold mines as JNIM, paramilitaries like the VDP and the army of Burkina Faso fight for control over these areas. Many artisanal gold mines are informal and not included in available data.

Gold is ideal for illicit smuggling, as it is difficult to trace and highly valuable. From mines in Mali and Burkina Faso, gold can be smuggled into Togo before being exported. With its value potentially in the billions, even a small amount of gold could be highly lucrative to jihadi groups.[16] The junta in Burkina Faso announced the closure of artisanal gold sites in July 2022, partly to restrict jihadist groups' access to funds. It is unclear what effect this may have on access to gold mining. Similar attempts in the past have been counterproductive, as jihadist groups have used closures to gain popular support from local communities that depend on the mines.[17] It is also highly likely that most of these mines continue to operate in areas where the state no longer has control over territory. The government in Burkina Faso has control over between 50 and 60 per cent of territory in the country, meaning that much of the gold rich region in the north of the country is outside the regime's control.

FIGURE 3.7

Incidents involving gold mines in the Sahel, 2012–2024

As a result of the strategic importance of this territory, there has been a large increase in attacks against gold mining operations in the past three years.
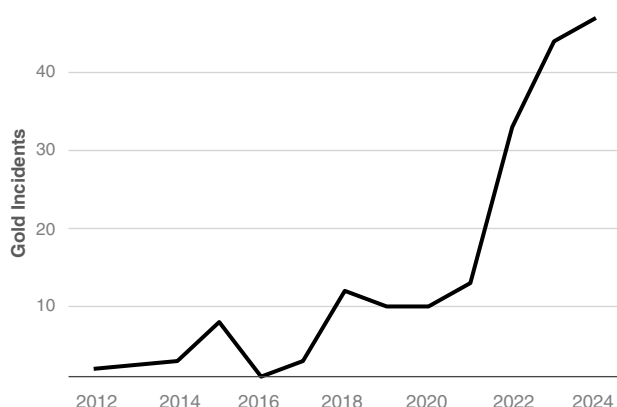
Source: ACLED; IEP Calculations

Russian operations in Mali reflect a broader pattern seen in Sudan and the Central African Republic, where the acquisition of resources such as gold and diamonds, along with the acquisition of mining concessions, forms part of Russia's approach in Africa. This strategy involves providing security, military assistance and other aid for access to valuable resources, which, in part, helps Russia circumvent sanctions imposed following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The full extent of such operations is difficult to uncover. Wagner troops were reported to have taken over artisanal mine sites in the past and Russia has agreed deals to build a gold refinery in Bamako.[18] Mali's largest international mining operations, run by Barrick Gold, ceased operations in January 2025 when the Malian government seized $245 million worth of gold, and have blocked Barrick's access to its mines, with the government seeking to enforce recently passed laws mandating a larger share of revenues from international miners.[19] To date, however, the full picture of Russian involvement in the mining sector in Mali and beyond is piecemeal. While Russia may strike deals for future concessions, at least publicly such deals are yet to be announced. Given the sanctions imposed over Ukraine, it is highly likely that the full extent of its operations will not be known.

A less discussed but perhaps more significant part of this story is the growing influence of China, which commands far less attention but is, according to reports, more significant in the mining sector. Chinese influence in the gold mining sector has reportedly surged since the 2021 coup and in December a Chinese owned lithium production plant opened, with the Chinese ambassador in attendance alongside the junta leader Colonel Assimi Goita, who described Chinese ties with Mali as "a strategic and sincere partnership."[20] The development of lithium mining in Mali is potentially significant, as lithium is a component of electric batteries and a critical mineral for the green energy transition. The more subtle and quieter influence-building approach in Mali appears to mirror Chinese strategy elsewhere on the African continent, where it has built significant influence in 27 countries.[21]

Russian operations in Mali have influenced and are being influenced by its involvement in conflicts elsewhere. While the invasion of Ukraine has incentivised Russian involvement in the Sahel to procure sanction-proof revenue, it has also drawn Ukraine into the conflict. Cooperation on intelligence sharing between Tuareg rebels and Ukraine was confirmed by its intelligence chief following the deadly attack on Africa Corp troops in July. It has also been reported, though denied by Kyiv, that Ukraine has supplied drones to the rebels, in what is potentially developing as a proxy war emanating from the war in Ukraine. [22]

Events elsewhere are also likely to affect Russian operations. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria has placed Russian military assets on the Syrian coast under threat. Russian bases in Syria had been the staging point for operations into Africa. While such operations could continue from Russian bases in Syria, the lack of certainty on the new Syrian government's position remains an open question and complicates Russian operations in Africa. The partial withdrawal and uncertainty over the future of operations can be seen in Russia sending over 100 military vehicles to Mali, in January 2025, believed to have been moved from bases in Syria.[23] The potential loss, or lessening of, influence in Syria may also push Russia to double down on its influence operations in Africa. Russia continues to build a base in Bamako around the military airbase that was attacked by JNIM in September 2024.[24]

Africa Corps have maintained their presence in Libya, which could become strategically more critical to its operations if they lose their only current Mediterranean base in Tartous, Syria. In addition to military assistance, Russia has also agreed a deal with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to provide telecoms and satellites for the three Sahelian states.

FIGURE 3.8

Influence in Mali, 2011–2022

There is very high competition for influence in Mali between four powerful states, with Russia having made significant gains in the past decade.
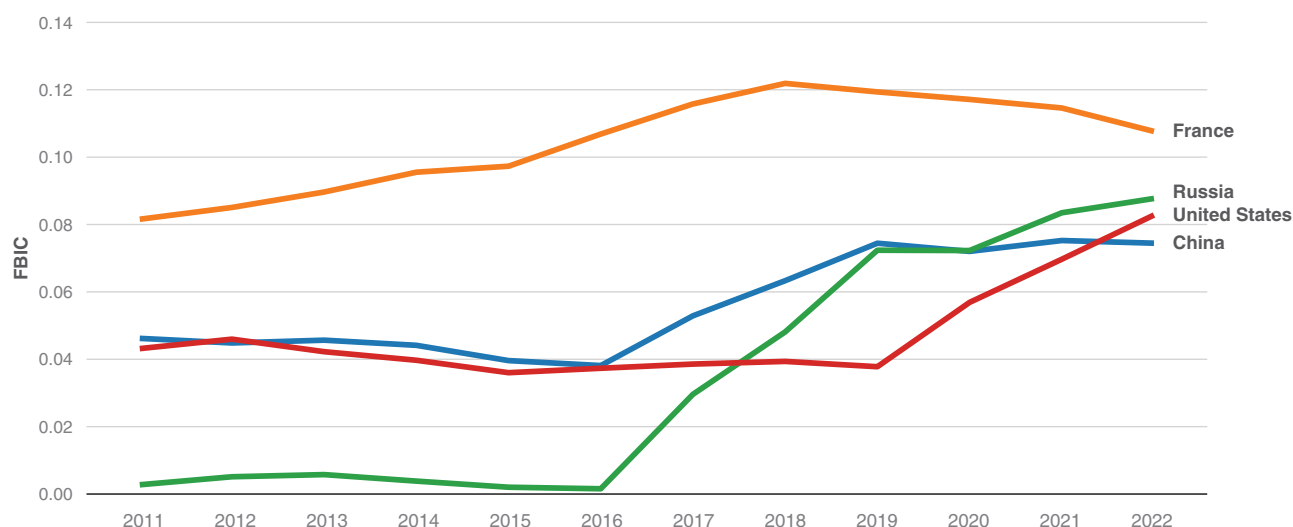
Source: FBIC; IEP Calculations

The overall influence in Mali remains highly competitive. While Russia's growing influence, as indicated by FBIC data, has been the most prominent, it is neither the sole nor the most dominant actor. China, France, and the United States also maintain significant influence in the country. What should not be lost in these events is the ready participation and engagement of Malian authorities. Russian partnership has become symbolic of the rejection of unpopular Western assistance missions, garnering significant popularity with sections of the population.

Between 2019 and 2022, US influence in Mali also increased paradoxically while European influence declined. This was due to sustained economic aid, diplomatic engagement, and security cooperation. Despite Mali's political instability, the US remained a key donor, with bilateral foreign assistance rising from $132 million in 2019 to over $156 million in 2020, reinforcing economic ties and dependence. Politically, the US maintained diplomatic relations and supported efforts to restore stability following the 2020 coup, ensuring continued engagement.[25] Although security assistance was limited after the coup, the US backed international efforts like MINUSMA prior to the mission's withdrawal.

BOX 3.2

Foreign Bilateral Influence Capability Measure (FBIC)

The Foreign Bilateral Influence Capability (FBIC) dataset, from the Pardee Institute for International Futures at University of Denver is designed to measure the extent of one country's influence over another in bilateral relationships. It focuses on capturing economic, political, and military dimensions of influence.[26]

The scores in the FBIC dataset are constructed using a combination of quantitative indicators, such as trade flows, foreign direct investment, military agreements, and diplomatic engagements. These indicators are weighted and aggregated to create an influence score for each country pair, reflecting the ability of one nation to shape the decisions or behaviour of the other. In addition to measuring absolute levels of an indicator FBIC also creates a measure of dependency by quantifying the extent to which one country relies on another for economic, political, or security needs. It incorporates indicators such as trade volume, foreign direct investment inflows, and development aid to reflect economic dependency. Political dependency is assessed through factors like voting alignment in international organisations and the frequency of diplomatic interactions. Security dependency is captured through metrics such as military assistance, defence agreements, and arms transfers. Data is only available to 2022 so changes to 2024 are not captured though in most cases influence capability is relatively slow moving, so the trends indicated in this report are expected to have continued.

The use of private military actors, in particular, is believed by the government to be crucial to maintaining sovereignty, providing it with critical security assistance while avoiding conditions or handing over decision making or sovereignty to external actors. Though they are seeking to reclaim their sovereignty, there is a risk they will simply swap one external security dependency for another. Without improving relations with regional neighbours and other parts of the international community, it could become isolated and instead dependent on outside patronage. The Malian model is, however, clearly being followed by its two main neighbours, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Burkina Faso

In 2024, Burkina Faso remained the country most affected by terrorism for the second year in a row. This year also marked the third consecutive year with over 1,000 fatalities from terrorism in the country. The northern and central eastern regions, near the borders with Mali and Niger, experienced over two-thirds of all attacks. Centre-Nord recorded the highest death toll, including the deadliest attack of 2024, where JNIM militants killed between 200 and 600 individuals in an assault on soldiers and civilians digging defensive trenches.

JNIM remained the dominant terror group, responsible for nearly half of Burkina Faso's attacks, with their activities and fatalities rising by over 50 per cent. In contrast, IS operations declined significantly, with only one attack in 2024 compared to eight in 2023, and terrorism deaths attributed to IS dropped by 91 per cent, from 175 to 15. Despite these improvements, over half of the attacks and a third of the deaths were attributed to unknown jihadist groups, likely to be JNIM or IS Sahel.

Burkina Faso had substantially less direct intervention and involvement by foreign powers prior to 2023, other than the French troops who were stationed in the country since 2009. Following the second coup in September 2022, Captain Ibrahim Traore began strengthening ties with Russia around military assistance and, in January 2023, called for a withdrawal of French troops and its ambassador. In January 2024, Russian private military troops began arriving in Ouagadougou, with the peak troop presence around 300. There has been little improvement in the security situation in the country, however. In July 2024, at least 100 of the 'Bear Brigade' military advisors left Burkina Faso to support Russian military responses to Ukraine's capture of the Kursk region.[27] Given the severity of the security crisis in Burkina Faso, the impact of Russian troops remains uncertain. Reports suggest that their primary role has been to provide direct protection for junta leaders rather than actively engaging in combat missions.

Beyond direct military support Russian influence models have been successful in advancing their geostrategic goals by shaping narratives supportive of the military and countering western and UN influence. Russian social media and traditional media campaigns have been active for over a decade across Africa, with attention focused in recent years on the Sahel. These efforts are extensive, with two Russian-linked influencers collectively reaching over 28 million social media followers. Their content is amplified through a vast network of hundreds of Russian-associated accounts and pages, achieving significant reach.[28]

Burkina Faso has seen at least eight Russian-backed influence campaigns, matching the activity recorded in Mali and the Central African Republic, both of which host significant Russian presence. Africa Corp has been the Kremlin's central tool for orchestrating influence efforts in Africa, linked to nearly half of all Russian operations on the continent. Since the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, in 2023, Russia's disinformation activities are transitioning to new entities, including the Russian Africa Corps and the Africa Initiative News Agency.[29]

Russia has built its own media infrastructure with online, TV and radio channels capable of controlling and articulating its core narratives. Russian embassies have reportedly facilitated the creation of African grassroots organisations to produce and disseminate disinformation.[30] Figure 3.9 shows the success of Russia's strategy to build influence in the region, beginning in 2017 and steadily increasing in scope. The start and increase of Russian influence correlates significantly with the increase of negative sentiment Burkina Faso towards France, seen in Figure 3.10.

US influence also increased during this period due to sustained economic aid, diplomatic engagement, and security cooperation. Despite political instability, including the January 2022 coup d'état, the US remained a key partner, providing significant development assistance and supporting efforts to counter extremism in the Sahel region. Politically, the US maintained diplomatic relations and supported efforts to restore stability following the coup, ensuring continued engagement.[31] Military and other forms of assistance were frozen following the coup so it is likely that US influence may be reduced in future.

FIGURE 3.9

Influence in Burkina Faso, 2011–2022

Russian influence has risen from almost none in 2017 to the second most influential state in 2022.
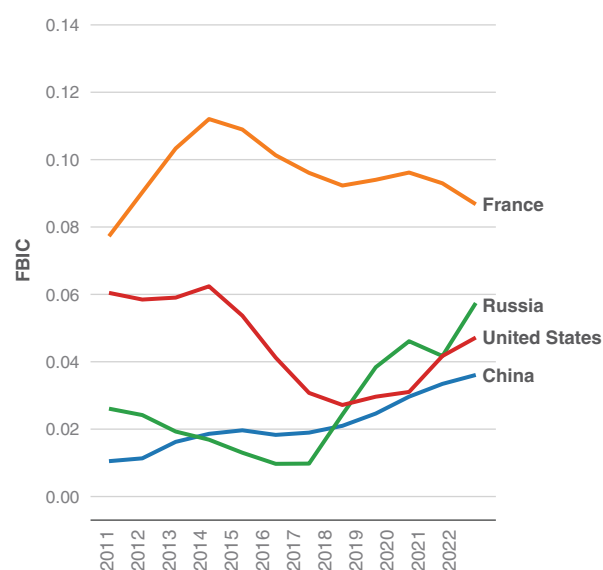
Source: FBIC; IEP Calculations

The picture of influence, like that in Mali, remains complex. China has steadily increased its influence, having achieved its goal of Burkina Faso ending its cooperation with Taiwan in 2019. China has gained gold, copper and nickel exploration licenses and has also built strong relations with the new government. Whilst Chinese interests dominate along economic lines, there is a growing commitment to protect its interests against security threats. China has pledged 1 billion Yuan (US $136 million) in military assistance to train 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 law enforcement members across Africa. This pledge, part of China's Global Security Initiative includes support for an African standby force to carry out peacekeeping and counterinsurgency.[32] Such a development is not unexpected where China seeks to protect its influence, especially in regions where non-state armed actors imperil its investments. The actual direct implications for security dynamics, especially in a country like Burkina Faso are unclear.

Niger

Terrorism in Niger escalated to record levels in 2024, following the sharp rise in 2023. Attacks increased to 101, up from 62 in 2023, while deaths nearly doubled to 930. Civilian deaths tripled, and military deaths rose to 499, making up over half of all fatalities and marking the highest military death toll caused by terrorism globally in 2024. The deadliest attack occurred in the Tahoua region, near the Malian border, where over 300 gunmen killed 237 soldiers. No group has claimed responsibility, though jihadists are active in the area. This was also the deadliest global attack of 2024.

Tillaberi remained the most affected region, located in the tri-border area with Burkina Faso and Mali. It accounted for 63 per cent of attacks and 67 per cent of fatalities in Niger, with violence spilling into neighbouring regions like Tahoua, where deaths increased fivefold. JNIM activity surged, with 13 attacks causing 109 deaths, a fourteenfold rise in fatalities and the group's highest numbers in Niger to date. IS attacks remained steady, though deaths attributed to them dropped by half to 108.

In July 2023, Niger experienced a military coup, with the presidential guard overthrowing President Mohamed Bazoum and General Adourahmane Tchiani assuming power. The justification centred around Bazoum's inability to counter jihadist threats, although this reasoning was seen as a pretext, especially considering the low terror attack frequency prior to the coup. The coup led to a diplomatic crisis, with regional powers threatening intervention and risking an interstate conflict.

By the end of 2023, Niger distanced itself from Western allies, ending security cooperation with the EU and began exploring ties with Russia. The government ended military ties with both France and the US. France withdrew its 1,500 troops in December 2023.[33] In May 2024, the US were told to withdraw their troops from the country, including handing over their $100 million dollar Airbase 101 in Niamey and Airbase 201 in Agadez in northern Niger that had become AFRICOM's main base for counterterrorism and drone operations in the region. The withdrawal was completed in September 2024, marking the end of either US or French presence in any of the three states.[34]

FIGURE 3.10

Tensions between Burkina Faso and France, 1995–2023

Negative sentiment between Burkina Faso and France have risen precipitously since 2017, corresponding with increases in Russian influence.
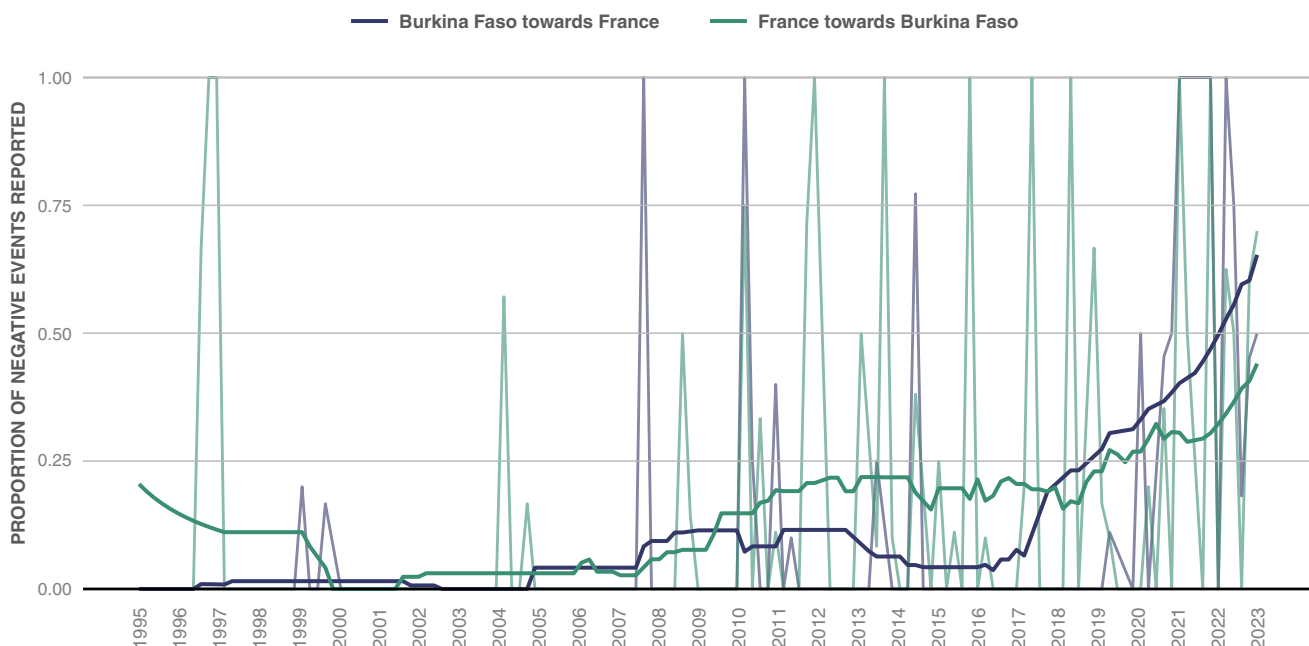
Source: ICEWS; IEP Calculations

Niger and Burkina Faso also withdrew from the G5 Sahel following Mali's departure, significantly weakening the alliance. Russian influence campaigns became more prominent in the lead up to the coup and have continued since the coup. This was a major shift for a country that had not until recently had diplomatic relations with Russia and, unlike Mali and Burkina Faso, had no history of engagement with the Soviet Union. In the period following the coup, Russia has mounted a concerted influence campaign sending military instructors and military equipment to the government, including aircraft.

As shown in Figure 3.11, following the withdrawal of both US and French forces, Niger has experienced the most terrorist attacks since the inception of the GTI.

The post-Niger withdrawal period has seen a reformulation of US counterterrorism strategy in the region. It appears unlikely that they will seek to re-establish a base akin to those in Niger, at least in the short term. Cooperation and hosting of US forces in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin has significantly increased since the coup in Niger, whilst US special forces, who had been asked to leave Chad, have been invited to return.

The influence landscape in Niger, as shown in Figure 3.12, is complex. Data up to 2022 indicates that the United States remains the most influential state, while France's influence is declining, and Russia and China are expanding their presence. This dynamic is expected to continue in the post-coup environment, though with the exit of US troops, their influence is likely to decline. Niger is the seventh largest producer of uranium in the world. Prior to the coup, it produced 25 per cent of Europe's uranium, the second largest source.[35] China and

Russia, both major consumers of uranium, have been actively securing deals in Niger as French companies like Orano and Canada's GoviEx have had their operating licences revoked, losing access to their mines.[36]

Meanwhile, a majority Chinese owned uranium mining company is set to resume operations after ten years of inactivity. This is as projections estimate China will require a roughly four-fold increase in uranium between 2023 and 2040.[37]

FIGURE 3.12

Influence in Niger, 2011–2022

Influence in Niger is shifting with Russia and the US growing at the expense of France.
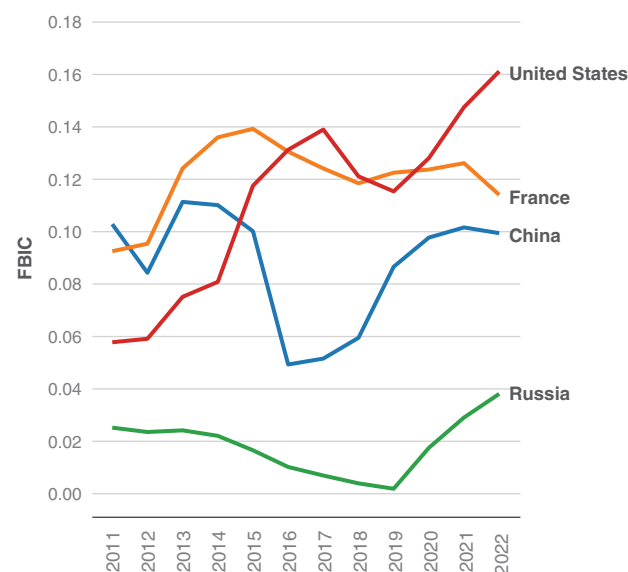
Source: FBIC; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.11

Terror attacks in Niger, 2020–2024

Attacks rose to their highest level ever following the withdrawal of US Counterterrorism Forces.
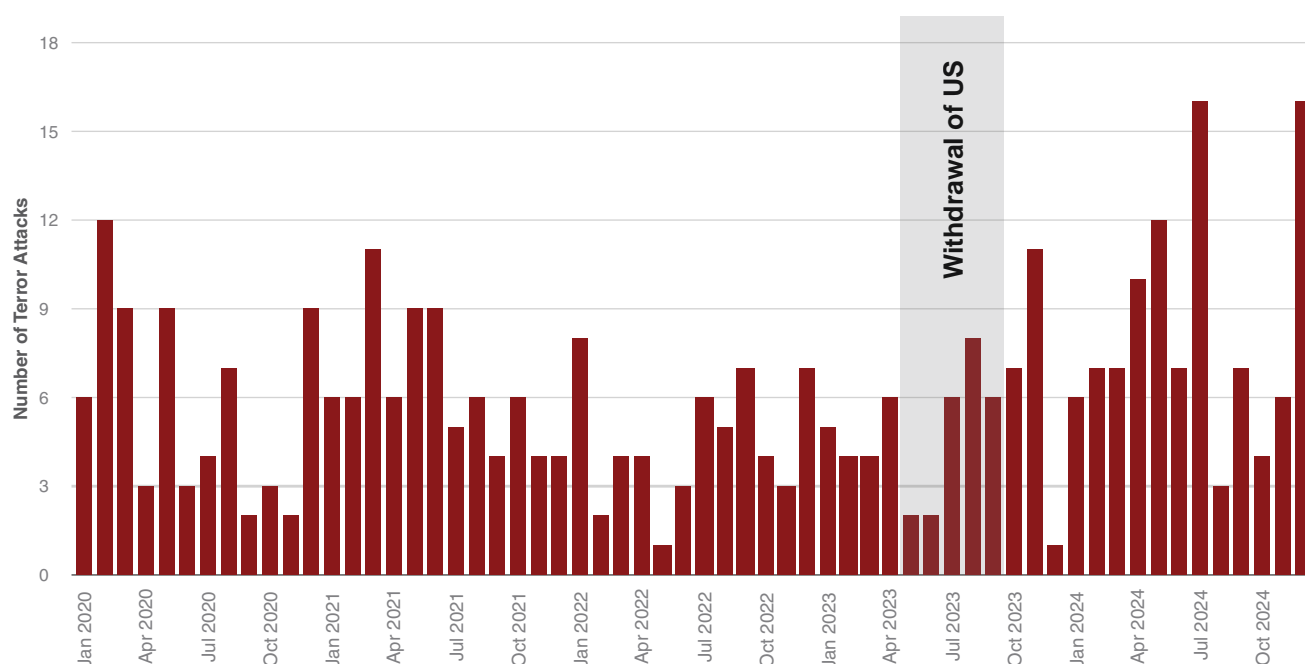
Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

According to Gallup polling sentiment towards major powers has shifted across the Sahel. Support for both Russia and the US has increased in much of the region, as shown in Figure 3.13. Positive sentiment towards Russia has risen by 33 per cent in Burkina Faso since 2019, with smaller but notable increases across the Sahel, except in Guinea, where it dropped by six per cent. Support for the US has also grown in many countries, though it has declined in Burkina Faso and Mali by 9 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively.[9] The only country where support for both has dropped is The Gambia, where support for Russia has dropped by 16 per cent and support for the US has dropped 10 per cent.

FIGURE 3.13

Changes in the approval of the US and Russia in the Sahel 2019-2024

Changes in approval rates of Russia and the US have significantly improved overall since 2019.
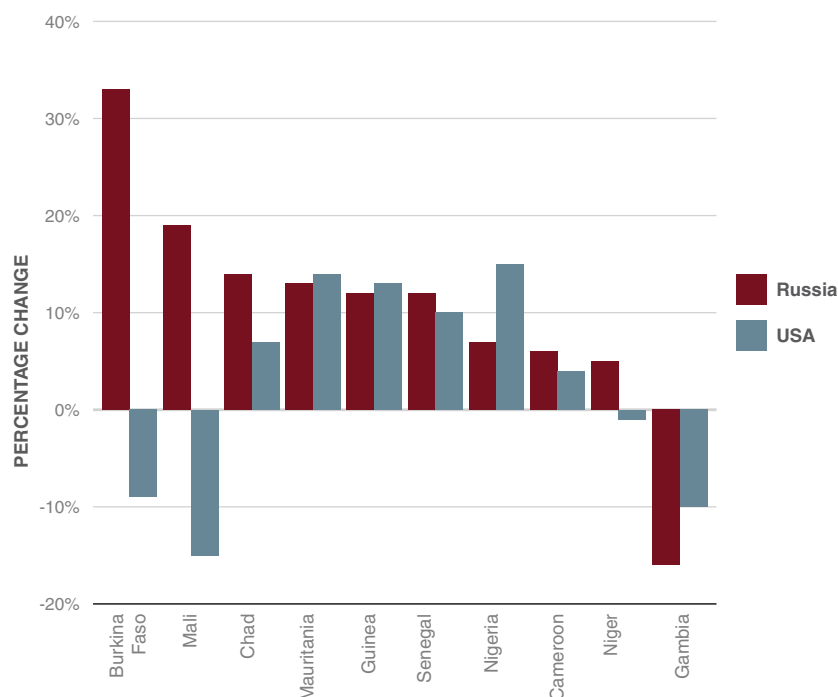
33%

Positive sentiment towards Russia has risen by 33 per cent in Burkina Faso since 2019, with smaller but notable increases across the Sahel, except in Guinea, where it dropped by six per cent.

Source: Gallup; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.14

Tensions between central West African countries and France, 1995-2023
Central West African countries, excluding Burkina Faso and Mali
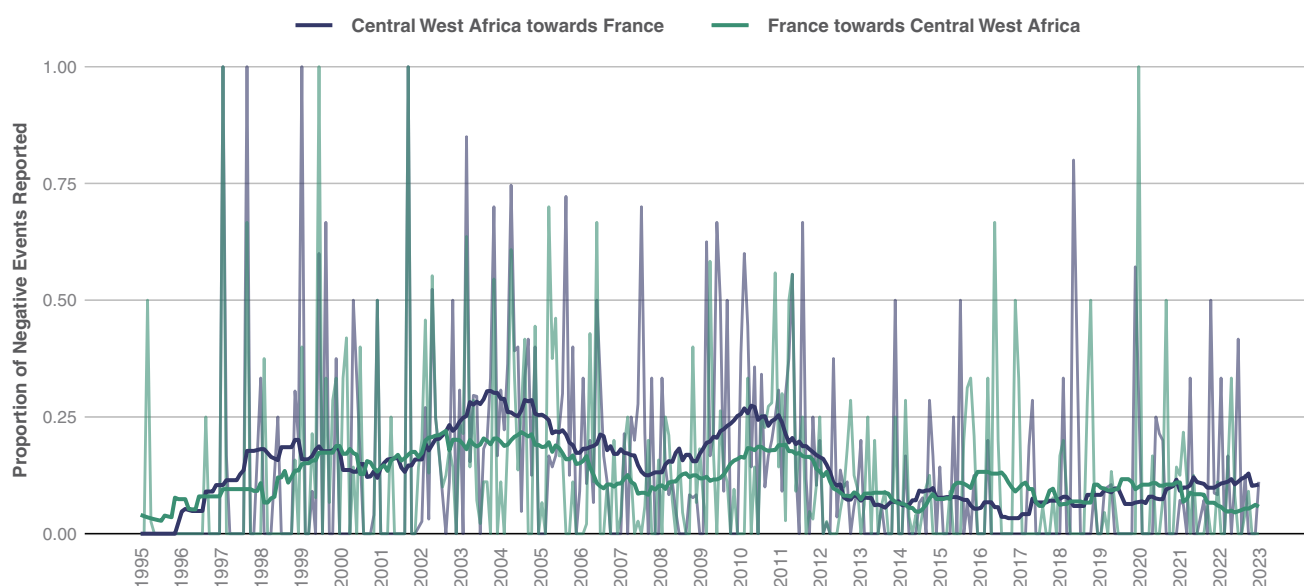
Source: ICEWS; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.15

Tensions between the Sahel and France, 1995-2023

Negative sentiment from Mali and Burkina Faso drives up overall regional proportions of negative sentiment
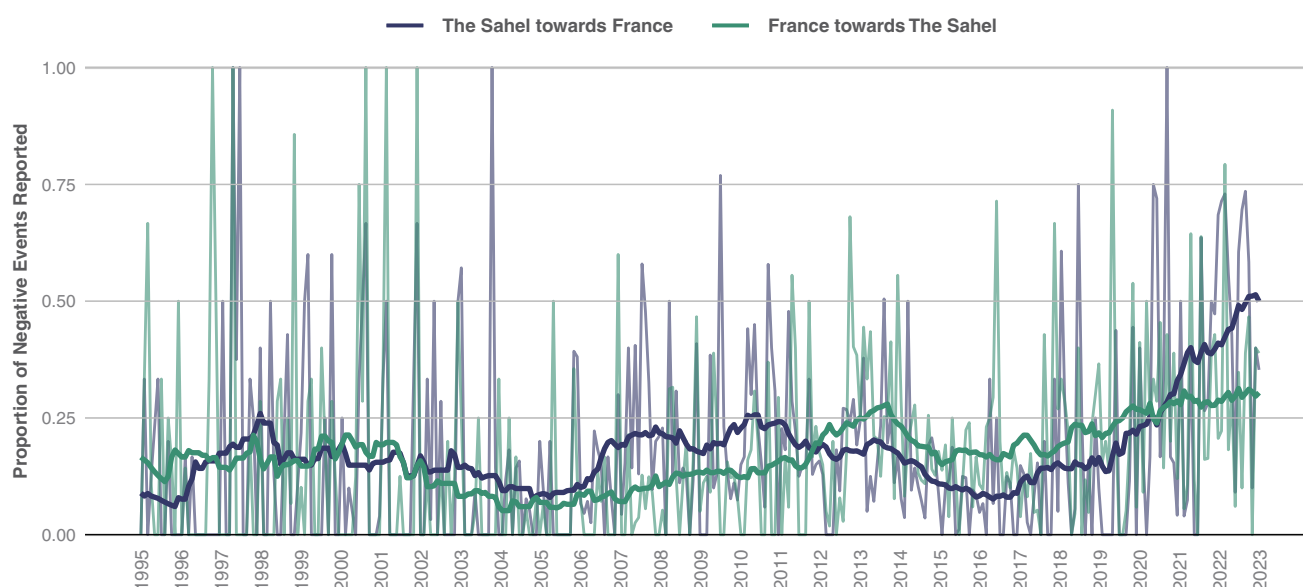
Source: ICEWS; IEP Calculations

Meanwhile, France is growing in unpopularity across many of its former colonies in the Sahel, with 59 per cent of Malians holding negative views about France. The most extreme changes in negative sentiment can be seen in Mali and Burkina Faso, when combined with the other former French colonies: Guinea, Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, Senegal and Mauritania Figure 3.15 shows a clear increase in negative sentiment. Without Mali and Burkina Faso, however, the levels of negative sentiment are significantly lower. A new wave of anti-colonial populism has surged in West Africa and has been utilised by military leaders of the governments in both Mali and Burkina Faso.[38] These trends may persist beyond the Central Sahel states and are certainly an area to watch into the future.

The geopolitical shifts and evolving dynamics in the Sahel have created uncertainty regarding their impact on terrorism. Counterterrorism cooperation between the Alliance of Sahelian States and neighbouring countries is now shaped by divisions between states aligned with Russia, the United States, or France. In January 2025, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger announced a 5,000 strong joint military force to conduct counterterrorism operations in the area where groups operate across borders.[39]

Given the extraterritorial nature of the counterterrorism challenge, effective operations require collaboration and cooperation beyond the Alliance of Sahelian States, to include North Africa, other Sahel states, and Coastal West Africa. It is also important for the US and EU countries to remain actively involved. This is essential to disrupt the flow of illicit financing and arms that sustain these organisations. Powerful regional states like Nigeria will dominate efforts, and cooperation between the alliance and other neighbours like Algeria and Libya will likely also prove pivotal. While Russia and China are ascendant in the region, the European Union and US are unlikely to seek to abandon their interests. With rising conflict within the region and growing external competition for influence, the security outlook for the Central Sahel appears increasingly bleak.

369/559

Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were the most affected by IS activity in 2024, experiencing the highest number of fatalities. Syria alone accounted for 369 of the 559 IS attacks.

Since 2020, foreign influence in Syria has shifted, with the roles of Russia, China and Iran diminishing and Türkiye rising as a key player.

Islamic State operates as a decentralised network of affiliates, encompassing nine jihadist groups and affiliated entities. Each group acts independently.

In 2024, these affiliates were responsible for attacks across the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe, highlighting the group's continued transnational reach and operational capacity.
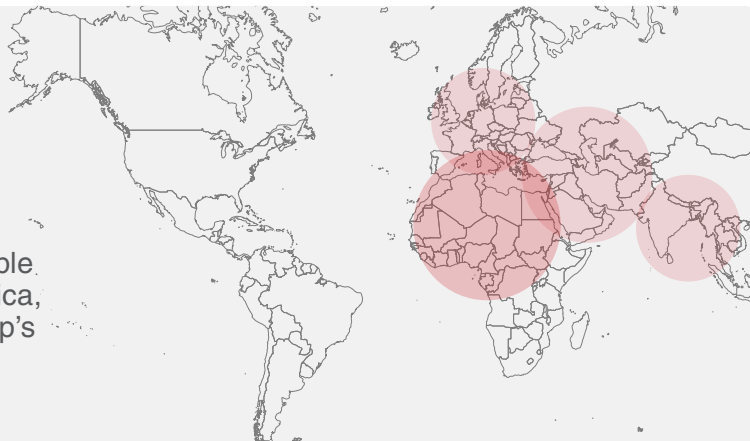
Instability following the fall of the government of the Assad regime could provide fertile ground for IS to regroup and rearm, increasing the risk of resurgence.

24

In addition to the attacks that occurred, in 2024, a total of 24 publicised plots linked to IS or affiliated groups were foiled, including a high-profile plot targeting Taylor Swift concerts in Vienna. In view of the rarity of intelligence services disclosing such incidents, it may be that many more such plots were foiled last year.

ISK has extensive multilingual skills and a sophisticated online presence in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Uzbek, Tajik, English and, more recently, Russian and Turkish, mainly targeting youth.

ISK's ability to operate and expand in Afghanistan and beyond remains an international concern, prompting heightened security and counterterrorism efforts by the EU, Russia and Central Asian states.

ISK has evolved into one of the most active jihadist groups globally, expanding its operations beyond Afghanistan into Pakistan, Iran, Russia and Central Asia. It carries out more deadly attacks outside of Afghanistan than within, highlighting its growing transnational threat.

4 Islamic State and Affiliates

Introduction

Since 2015, Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates have remained the world's deadliest terrorist group. The total number of IS attacks rose globally until 2022, but the number and overall intensity of attacks have declined in recent years, leading to a slight reduction in fatalities. While some chapters have declined, others, such as Khorasan chapter, have increased their activities substantially. IS has continued to expand its presence in the Middle East, Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

IS is no longer as centrally organised as it was at its peak in 2015, when it controlled territory in Iraq and Syria roughly the size of France. The destruction of its so-called caliphate by 2019 led to decentralisation and a shift towards low-cost, high-impact attacks. These tactics have allowed IS to sustain its operations despite military and territorial losses, demonstrating its adaptability.

Today, IS operates through regional affiliates, each pursuing distinct goals tailored to local contexts, reflecting a broader trend towards networked jihadism. This decentralised model makes IS more difficult to contain, as it combines territorial control, ideological influence, opportunistic attacks and a strategy adapted for the locality. For example, Islamic State Sahel (IS-S) has focused on territorial expansion in border areas of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, while Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISK) has pursued a more transnational agenda. Islamic State affiliates are active in multiple states and regions including Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Egypt, Cameroon and Nigeria.

IS continues to pose a significant security threat to the West, with both organised cells and lone-wolf individuals pledging allegiance to IS attempting mass-casualty attacks. In 2024, authorities foiled IS plots targeting the Paris Summer Olympics and Taylor Swift's concerts in Vienna, among several others, highlighting the group's ongoing global reach.[1]

Following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria in December 2024, after more than 13 years of civil war, concerns over a potential power vacuum in the region have intensified. Alongside the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, these shifts have added new layers of complexity to the geopolitical landscape in both the Middle East and South Asia. Additionally, the ongoing war in Gaza risks serving as a catalyst for radicalisation and recruitment, much like the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan did in the past.

This section provides an analysis of IS and affiliates, and its impact on global security, examining the current ecosystem of IS. It also explores the group's rise and fall in Syria and Iraq, the influence of its major regional affiliates, and the growing role of ISK, which has emerged as IS's most internationally active branch. The evolving nature of IS marks a phase of terrorism that is increasingly resistant to traditional military strategies. Effectively countering this threat requires a comprehensive and adaptable approach, capable of addressing the group's decentralised structure and rapidly shifting tactics.

Summary

FIGURE 4.1

Islamic State affiliate locations and attacks, 2024

In 2024, Islamic State affiliates were active across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

| ISK | ISIL | ISS | ISWA | IS Sinai |
| IS Libya | IS Somalia | IS Mozambique | IS Central Africa | |
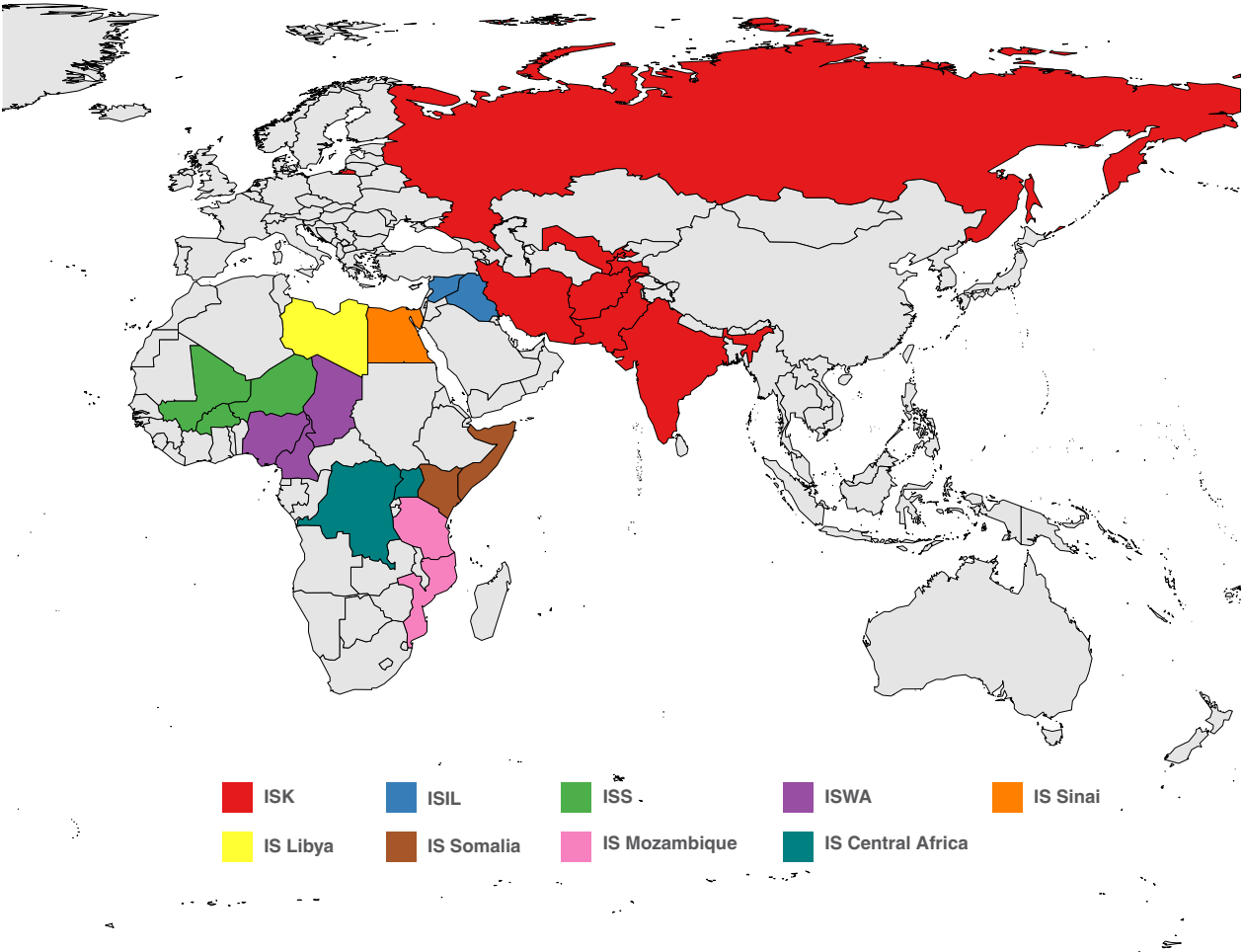
Source: IEP Calculations

Definitions of Islamic State (IS) vary. In this report, IS is defined as a global jihadist organisation that operates as a decentralised network of affiliates. However, not all IS chapters are categorised in the Terrorism Tracker. The attribution of attacks and deaths to Islamic State and its affiliates can be challenging to determine, due to the shifting nature of affiliations and the evolving dynamics of the group's regional branches. As IS originally rose to prominence in Iraq and Syria, the group tends to be most associated with – and sometimes treated as synonymous with – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). But in the Terrorism Tracker, "Islamic State" is also used to denote events ascribed to the network that have been carried out outside of Iraq and Syria. The attacks replicate IS tactics; however, they cannot be linked to any one affiliate group. In 2024, for example, there were a total 22 countries around the world with incidents attributed to "Islamic State". As shown in Figure 4.1, this section provides an overview of affiliate branches of IS: Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISK), Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), IS Sahel Province (ISS), IS West Africa (ISWA), IS Sinai, IS Libya, IS Somalia (ISS), IS Mozambique (ISM) and IS Central Africa (ISCA).

Roughly 48 per cent of terrorism deaths in 2024 have not been attributed to any group. IEP has developed a machine learning model which apportions these deaths to various groups.[2] Based on these findings IS is likely to be responsible for an additional 15,000 deaths between 2007 and 2024.

IS and its affiliates were responsible for over 4,000 deaths in 2016, the peak of its deadly operations. Over the next three years, the number of deaths dropped substantially, reaching as low as 1,666 in 2019, and deaths have not exceeded 2,500 since then. Iraq has been the most affected country by IS attacks, with a total of 9,088 deaths since 2007, followed by Syria with 3,636 fatalities, and Afghanistan with 2,686 deaths. In 2024, deaths from IS attacks fell to their lowest level since 2019, dropping by 12 percent compared to the previous year. Syria recorded the most IS attributed deaths in 2024, with 708 deaths, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with 299 deaths, Nigeria with 159 and Russia with 148 deaths.

While the number of IS deaths peaked in 2016, the number of attacks attributed to IS and its affiliates reached its highest level

in 2021. Between 2007 and 2014, attacks were relatively limited, with 21 incidents in 2007. However, 2015 marked a sharp increase, with 390 attacks recorded. Attacks rose to 815 in 2018 and remained elevated over the next several years, eventually peaking at 867 attacks in 2021. Attacks increased for the first time since the peak in 2024, when 559 IS attacks were recorded, six per cent more than the prior year.

The rise in attacks despite declining deaths suggests a shift toward smaller, less coordinated operations, often relying on local sympathisers rather than centralised command.

For instance, Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) recorded its highest number of attacks in 2020, with 90 incidents, before declining in subsequent years. ISK saw a significant surge in activity, peaking in 2021 with 189 attacks. Islamic State Sinai Province (IS-SP), although relatively less active, remained a persistent threat, with notable activity in 2016 and 2018.

Figure 4.2 shows the total deaths associated with IS and its affiliates by country and regional groupings over the past two decades. The groupings are broadly associated with the main branches:

- Iraq and Syria (ISIL dominated)
- Central and South Asia, including Iran and Russia (ISK dominated)
- Sahel: Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria (ISWA dominated), Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger (ISS Dominated)

The ongoing transnational threat posed by IS remains a serious concern across various regions, including in the West. This is evident not only from successful attacks but also from numerous plots that have been foiled by security services in different countries. Figure 4.3 shows the foiled plots attributed to IS in 2024. While foiled plots and terror suspect arrests occur regularly, intelligence agencies rarely disclose them to the media. As a result, only publicly reported cases can be analysed, while many more thwarted attacks remain undisclosed.

In 2024, there were 24 publicised plots linked to IS or affiliated groups. The most were recorded in Israel, with five plots, including one where four alleged members of IS were arrested with hundreds of explosives.[3] The US followed with four plots, with one notably being planned by a former CIA security guard in Afghanistan who had planned to carry out a mass shooting on election day. The suspect told the FBI that he was communicating with individuals associated with ISK.[4] In Germany, arrests occurred throughout 2024, including in Cologne, and in March 2024, following a threat to the Swedish Parliament.[5] Similarly, Russian authorities apprehended suspects linked to a planned attack on a Moscow synagogue in March 2024.[6]

In addition to foiled plots, there have also been recent high-profile arrests of IS affiliated individuals in every part of the world. In mid-2024, several suspects were detained in Iran. Between June 2023 and March 2024, 2,733 suspects were detained in Türkiye, with 692 formally arrested for suspected links to IS.[7]

FIGURE 4.2

Deaths attributed to the Islamic State, by country and regional groupings, 2007–2024

Of the IS affiliate groups, ISIL, ISWA and ISK have been the deadliest in the past decade.
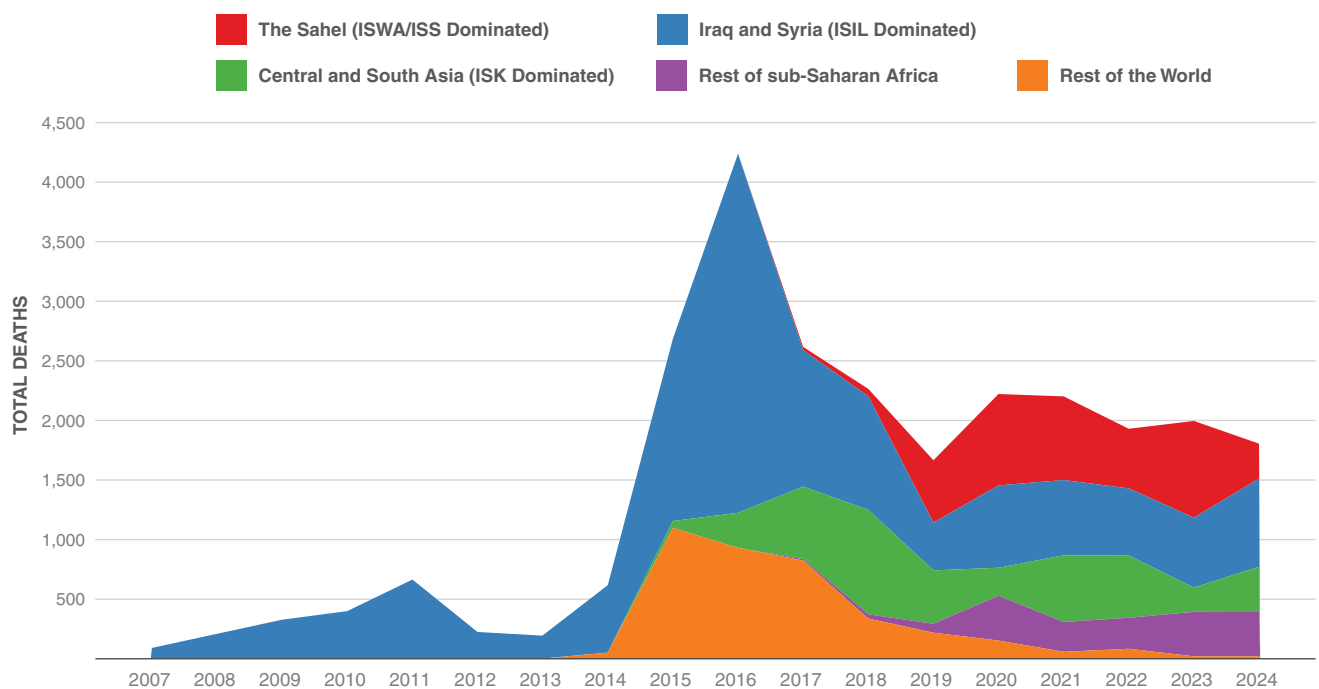
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

IS foiled plots, 2024
Attacks by IS were foiled across the West and in parts of Russia and Eurasia.
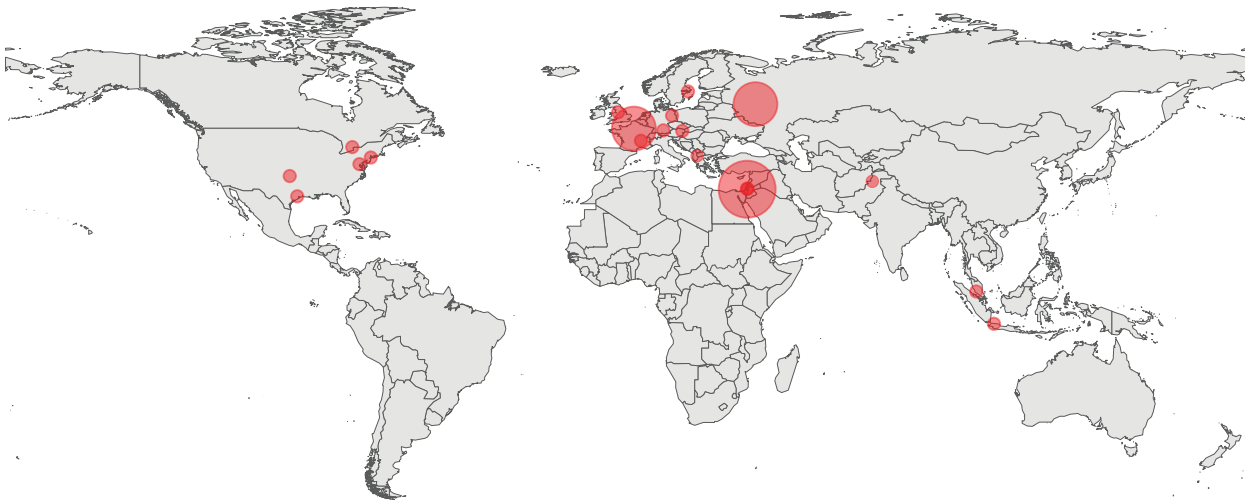
Source: IEP Calculations

In Central Asia, there has been an increase in ISK-related arrests and incidents, reflecting both the group's focus on the region and heightened counterterrorism efforts by governments. For instance, in December 2023, two teenagers were arrested for plotting attacks in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan. A few months later, an ISK-linked car bomb exploded in Tajikistan's Kulob region. In June 2024, 15 individuals were arrested in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, for posting videos related to ISK weapons and explosive tactics.[8]

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

The emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) can be traced back to the mid-2000s, when the group initially formed as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI was established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2004, shortly after the US invasion of Iraq.[9] The group capitalised on the instability and sectarian violence in Iraq, positioning itself as a major player in the insurgency.

By 2006, the group expanded its operations and changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), signalling its growing ambition to create an Islamic state. The group's leadership, under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi after Zarqawi's death in 2006, focused on establishing a territorial base in northern Iraq. Over the next few years, ISI claimed many terrorist attacks inside Iraq, including the attacks in Baghdad in August, October and December 2009, which, combined, killed over 480 people.[10] However, ISI faced significant challenges due to limited resources and internal conflicts, while the Iraqi government and US forces mounted a strong resistance against its advances.

Facing backlash from the community and increased pressure from US and Iraqi forces, the group weakened until 2011, when its involvement in the Syrian Civil War sparked a period of renewed growth. In 2013, under Baghdadi's leadership, the group rebranded itself as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In 2014, it formally broke ties with Al-Qaeda.[11]

ISIL exploited the power vacuum in Syria to expand its influence into neighbouring areas, engaging in conflicts with tribal groups and militias in Iraq, and against Kurdish forces and various rebel factions in Syria. Strengthened by an influx of fighters from across the region, the group rapidly evolved, marking the early stages of its transformation into a global extremist organisation.

In June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul and again changed its name to Islamic State (IS), declaring a caliphate and naming its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the "Caliph".[12] This declaration marked a significant turning point for the group, as it now claimed religious and political authority. The caliphate's territory spanned parts of Iraq and Syria, totalling an area roughly the size of France at its peak. IS sought to implement a strict interpretation of Islamic law in the areas it controlled.

In September 2014, the United States and a coalition of allies launched airstrikes against IS positions, while local forces, including the Iraqi military and Kurdish fighters, mounted a resistance against the group's expansion.[13] Despite the setbacks, IS continued to hold significant territory and maintained its control over large swathes of land in both Iraq and Syria for much of 2014 and 2015. In 2015, the group established a presence in Libya.[14]

FIGURE 4.4

IS territorial control, 2015

IS controlled large swarths of Syria and Iraq at its peak in 2015.

ISIS Control
Controlled by Others
Unpopulated Desert
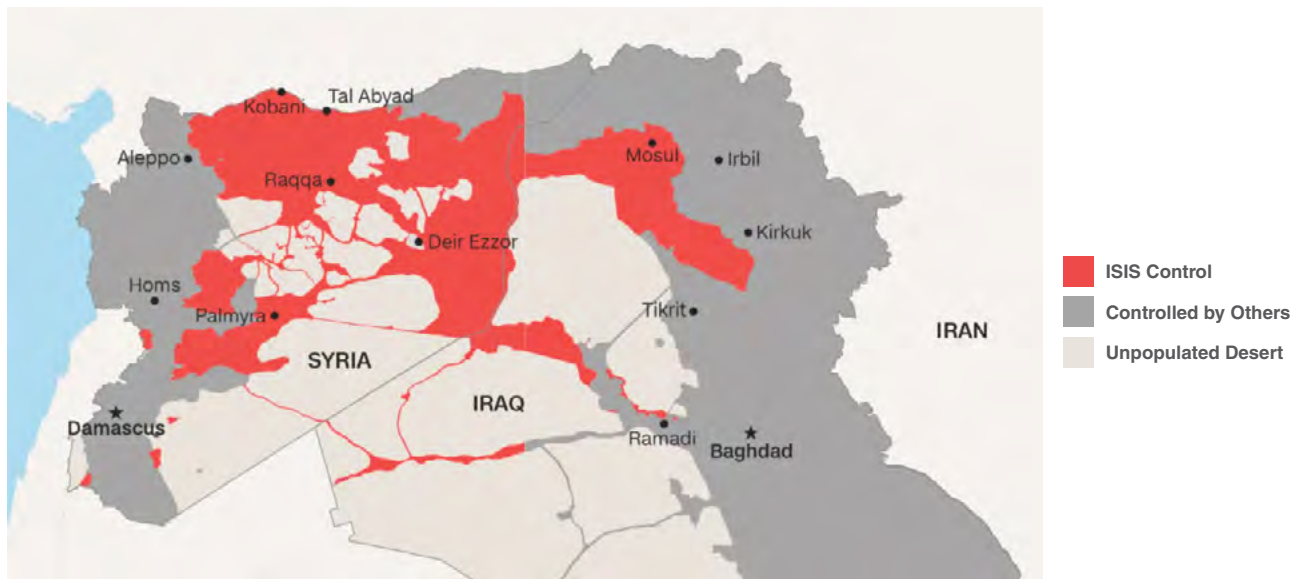
Source: CNN; IHS Conflict Monitor

Terrorism deaths attributed to IS peaked in 2016 at 4,240 reported fatalities. While the death toll has fluctuated over the years, it has generally declined since its peak, reaching 1,805 in 2024. Despite this reduction, IS remains a significant threat, as ongoing casualties in recent years demonstrate. Up until 2016, most IS deaths were concentrated in Syria and Iraq. However, since then, fatalities in other regions have increased, highlighting the expanding reach and influence of IS affiliates across different parts of the world.

FIGURE 4.5

Deaths attributed to Islamic State, 2007–2024

Since 2017, the majority of deaths caused by IS have occurred outside Iraq and Syria.

Other Countries
Syria
Iraq
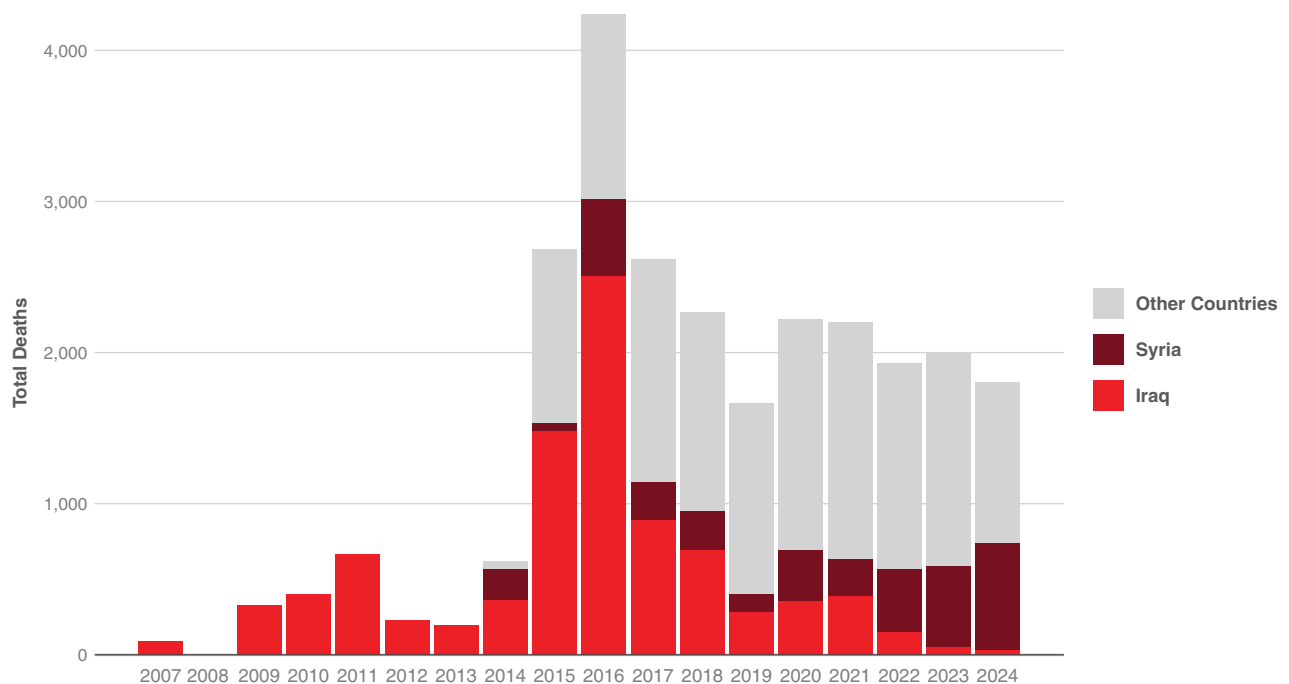
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

The decline of IS began in 2016 as military efforts to reestablish Syrian and Iraqi governmental control of the countries' territories gained momentum. In Iraq, the Iraqi military, supported by a US-led coalition, launched a series of offensives to retake key cities, culminating in the reclaiming of Mosul in 2017, a decisive turning point in the fight against IS.[15] Similarly, in Syria, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by the US, made significant advances, gradually pushing IS out of its strongholds, including Raqqa, which fell in 2017.[16] By 2019, IS had lost most of its territory, and the group's self-declared caliphate was effectively dismantled.

Despite losing its territorial holdings, IS remained a significant threat through its insurgency activities, continuing to carry out attacks in Iraq, Syria and beyond. The group's leadership adapted by going underground or fleeing to other regions, including parts of Africa and Southeast Asia. The decline of IS's geographical caliphate did not mark its end; instead, the group transitioned to a more decentralised model, relying on cells and affiliates to sustain its violent campaign and spread its ideology.

IS maintains a presence in northeastern Syria and parts of Iraq, while its regional affiliates, including IS-Sahel, ISWA and ISK, have gained increasing prominence. Since the end of IS's territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria, attacks previously attributed to ISIL are now attributed to IS.[17] The other regional branches of IS, such as ISWA, have seen a rise in activity in recent years, with the number of attacks increasing from two increases, with their attack numbers rising from a few incidents in 2015 to larger spikes in recent years, such as 189 attacks in 2021. This underscores both the persistence of the IS network and the shifting geography of its operations.

Different IS provinces have adapted their strategies to suit their local contexts. IS-Sahel, for example, has focused on capturing and holding territory, while ISK has pursued a more transnational agenda. The internal dynamics of these provinces, along with the conflict environments in which they operate, have shaped their divergent approaches, making IS difficult to define.

IS AND THE END OF WAR IN SYRIA

The fall of President Bashar al-Assad's regime in December of 2024 has precipitated a period of significant instability in Syria, creating a power vacuum that IS is actively seeking to exploit. Historically, IS has demonstrated a capacity to capitalise on political turmoil to expand its influence, and current developments suggest a potential resurgence of the group within the region.

Following the collapse of Assad's government, IS militants have intensified their operations in Syria. The group has reportedly gained access to new weapon supplies left behind by former government troops, bolstering IS's operational capacity.[18] This rearmament has coincided with an increase in attacks globally, including a notable incident on New Year's Day in 2025 in New Orleans, where an assailant, inspired by IS, killed 14 people with a pickup truck.[19]

In response to the escalating threat, the US has conducted a series of airstrikes targeting IS positions in Syria. Between December 2024 and January 2025, US Central Command reported multiple operations aimed at degrading IS capabilities and preventing the group from exploiting the current security vacuum.[20]

IS is also leveraging the disarray among groups that formerly opposed the Assad regime to re-establish its foothold in Syria. The rapid overthrow of the government has led to internal discord within Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), creating opportunities for IS to infiltrate and destabilise these factions.[21] IS deaths in Syria surged to over 700 in 2024, with nearly 100 occurring in attacks following the fall of Assad.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), instrumental in the territorial defeat of IS in 2019, now face challenges from Turkish-backed groups and other insurgents. In early 2025, the leader of the SDF expressed concerns about IS militants regrouping in eastern Syria, taking advantage of the diminished centralised authority.[22]

The instability has exacerbated conditions in detention camps such as al-Hol and al-Roj in northern Syria, which house at least 40,000 IS fighters and their families. Reports indicate that these camps have become breeding grounds for the next generation of IS extremists, with children as young as eight displaying violent behaviour and being indoctrinated by radicalised family members. Camp administrators have raised alarms about deteriorating conditions and the potential for IS to exploit these environments for recruitment and radicalisation.[23] The future of these camps is uncertain as they are dependent on US funding for Kurdish security forces who guard and maintain them. Changes to foreign assistance under the new US administration and a more isolationist position make the presence of US troops in Syria and their involvement in guarding the camps uncertain. Prison break attacks have occurred in the past, such as at the Hasakah prison in 2022, where over 300 people died during an assault on the prison and hundreds of IS fighters escaped.[24]

The current transitional phase in Syria presents a precarious environment where IS can potentially reassert itself. The group's recent activities suggest a strategic effort to regroup and exploit security gaps. Addressing this threat necessitates a coordinated international response focused on stabilising the region, supporting effective governance structures, and preventing IS from capitalising on the current turmoil.

Türkiye has emerged as a significant power broker in post-Assad Syria, expressing readiness to assist the new Syrian administration in managing IS camps and prisons. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reaffirmed Türkiye's commitment to supporting Syria in combating terrorism during a meeting with his Syrian counterpart Asaad Hassan al-Shibani.[25] As shown in Figure 4.6, Türkiye's influence in Syria as of 2022 was already at a level comparable to Russia's, which was declining well before the fall of Assad. Similarly, China and Iran have seen declines, with their influence remaining below that of Russia and Türkiye.

FIGURE 4.6

Geopolitical influence in Syria, 2000–2022

As captured by the measures of the Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity (FBIC), the influence of Russia, China and Iran has declined in Syria since 2020.
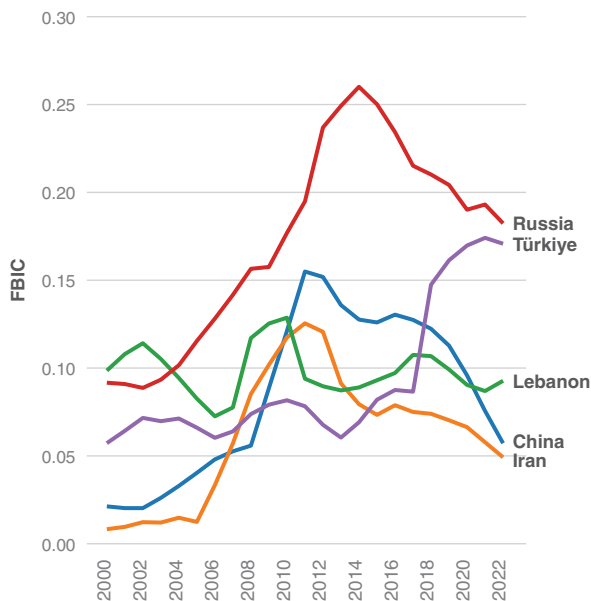
Source: FBIC; IEP Calculations

ISLAMIC STATE WEST AFRICA

Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) was formed in 2015 with an alliance between Nigeria-based terrorists and those in surrounding countries and regions, including the southern Lake Chad group, Boko Haram. ISWA operates in Nigeria and the southern Lake Chad Basin.[26] In 2016, IS leadership publicly replaced ISWA leader Abubakar Shekau with Abu Musab al-Barnawi, leading to a split in the group. The faction loyal to al-Barnawi continued as ISWA, while Shekau's faction remained as Boko Haram.[27]

Unlike Boko Haram, ISWA focuses on targeting state and military assets while attempting to win local support by providing limited services, such as distributing food and protecting local populations. Additionally, ISWA collects taxes from locals which are used to fund the group, but also to provide health services and implement its own jihadist-based education system. However, ISWA is known to kill those who refuse to pay taxes and for targeting agencies providing humanitarian aid, depriving locals of necessities in government-held areas. The group has also massacred civilians who collaborate with local governments or disobey ISWA orders, as well as persecuting the Christian minority in its territory.[28]

The group has conducted several significant attacks, including the January 2020 attack on a Niger military base which left 89 soldiers dead.[29] Later that year, ISWA fighters also attacked the town of Monguno in Nigeria, destroying many buildings, such

as a UN humanitarian facility and a police station, resulting in the death of tens of people.[30]

By late 2019, ISWA had become an integral part of the IS's global network, with the group being one of the most active IS affiliates outside the Middle East.[31] The group has attempted to expand operations into neighbouring countries, aiming to exploit weak governance and regional instability. Despite this, ISWA has faced challenges in expanding its influence due to consistent opposition from regional military forces and rival groups.[32] The group's recorded activity has gradually decreased, and in 2024 was at its lowest levels since 2018.

In 2021, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau died after detonating an explosive device to avoid capture during an ISWA attack. Following his death, there were expectations that Boko Haram fighters might join ISWA. However, reports indicate that Boko Haram, under new leadership, has continued its operations independently.[33]

In late 2024, the conflict between Boko Haram and ISWA intensified. In December, Boko Haram forces launched coordinated attacks on ISWA strongholds, targeting critical camps and supply centres. The assaults resulted in substantial ISWA casualties and the seizure of valuable assets, including vehicles, weapons, and other resources. These actions compelled ISWA to withdraw from several strategic locations, causing considerable disruption to its regional operations.[34]

In 2024, Nigeria recorded 40 attacks attributed to ISWA, resulting in 158 deaths. This marks a decline from 288 deaths in 2023. The peak of ISWA activity in Nigeria occurred in 2020, when the country recorded 482 deaths. ISWA's activity in Burkina Faso led to deaths between 2019 and 2021, but there have been no attacks in the country since then. Niger recorded 20 deaths in 2024, a decline from 31 in 2023. In 2024, no deaths from ISWA were reported in the DRC, Benin, Burkina Faso or Cameroon.

Türkiye's influence in Syria as of 2022 was already at a level comparable to Russia's, which was declining well before the fall of Assad. Similarly, China and Iran have seen declines, with their influence remaining below that of Russia and Türkiye.

FIGURE 4.7

Attacks and deaths by Islamic State West Africa, 2017–2024

Deaths from ISWA's activity peaked in 2020, after which they declined markedly.
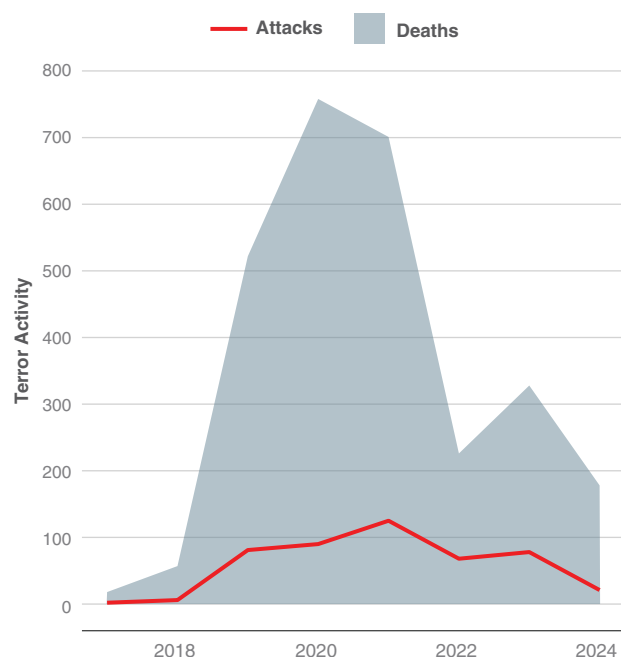
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

ISLAMIC STATE - SAHEL

Islamic State in the Sahel (IS-Sahel) emerged in 2015 under the banner of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Initially operating independently, ISGS was integrated into Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) in 2019. By 2022, the group restructured and established itself as the autonomous 'Sahel Province' of IS, focusing on consolidating territorial control.

IS-Sahel is primarily active in the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, known as Liptako-Gourma, but has also engaged in sporadic activity in Algeria, Benin and Nigeria. It has faced an ongoing inter-Jihadist conflict with JNIM for control of territory. In 2024, IS carried out 16 attacks in Nigeria, 12 in Niger, six in Mali and one attack in Burkina Faso.

IS-Sahel is known for its mass, indiscriminate violence against civilians. The group has carried out numerous attacks, including the March 2021 massacres in Niger's Tahoua Region, where over 140 civilians were killed. Since 2023, IS-Sahel has sought to shift away from its purely mass violence-based approach to one of territorial expansion and governance in the areas it controls, in part contributing to lower numbers of attacks in its areas of operations. By August 2023, IS-Sahel had reportedly doubled the amount of territory it controlled in Mali.[35]

In 2024, IS-Sahel appeared to prioritise territorial consolidation. Its control over vast areas along the Mali-Niger border has provided an operational safe haven, presenting a significant challenge for state forces attempting to counter its presence.

Despite facing opposition from regional military forces and rival groups, IS-Sahel has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. Its ability to capture and hold territory has allowed itself to embed within the local populations. The focused recruitment of child soldiers is further designed to provide a long-term source of fighters and leaders. Its tactics have morphed from mass violence to siege-like tactics, controlling logistical routes and placing embargoes on towns they want to exert control over. Within its zones of control, the group has established governance infrastructure, including court systems which adhere to strict Salafist interpretations of Sharia law.[36]

IS-Sahel remains a formidable force in the region, with its operations posing a significant threat to the stability of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

ISLAMIC STATE CENTRAL AFRICA PROVINCE

Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) emerged in 2017 and initially comprised two branches: one based in northern Mozambique and the other in eastern DRC.

The Congolese wing of ISCAP originated from the Ugandan Islamist group known as the Uganda Muslim Freedom Fighters and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the 1990s. Over time, the ADF shifted its focus to the DRC due to military pressure and internal challenges. By 2017, the group pledged allegiance to IS, securing financial support and recruitment from across East Africa. In 2019, IS officially recognised the ADF as its Central Africa Province, enabling the group to expand its operations while maintaining allegiance to successive IS leaders despite significant leadership losses.[37]

Initially focused on Uganda's government, the IS-affiliated faction in Congo shifted its attention to local economic activities, including mining and timber. Since aligning with IS, it has escalated attacks against both Congolese forces and civilians.

Despite ongoing military efforts, the group remains a significant threat. In June 2024, an attack in Mayikengo resulted in at least 42 deaths, with perpetrators using firearms and machetes.[38] The conflict in the DRC has worsened, with armed groups like the IS-linked ADF driving significant displacement. By mid-2024, over 2.4 million people had been displaced due to escalating violence between armed groups and government forces, with an estimated 200,000 internal displacement caused by the IS Congo conflict.[39]

ISLAMIC STATE MOZAMBIQUE

The Mozambique IS wing (ISM), locally known as Al-Shabaab though not related to the Somali group, emerged in October 2017 from a long-standing Salafist sect. Heavily armed fighters launched attacks on security forces in Cabo Delgado's northern province, driven by growing tensions with local leaders. The group was designated a separate 'province' from ISCAP in 2022.[40]

ISM's primary area of operation is the northern province of Cabo Delgado, though other provinces, such as Balama, Chiure and Macomia, also saw group development. It also conducts cross-border attacks in southern Tanzania.[41]

ISM's early years were characterised by violent activities, with frequent attacks on civilians. Between 2017 and 2019, the group was involved in 66 incidents, mostly targeting civilians in districts like Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia and Palma.

In 2019, IS officially recognised ISM as part of ISCAP, strengthening the group's resources and strategic focus. ISM increased its operations, targeting urban centres and key infrastructure, including a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project near Palma. By 2020, the group had taken control of Mocímboa da Praia and disrupted major transportation routes, pushing the state to respond with counterinsurgency efforts.[42]

Since 2021, international interventions by Rwandan security forces and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique have significantly disrupted ISM's activities. Although the group initially resisted these offensives, its capacity for political violence has steadily declined since late 2022. ISM's focus shifted from targeting civilians to state institutions and LNG sites. ISM also became distinct from ISCAP in 2022.[43,44]

By the end of 2023 and into 2024, ISM escalated its operations across northern and southern Mozambique, including in previously untouched areas like Chiure and Mecúfi districts in southern Cabo Delgado. In the first six months of 2024, the group carried out deadly attacks, including kidnappings and massacres, displacing over 200,000 people.[45] Despite international efforts to reclaim territory, ISM exploited the region's weak governance to regain strength. The group remains focused on capturing and controlling territory, following the same strategies used by other IS branches in Iraq, Syria, and Libya.[46] In 2024, these branches carried out a total of 28 terrorist attacks in the DRC and 33 in Mozambique.

ISLAMIC STATE – LIBYA PROVINCE

The Islamic State – Libya Province (IS-LP) was established in 2014. It was formed mainly by Libyan fighters who had participated in conflicts in Syria and Iraq as members of IS. These fighters took advantage of Libya's instability following the 2011 civil war to consolidate its influence. The group was initially organised as the Islamic Youth Shura Council and later pledged allegiance to IS, officially becoming IS-LP.[47] The group secured a stronghold in the city of Derna, which has a longstanding history of jihadist activity.

IS-LP swiftly expanded its influence, with IS leadership recognising three provinces in country: Cyrenaica in the East, Fezzan in the South, and Tripolitania in the West.[48] By early 2015, IS-LP had seized control of Sirte, Muammar Gaddafi's hometown, implementing strict Sharia Law and using the city as a strategic base for operations.[49] Additionally, the neighbouring towns of Nofaliya and Harawa were taken over by the group.

The group orchestrated several high-profile attacks, including the January 2015 assault on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, resulting in nine deaths.[50] In February 2015, IS-LP claimed responsibility for bombings in the eastern town of al-Qubbah, which killed at least 40 people.[51] Additionally, the group conducted mass executions, notably the killing of 21 Egyptian Christians near Sirte in Early 2015.[52]

IS-LP's presence in Libya attracted international concern, prompting military interventions. By late 2016, a coalition of Libyan forces, supported by US airstrikes, expelled the group from Sirte.[53] In January 2017, US airstrikes on an IS-LP base southwest of Sirte reportedly killed over 90 militants.[54] Furthermore, in September 2019, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) claimed airstrikes carried out against the group resulted in the death of 43 IS-LP militants. Despite these setbacks, the group persisted, adapting its tactics to operate as a dispersed insurgency, particularly in Libya's southern regions.[55] As of 2020, IS-LP has mostly operated as a moving insurgency, instead of holding territory that risks being subjected to raids and attacks.[56]

In recent years, the IS-LP has experienced significant setbacks, including the loss of key leaders and a marked reduction in its operational capacity. Notably, there have been no recorded terrorist attacks attributed to IS-LP within Libya since 2022. While the group no longer holds control over territory in the country or carries out numerous attacks, the continued presence and activity of IS on an international scale present a potential risk of IS-LP's resurgence.

ISLAMIC STATE – SOMALIA PROVINCE

Islamic State – Somalia Province (ISS) emerged in late 2015, when Abdul Qadir Mumin, a former al-Shabaab cleric, pledged allegiance to IS along with approximately 20 other fighters. Operating primarily in the Galgala mountains of Puntland, ISS sought to expand its influence in the region.[57]

After being inactive for a year, ISS captured the port town of Qandala in 2016, marking its first significant territorial gain. The group held the town for over a month before being expelled by Puntland Security Forces in December of 2016.[58] Despite its relatively small size compared to rivals al-Shabaab, ISS has conducted several notable attacks. In May 2017, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Bosaso, Puntland's commercial capital, which resulted in multiple casualties.[59]

By late 2019, ISS was considered a significant part of the IS's global network. Despite this status, the group struggled to expand its influence, facing consistent opposition from al-Shabaab, the Somali Armed Forces, and US military operations. In an attempt to broaden its reach, ISS directed its efforts toward Ethiopia, seeking to infiltrate the country and recruit additional fighters. These initiatives were consistently thwarted by Ethiopian security forces, who dismantled ISS operations and apprehended numerous militants, preventing the group from establishing a meaningful presence beyond Somalia's borders.[60]

In May 2024, a US airstrike in northern Somalia targeted Abdul Qadir Mumin, who was allegedly acting as IS's global leader at the time. Although reports suggested he survived, the incident underscores ISS's growing significance within the broader IS network.[61]

In late December 2024, ISS launched a coordinated suicide attack on a Puntland military base near Dharjaale in the Bari region. The assault involved 12 militants and two explosive-laden vehicles, resulting in the deaths of at least 22 Puntland soldiers. Puntland forces repelled the attack, killing several ISS fighters.[62]

In response to ISS escalating activities, Puntland authorities initiated a major offensive in January 2025, targeting ISS hideouts in the Cal Miskaad mountains. The operation led to the seizure of eight jihadist outposts and the deaths of several ISS fighters.[63]

As of January 2025, ISS continues to pose a security threat in Somalia, particularly in Puntland's mountainous regions. The group's resilience and integration into IS's global network highlight the ongoing challenges in countering militant Islamist factions in the Horn of Africa.

ISLAMIC STATE – SINAI PROVINCE

Islamic State – Sinai Province (IS-SP), originally known as Ansar Bait al-Maqdis (ABM), emerged as a prominent militant group in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula following the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Initially focusing on attacks against Israel and the Arab Gas Pipeline to Jordan, ABM shifted its operations towards Egyptian security forces after the 2013 ousting of President Mohamed Morsi. In 2014, ABM pledged allegiance to IS, rebranding itself as IS-SP.[64]

IS-SP has been responsible for numerous high-profile attacks between 2013 and 2023. In October 2014, the group conducted a coordinated assault on Egyptian military checkpoints near El-Arish, resulting in the death of at least 26 soldiers.[65] One year later, IS-SP claimed responsibility for the bombing of Metrojet Flight 9268, a Russian passenger plane which departed from Sharm El Sheikh, leading to the deaths of all 224 individuals on board the plane.[66]

The group continued its insurgency with significant incidents, such as the October 2016 attack on an Egyptian army checkpoint in Bir al-Abed, which resulted in the deaths of 12 soldiers. In July 2020, IS-SP militants launched an assault on the village of Rabaa, temporarily seizing control of several nearby villages before being repelled by Egyptian forces three months later, killing 77 IS-SP operatives.[67] The following month, Egyptian and Bedouin forces killed Salim Salma Said Mahmoud al-Hamadin, a prominent IS-SP leader, during clashes just south of Rafah.[68]

IS-SP was at its most active and most deadly in 2017, carrying out 156 attacks that resulted in 501 fatalities. By 2024, its activity had significantly decreased, largely due to sustained military campaigns by the Egyptian Army in coordination with the Sinai Tribes Union. Additionally, reports suggest that Egyptian authorities have reached amnesty agreements with suspected IS-SP members, offering immunity in exchange for their surrender.[69]

ISLAMIC STATE KHORASAN PROVINCE

Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISK), also known as ISKP, is a regional affiliate of IS operating primarily in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and parts of Central Asia. Formed in 2015, ISK pledged allegiance to IS's central leadership and aims to establish an Islamic caliphate in the historical region of Khorasan, which includes parts of modern-day Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia.

ISK has become one of the most active jihadist groups internationally in recent years. Since its formation, it has carried out numerous attacks beyond its bases in Afghanistan. In 2024, the group was responsible for two of the year's deadliest terrorist incidents: the January attack in Kerman, Iran, which killed at least 95 people, and the March attack in Moscow, Russia, which resulted in at least 144 deaths.[70]

Since its inception, ISK has been linked to 634 attacks and 3,212 deaths. Recent activity has targeted the Russia and Eurasia region, with incidents rising from 11 in 2023 to 18 in 2024. Although the number of attacks remains lower than in sub-Saharan Africa, deaths attributed to the group increased from four to 199 during the same period.

The threat of jihadism in Afghanistan and surrounding countries has been limited until recently. Since the various political and military upheavals that have impacted the region in the years since 2021, radical jihadism had persisted as a security concern until then but had remained a marginal issue, affecting only a small segment of the socio-political landscape.[71]

The departure of Bashar al-Assad from Syria in December 2024, coupled with the change of power in Afghanistan in 2021, has reshaped the regional security landscape. At the same time, a surge in international attacks and foiled plots linked to ISK has underscored the group's growing transnational threat. This subsection examines ISK's expanding influence and reassesses the broader jihadist threat both in the region and globally.

From Inception to Formative Years (2015-2021)

Foundation

Jihadism in the Khorasan region has multiple sources and influences. The ideology gained prominence after the US-led operation that overthrew the Taliban in 2001, which led to increased jihadist activity in Afghanistan. The draw-down of Western combat forces in 2014 did not end the Afghan jihad but instead fuelled ongoing instability driven by internal conflicts and factional disputes.[72]

At the end of 2014, the first IS representatives arrived in Pakistan, distributing leaflets in Pashto and Dari. These leaflets called on local Muslims to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi and join IS's global jihad.[73] Later that year, six senior members of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) also pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi.[74, 75]

By January 26, 2015, the formation of "Wilayat Khorasan" (Khorasan Province) was officially announced by IS spokesperson Abu Muhammed al-Adnani.[76] This followed six months of negotiations between IS leadership in Syria and Iraq and militant factions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Among these groups were former TTP members, led by Hafiz Saeed Orakzai, who became ISK's first emir.[77][78] At the time, IS had already captured the Iraqi city of Mosul and the Syrian city of Raqqa, declared the establishment of a global caliphate, and received pledges of allegiance from other radical jihadist groups in various countries, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria.

ISK was initially thought to have few connections with IS. However, by 2016, it was confirmed that the group had financial, strategic, and communication links with IS leadership in Iraq and Syria.[79] ISK initially consisted of several thousand individuals opposing the government. The group was mainly composed of Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.[80] According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), ISK's core also included members of Pakistani Islamist groups who had fled military operations in northern Pakistan between 2010 and 2011. These individuals referred to themselves as 'muhajerin', meaning refugees or migrants. By the end of 2015, AAN reported that around 1,000 Pakistani migrants were members of ISK in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province.[81]

One of ISK's early strategic regional alliances was with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a terrorist group formed in 1998, primarily composed of Uzbeks and originally based in the mountains of eastern Tajikistan. Historically, the IMU has allied with both the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The group's goal has been to overthrow the Uzbek government and establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan, governed by the application of Sharia law.[82] In August 2015, IMU leader Usman Ghazi pledged allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a video,[83] thereby establishing a close relationship with ISK.

ISK shares core ideological elements with IS, including the goal of establishing a global caliphate governed by a strict interpretation of Islamic law. One of the components of their ideology is takfirism, the practice of declaring other Muslims who reject sharia law as infidels or kafirs, which they use to justify violence against Muslims.[84]

Key Activities and Operations

In its early stages, ISK focused on establishing a foothold in Afghanistan for future expansion. The group initially avoided conflict with the Taliban and other groups in the region, refrained from local taxation, and limited confrontations with regional military authorities.[85] Recruitment remained limited, with several hundred active fighters and a larger number of sympathisers. Initially, ISK received funding from IS in Syria and Iraq. However, as IS in Syria and Iraq struggled to consolidate control in Middle East, this support declined, and ISK began to rely more on other funding.[86] The affiliates of IS in Central Asia were divided between those linked directly to IS leadership in Iraq and Syria (Tajikistan) and those aligned with ISK in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.[87]

ISK maintains a hierarchical leadership structure.[88] The group

has had seven emirs to date. As shown in Figure 4.8, under the leadership of ISK's first emir, Saeed Khan, just one attack resulting in 83 deaths was attributed to the group. Abu Sayed took over as leader in April 2017, but his tenure was short-lived after he was killed in a US drone strike in July 2017. ISK became more active under the leadership of Saad Orakzai, a former TTP commander, who was killed in an airstrike in Afghanistan in 2018. The next ISK emir, al-Khorasani, was appointed by the local ISK leadership council but was demoted by IS in Iraq and Syria due to poor performance.[89] Deaths from ISK attacks declined during his leadership from 814 in 2018 to 225 in 2019.

Since 2020, ISK has been led by Shahab al-Muhajir, who was allegedly a commander in the Haqqani network, an Islamist insurgent group in Afghanistan.[90] Since al-Muhajir took power, ISK has organised several high-profile attacks, including the 2021 Kabul airport attack. Due to the ongoing conflict with the Taliban, over 500 deaths were attributed to ISK in both 2021 and 2022. The lethality of the group's activities declined in 2023, but deaths rose again in 2024, primarily due to international attacks, such as at the Crocus City Hall in Moscow.

FIGURE 4.8

Number of deaths caused by ISK under different leaders, 2016–2024

While ISK deaths peaked during al-Korasani's leadership, they experienced a second surge after al-Muhajir took power in 2020.

Source: Australian Government; TerrorismTracker

US forces in Afghanistan began targeting ISK fighters at the end of 2015. In 2016, a joint US and Afghan counterterrorism operation killed ISK's first leader Hafiz Sayyid Khan and several fighters, further diminishing the group's territory. Taliban attacks also contributed to this decline. In 2017, the US dropped a powerful bomb on ISK positions in Nangarhar province.[91] By mid-2017, the group's territorial control was limited to just three districts in Nangarhar province, with ISK deaths later peaking in 2018.[92]

Evolution after Taliban's Takeover in 2021

Regionalisation and Internationalisation

In 2021, the power dynamics in Afghanistan shifted when the Taliban regained control of the country, following the withdrawal of US and NATO forces after nearly two decades of military presence.

During the US withdrawal, ISK conducted an attack on the Kabul Airport. The bombing killed at least 175 people, including 13 US service members, and left hundreds more injured. The attack is believed to have been orchestrated under the leadership of the current emir, Shahab al-Muhajir.[93] Al-Muhajir was reported killed by Taliban in 2023,[94] but he survived with injuries and continues to lead the group.[95]

ISK rejects the Taliban's legitimacy as an Islamic group and denies its rule over Afghanistan.[96] According to a resolution passed by the Taliban in 2022, Afghanistan operates under an Islamic system of governance, and any armed opposition to this system is deemed rebellion and corruption.[97] Consequently, the Taliban considers ISK's actions illegal and against national interests. Therefore, assisting ISK or maintaining ties with the group in Afghanistan is prohibited.[98] However, despite the declared hostility between ISK and the Taliban, their relationship is complex. Researchers suggest that it is influenced not only by ideological differences but also by competition for influence within the same ideological space and, ultimately, the struggle for power.[99]

A few months after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, ISK expanded its influence across nearly all provinces.[100] The group continues to use suicide bombers, ambushes, and targeted killings. These attacks often focus on civilians and religious or ethnic minorities. Human Rights Watch reported that in the year following the Taliban's takeover, ISK killed or injured 700 members of religious minorities in Afghanistan.[101]

Since 2022, ISK has primarily focused its attacks in northeastern and southern Afghanistan, continuing to target key locations and infrastructure. The group remains active, engaging in violent activities as it attempts to regain influence and challenge local authorities in these regions, which border Pakistan and Tajikistan on the north.

Operating on the north-eastern border area of Afghanistan, ISK targets neighbouring Pakistan. In 2018, total ISK-related deaths in Pakistan peaked, with 236 fatalities. The impact of ISK activity in Pakistan has declined since, with 75 deaths in 2023 and 15 in 2024. Total IS attributed attacks in the country in 2024 stood at 25, similar to the 24 attacks reported the previous year.

FIGURE 4.9

ISK attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, post 2021

Since the Taliban took power in 2021, ISK has concentrated its attacks primarily along the country's border with Pakistan.
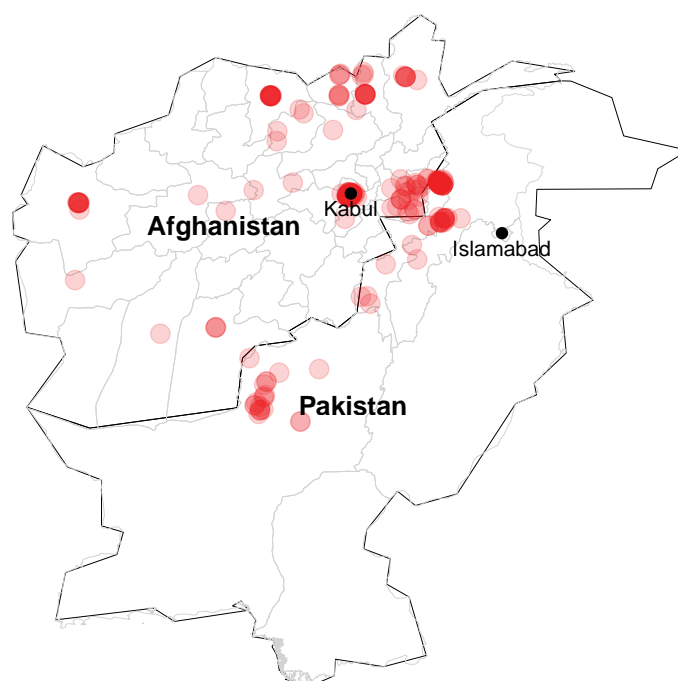
In recent years, ISK has shifted its operational focus, with a decline in the number of attacks claimed or attributed to the group globally but an expansion of its geographical reach. This shift may be an attempt to highlight the Taliban's limited control over border security and attract new recruits from the region. It could also be driven by the Taliban's efforts to suppress ISK following the group's takeover of Afghanistan or a broader strategic adjustment within ISK.102 ISK's propaganda magazine Khorasan Ghag (Voice of Khorasan) reported in late 2023 that the decline in attacks since 2021 was part of a 'strategic silence policy' aimed at reducing the group's visibility within Afghanistan.103

Figure 4.10 shows the proportion of ISK attacks within and outside Afghanistan since 2016. Prior to 2022, ISK attacks were primarily confined to Afghanistan. However, since 2022, attacks within the country have declined, while those outside its borders have risen to a comparable level. This shift may reflect a strategic adjustment by ISK, possibly as a survival tactic in response to being increasingly suppressed in Afghanistan. Faced with diminishing territorial and operational opportunities, the group might be redirecting its activities to regions where it encounters less resistance or can more easily rebuild its networks.

The Threat of ISK

ISK's influence and activities unfold within a complex web of regional and global circumstances. With the group's growing international attacks and increased efforts to mobilise support across the region, understanding the shifting dynamics of foreign influence in Afghanistan is essential. These changes not only shape Afghanistan's internal stability but also impact the broader regional and global security landscape.

Since 2021, ISK has caused more deaths outside Afghanistan than within it, indicating a shift in focus toward high-impact external operations rather than internal control. This trend suggests an expansion of the group's global ambitions, as it seeks to target foreign interests, inspire attacks abroad, and extend its influence beyond Afghanistan. The relative decline in deaths within Afghanistan also reflects ISK's struggle to maintain territorial control or consolidate power locally.

ISK has carried out several large-scale attacks in recent years, drawing significant media and policy attention. One of its most significant attacks in Iran took place in late 2023 during a ceremony commemorating General Qasem Soleimani, who was killed by a US drone strike in January 2020. Multiple explosions targeted the memorial event in Kerman, killing more than 100 people.

In 2024, deaths from ISK attacks increased. On March 22, gunmen stormed Crocus City Hall near Moscow, opening fire on civilians and detonating explosives. The attack caused a roof collapse and fire, killing 133 and injuring 140. ISK later claimed responsibility for the attack. Russian authorities arrested 11 suspects, including the main perpetrators.

FIGURE 4.10

ISK attacks in Afghanistan and the rest of the world, 2016–2024

In the past two years, the number of ISK attacks in Afghanistan has been on par with those outside the country.
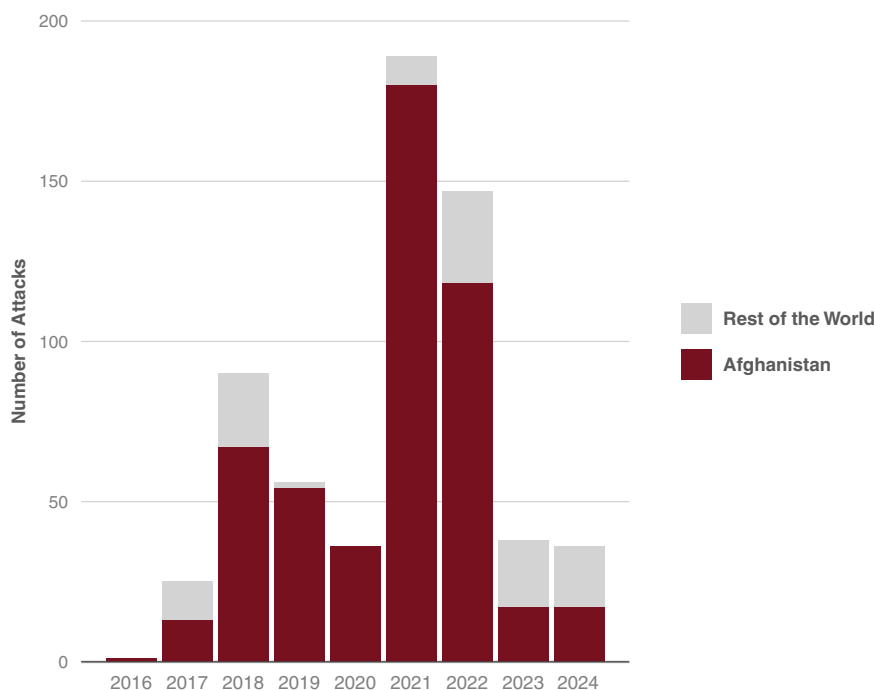
Rest of the World
Afghanistan

Since 2021, ISK has caused more deaths outside Afghanistan than within it, indicating a shift in focus toward high-impact external operations rather than internal control.

Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 4.11

ISK deaths in Afghanistan and the rest of the world, 2016–2024

The percentage of deaths from ISK has increased outside Afghanistan since 2021.
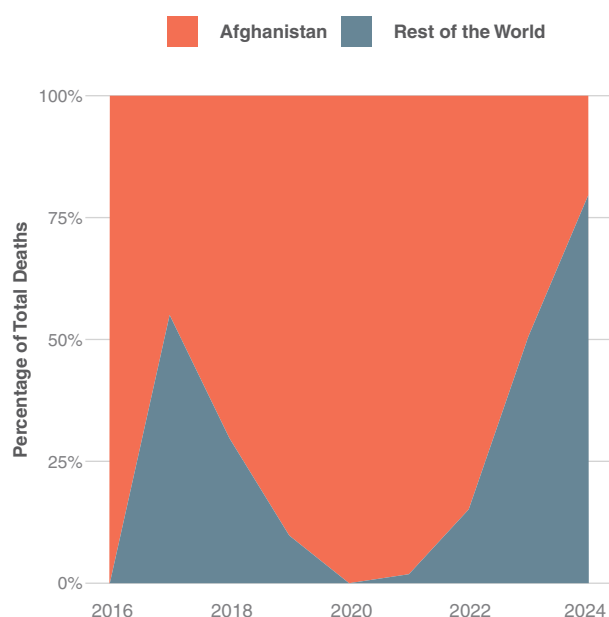
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, ISK has expanded its propaganda efforts, focusing on outreach, recruitment and fundraising across South and Central Asia.[104] As shown in Figure 4.12, the number of propaganda pieces released by ISK has increased since 2022, with a notable rise in content produced in Tajik and Uzbek. While comprehensive data on propaganda in different languages remains limited, Figure 4.12 suggests that ISK has intensified its efforts to gain sympathisers and boost recruitment in Central Asia.

ISK relies on financial networks to sustain its operations, with an estimated $2.5 million in funding accessed through blockchain transactions in 2023.[105] In 2024, the group's membership in the region was estimated to be between one and six thousand, with a strong presence near Tajikistan's southern border provinces, including Badakhshan, Kunduz and Takhar.[106] ISK continues to attract returning fighters from Syria and Iraq, with recruitment efforts bolstered by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. ISK's multilingual media strategy uses Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Uzbek, Tajik, English, and more recently, Russian and Turkish, to target youth and marginalised groups through platforms such as Telegram and Al-Azaim.[107]

As shown in Figure 4.13, foreign influence in Afghanistan has declined since the Taliban regained power in 2021. This trend is evident for the four major powers who had the most influence in the country since 1999: the US, India, Russia and Pakistan. The only exception is Uzbekistan, which has maintained its influence, though its overall impact on Afghanistan remains limited compared to the declining influence of the US or Russia.[108] This shift may weaken the ability of traditional powers to counteract ISK's activities. With the Taliban's focus on consolidating internal control, the potential space for other actors, such as ISK, to expand their influence may increase,

FIGURE 4.12

ISK propaganda by language, 2022–2024

In the past two years, there has been a notable increase in reported ISK propaganda pieces.
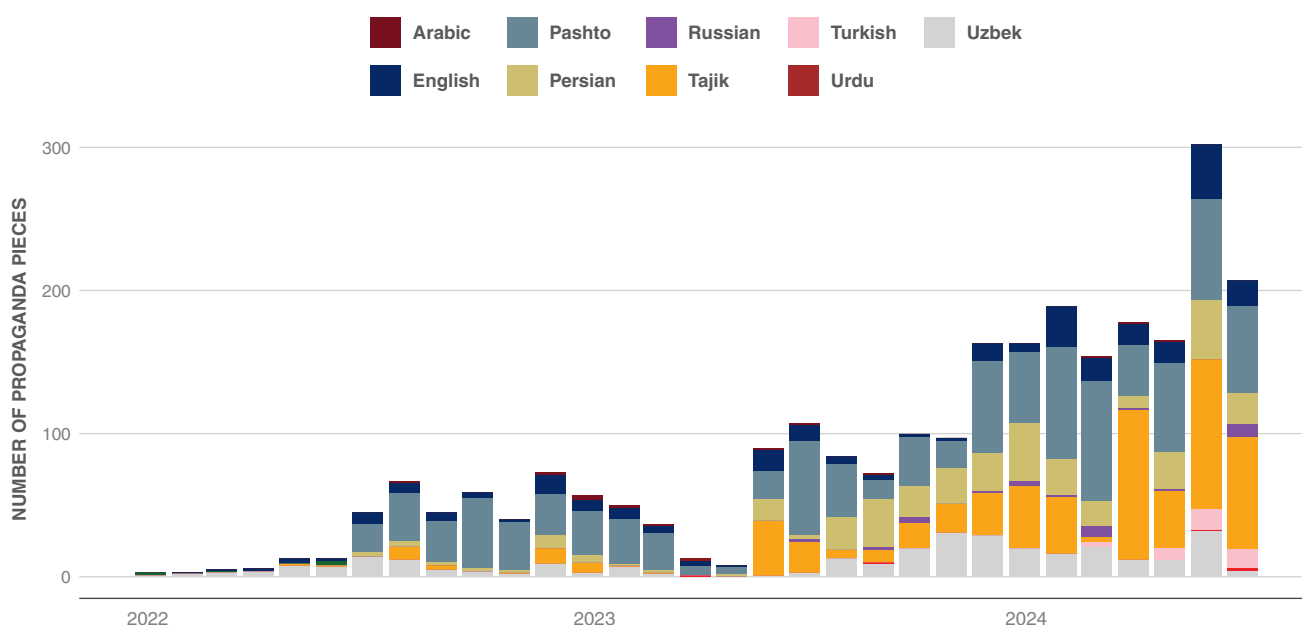
Source: Centre for Information Resilience

especially in regions with limited state authority. Additionally, the reduction in foreign presence means that ISK may face less direct military opposition from external powers, allowing them to operate more freely and potentially target foreign interests more aggressively beyond the country.

Concerns over the stability of the Afghan border have existed for many years, particularly among neighbouring countries like Tajikistan, which view it as a critical security challenge in terms of radicalisation and organised crime.[109] In this context, regional organisations have repeatedly emphasised the importance of reinforcing border security. For instance, in November 2024, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) announced the adoption of a Targeted Intergovernmental Program aimed at strengthening the Tajik-Afghan border, later supported by Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.[110] However, local media in Tajikistan highlighted that similar promises of assistance were made by the CSTO as early as 2017, with little to no significant actions undertaken to reinforce the border since then.[111]

In 2024, the Taliban claimed that Afghanistan is safe and that there is no need for a security belt around the country, while also stating that drugs have been completely banned.[112] Despite the ban, reports suggest that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan increased by 19 per cent between 2023 and 2024, with production shifting from the southwest to the northeast.[113]

Tajikistan faces significant threats from ISK, which has intensified recruitment, expanded training facilities, and increased attacks near the country's border with Afghanistan.[114] Tajiks were implicated in several major attacks and arrests in 2024.[115] Domestic policies restricting religious practices, such as hijab bans, may inadvertently fuel radicalisation.[116]

Regional discussions continue on countering these threats, alongside shifting Russian policies toward the Taliban. ISK's attacks in Russia may be in part a response to growing Russian engagement with the Taliban. The growing strength of ISK in Afghanistan, driven in part by weaknesses in Taliban governance, poses a challenge for Russia and its Central Asian partners. As a result, there is increasing pressure to develop strategies to counter this threat.[117] Simultaneously, between January and August 2024, Russian law enforcement thwarted 110 terrorist attacks and detained 1,050 people.[118] This coincided with a significant increase in expulsions from Russia, after the ISK attack near Moscow, with over 80,000 migrants expelled in 2024, nearly doubling the 44,200 expulsions from the previous year.[119] Additionally, in December 2024, President Putin signed a law that could potentially remove the Taliban from Russia's list of banned organisations.[120] Meanwhile, members of the CSTO convened in Moscow to discuss the military-political situation in Afghanistan and the extremist threat posed by ISK.[121]

The situation in Afghanistan remains crucial for the future trajectory of ISK and its threat to other countries, including neighbouring states and major global powers. As the Taliban consolidates its control, the ability of ISK to operate and expand both within Afghanistan and beyond is a key point of international concern. Governments have expressed significant concern over the growing external threat posed by ISK, particularly in countries like the UK, where it is considered the most serious overseas Islamist threat.[122] The European Union, Russia and Central Asian countries are strengthening security and counterterrorism efforts.[123] Whether ISK expands its reach or is contained will be a key factor in shaping its ongoing international threat, keeping it at the forefront of global counterterrorism priorities.

FIGURE 4.13

Foreign influence in Afghanistan, five countries with greatest influence, 2000–2022

As captured by the measures of the Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity (FBIC), the influence of the US, Russia, India and Pakistan has declined in Afghanistan in the past three years.
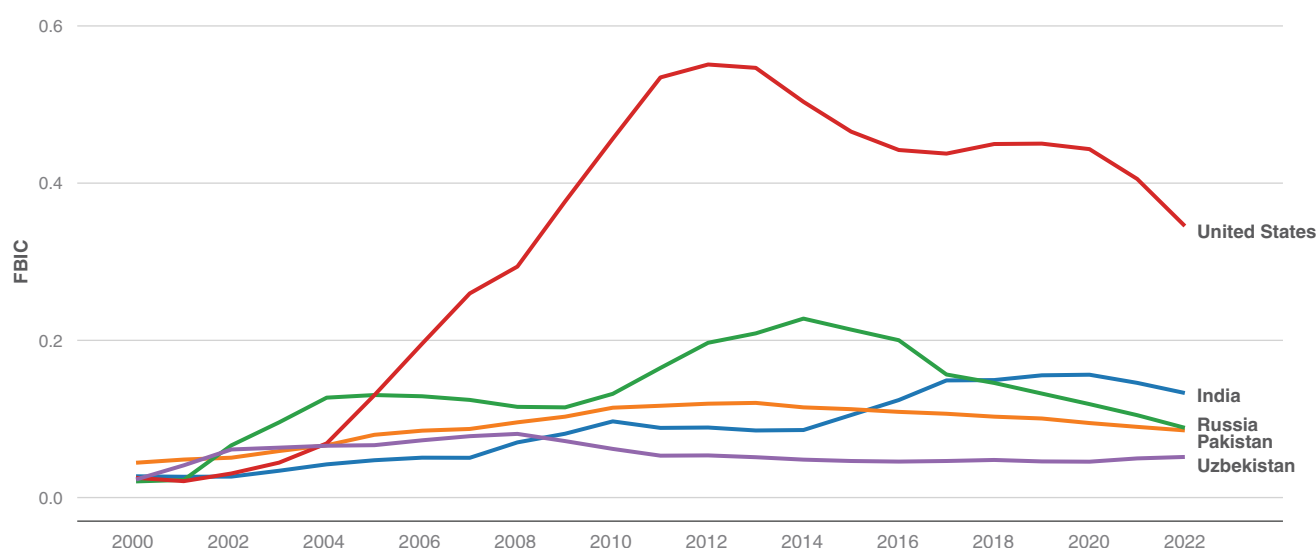
Source: FBIC; IEP Calculations

Expert
Contributions

Islamic State Khurasan Province's International Expansion and Growing Online Activities

Tech Against Terrorism Analysis

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Introduction

Islamic State's (IS) external operations[1] threat have undergone a fundamental shift, evolving from a predominantly centrally-directed enterprise into a dynamic, multi-vector network of regional branches across Asia and Africa. These branches have not only demonstrated the intent but also the growing capability to orchestrate international terrorist attacks in the West, reshaping the global security landscape. Among them, Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP), IS' Afghanistan-Pakistan branch[2], has emerged as the organisation's most active external affiliate. The group is unusual in that it does not control significant territory, and its militant attacks within the region have declined, but it has nonetheless dramatically expanded[3] its external operations capacity and developed a sophisticated online apparatus. ISKP has been able to turn its territorial weakness into a strength by becoming more difficult to locate and launch attacks against, adopting a more flexible and elusive operational model based on guerilla tactics and urban terrorism. By scaling back its insurgent focus, it has increasingly prioritized its focus on the digital battlefield. Crucially, much of its external plotting activity has been hybrid in nature, whereby followers were not trained and deployed by ISKP directly but were instead remotely guided in tactics, target selection, and weapons procurement by official ISKP members through communication on online platforms[4]. This increasing exploitation of digital infrastructure raises pressing questions: How and why is ISKP leveraging the internet so effectively, and what implications does this have for counterterrorism efforts?

This paper will examine how ISKP has strategically exploited digital platforms to expand its influence, recruit members, fundraise, and mobilise followers to violence. Tech Against Terrorism assesses that the group's regional and international ambitions are fundamentally dependent on its ability to harness digital infrastructure, thereby demonstrating that ISKP's growing operational success is directly tied to its online capabilities. This paper will explore how, at the level of regional operations, the Al-Azaim Foundation for

Media Production has become an integral instrument for expanding the group's influence, shaping regional perceptions of its strength, and maintaining its strategic relevance.[5] This digital strategy has enabled ISKP to mobilise, coordinate, and conduct attacks against foreign nationals across the region. The second half of this paper will focus on ISKP's transformation into an IS branch with significant international capabilities. It will examine how the group has expanded its propaganda dissemination to reach previously inaccessible audiences through targeted messaging and increasingly multilingual production. Ultimately, this paper will argue that the group's successful incitement of violence and the growth in its supporter base highlights the effectiveness—and danger—of its sustained digital strategy.

The implications are clear: ISKP's sophisticated online strategy directly enables its militant and external operations, resulting in more attacks across a wider geographical area. Given the group's dispersed and highly covert nature, traditional military measures alone are insufficient to neutralise the threat. Consequently, it is paramount that governments, organisations, tech platforms, financial institutions, and other private industry entities develop and implement a coordinated approach to countering and degrading ISKP's online infrastructure and operational capacity. Tech Against Terrorism urges tech platforms to increase efforts to monitor and remove terrorist content, with regulators needing stronger powers to enforce accountability.[6] Action taken to remove and suppress ISKP's online content is just as important as kinetic military action.

Use of the Internet to Project Power at a Regional Level

ISKP has leveraged the internet as a primary instrument for amplifying the projection of power beyond its territorial area of operations and shaping regional perceptions of its strength and influence.[7] Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the group has increasingly relied on its online presence

to maintain strategic relevance while facing intensified counterterrorism raids. Through sophisticated media operations and digital propaganda, ISKP has exaggerated its apparent operational capabilities and created a discrepancy between its perceived and actual strength. This digital strategy serves multiple purposes: it helps to attract potential recruits, maintains psychological pressure on adversaries, and advances the group's broader goal of regional expansion. ISKP also uses dedicated propaganda channels, including magazines and encrypted messaging channels, to maintain active crowdfunding campaigns using Monero, a privacy-based cryptocurrency and money transfers via TRC20 tokens.[8]

Central to this outreach effort is the Al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production, which emerged from an ecosystem of competing but aligned pro-IS propaganda outlets to become the chief media organ used by ISKP. While initially focused narrowly on religious discourse, Al-Azaim has evolved in parallel with ISKP's growing regional ambitions to become a sophisticated multimedia platform addressing religious, political, social, and military issues at both regional and global levels. ISKP's outreach and propaganda campaigns exploit the dynamics of regional conflict and militant infrastructures by fusing local grievances with its global agenda. Al-Azaim's linguistic reach is particularly notable, with content produced in a lengthening list of languages, including Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Uzbek, Tajik, English, and more recently, Russian and Turkish. This versatility enables ISKP to craft culturally resonant messages for diverse audiences across South Asia, Central Asia, and beyond.[9] Tech Against Terrorism has observed that, in recent campaigns, Al-Azaim and aligned outlets have intensified regional outreach, producing content that ranges from high quality online magazines to AI generated video content. Notable examples include a pro-ISKP AI video news program in Pashto called "Khurasan TV" and the flagship English language Voice of Khurasan magazine. This high volume of propaganda output in local and regional languages, with customised messaging and narratives to appeal to specifically identified ethnolinguistic target audience segments, has resulted in a growth of influence and support throughout South and Central Asia.[10] By maintaining consistent messaging across multiple platforms and languages, Al-Azaim has enabled ISKP to project an image of organisational strength and operational capability that often exceeds its true extent. These communication networks, which imply an extensive organisation thereafter, supply the infrastructure for achieving strategic objectives which typically require substantial territorial control or military capability.

The success of this strategy manifests most importantly in ISKP's ability to inspire, coordinate, and conduct attacks against foreign nationals across the region. ISKP propaganda explicitly advocates targeted attacks against Chinese, Russian, and Central Asian nationals as retaliation for the perceived anti-Muslim policies enacted by such nationals' home countries.[11] Issues such as China's treatment of Uyghurs and Russia's actions in the Caucasus are frequently emphasised by way of justification. This selective but comprehensive targeting serves multiple strategic objectives. A primary objective of attacks on foreign nationals is to undermine the Taliban's authority by demonstrating their inability to provide security for foreign investments and diplomatic personnel in Afghanistan. A second objective is to provoke international reactions that could destabilize diplomatic and economic relationships across the region. A third objective is to capitalise on existing regional tensions for the purpose of creating conditions of instability that ISKP believes could facilitate territorial expansion.

ISKP appears to have been successful in advancing these strategic objectives. Since the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in July 2021, ISKP has steadily escalated its campaign of violence against foreign nationals. Significantly, in August 2021, a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport's Abbey Gate killed American soldiers and scores of other bystanders.[12] The same day, two Pakistani nationals possessing an explosive device were detained in the vicinity of the Turkmenistan embassy. In September 2022, the Al-Azaim Foundation issued threats of further attacks on diplomatic targets in Afghanistan, specifically naming those from China, Iran, and India. On January 11, 2023, these threats materialsed with a suicide bombing targeting a Chinese diplomatic delegation at the Afghan Foreign Ministry in Kabul.[13] Most recently, on January 22, 2025, ISKP fatally shot a Chinese national and mine worker in Afghanistan's Takhar province, near the border with Tajikistan.[14] These attacks have undermined the Taliban's ability to attract foreign direct investment and economic development projects. The Chinese government, for instance, has increased pressure on the Taliban to better secure its citizens and interests in Afghanistan.[15] The cumulative effect has been a deterioration of regional stability, with affected nations adopting increasingly aggressive security postures while reducing diplomatic and economic engagement with Afghanistan. This has created precisely the conditions of isolation and instability that ISKP seeks to exploit, while also serving to make the group appear successful and more dangerous.

Use of the Internet to Project Power at an International Level

In the past four years, ISKP has transformed from a militant group with a regional focus into an organisation with expansive international capabilities, largely driven by its sophisticated exploitation of digital platforms.[16] A pivotal factor in this transformation is Al-Azaim's multilingual propaganda campaign, which strategically targets the growing Afghan and Central Asian diasporas in Europe and North America. By extending its reach beyond Asia, ISKP strengthens its sphere of influence, widening its support base far beyond its regional origins.

A milestone in Al-Azaim's expansion was the launch of its English-language magazine, Voice of Khurasan, in January 2022. This publication has attracted contributors from diverse backgrounds, including those from Canada, Australia, Italy, and Tajikistan, reflecting ISKP's successful extraterritorial expansion of its ideological appeal. Al-Azaim has further strengthened

its media presence through strategic partnerships with other pro-IS media entities. A significant development was its collaboration with Fursan al-Tarjuma, an umbrella organisation established in March 2023 that coordinates at least 14 pro-IS media groups. Additionally, Al-Azaim has partnered with the I'lam Foundation archive, which serves as a key source of translated official IS content for supporter networks both within and outside the EU, available on the surface and dark web. These strategic media partnerships significantly amplify ISKP's reach by increasing the accessibility and visibility of its propaganda. By making content easier to find and available in multiple languages, Al-Azaim enhances ISKP's potential to radicalise supporters across multiple continents, further solidifying its global influence.

ISKP has also considerably intensified the online incitement of its supporters to carry out violence abroad. The first escalation in this incitement campaign was prompted by events that took place in Stockholm, Sweden, on January 21, 2023, when Rasmus Paludan, the leader of the far-right Danish party "Hard Line", stood in front of the Turkish embassy and burnt a copy of the Quran on video. By way of response, ISKP, in its Pashto language Khurasan Ghag magazine, devoted several pages to issuing threats and calling for attacks against targets in Sweden and, in general, against European citizens wherever they could be found.[17] This campaign of incitement intensified further following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel: ISKP moved quickly and aggressively to capitalise on hostile sentiments stirred up throughout the Muslim world as a result of the ensuing protracted conflict in Gaza. ISKP created a high volume of propaganda criticising, threatening, and urging attacks against Israeli targets as well as against Western states that support Israel. In its Voice of Khurasan magazine, for instance, ISKP published an English translation of an editorial from IS's official al-Naba newsletter that urged its supporters to participate in its post-October 7 propaganda campaign.[18] In addition, it encouraged supporters to carry out attacks against Jewish neighbourhoods in America and Europe and on Israeli and Western embassies, synagogues, and Israeli economic interests globally. In the same issue, Al-Azaim included instructions in a full-page infographic titled "Practical Ways to Confront the Jews" which called upon supporters to kill Jews wherever they could be found, participate in IS' anti-Jewish propaganda campaign and conduct cyberattacks on websites affiliated with Jews.[19] ISKP suggested that supporters choose weapons such as Molotov cocktails, crossbows, guns acquired on the black market, pipe guns, nail guns, vehicles, and knives.

ISKP and aligned pro-IS outlets launched a similarly intense incitement campaign after the Crocus City Hall raid in Moscow, Russia on 22 March 2024. This campaign emphasised specific countries and targets which should be attacked and additionally provided tactical advice and options for relevant weaponry. In an issue of Voice of Khurasan magazine, it featured a full-page image of an ISKP jihadist wearing camouflage with a rifle and box of explosives on a train with a sign behind him saying "Welcome to Europe" accompanied by the text "Last call before exit." The post-Moscow campaign mostly focused on large sporting events.[20] This particular escalation in ISKP's event-driven incitement campaign is marked by increasingly specific tactical guidance and target selection. Furthermore, it represents an evolution in the group's approach to inspiring attacks abroad and demonstrates the increasing sophistication of its ability to exploit global events and mobilise violence against both traditional and emerging target sets.

ISKP has poured considerable resources into building up its external operations and guided plot capabilities. This increased resourcing is evident in the rise in international plots in 2024 when compared to the previous year. Notably, many of these plots were hybrid operations, whereby followers were not directly trained and deployed by ISKP but instead received remote instruction in tactics, target selection, and weapons procurement from official ISKP members by means of online platforms.[21] This is a clear practical application of the system that the group has developed whereby selected "officials" of ISKP provide online advice and support to followers willing to carry out attacks abroad. This support involves the provision of DIY manuals on making IEDs, detonators, craft-made suppressors, and drone-use. ISKP instructors are readily available to answer the plotters' questions and coach them on operational security practices and more.

These developments highlight how ISKP has effectively leveraged online platforms to transform its ability to project power internationally. The group's sophisticated use of digital infrastructure has enabled it to spread its propaganda beyond Asia, radicalising and mobilising new communities across diverse geographical regions. This expansion has affected a striking collateral shift in ISKP's operational methodology, as the group can now establish and coordinate operational cells across multiple continents simultaneously and remotely by providing online guidance. The shift to enhance digital operations serves as a significant force multiplier, enabling ISKP to reach previously inaccessible audiences with targeted messaging while providing operational guidance without physical presence.

A testament to the effectiveness of this approach is the marked diversification in the backgrounds of those implicated in ISKP-related activities abroad. Historically, international plots were primarily associated with Central Asians and predominantly Tajiks.[22] This resulted from an intentional decision by ISKP to appeal to a wider Central Asian audience in order to expand its influence and recruitment within and beyond Afghanistan's borders. However, in the latter half of 2023, this diversification accelerated, with the national and ethnic backgrounds of those involved in ISKP-related operations broadening noticeably. The group's success in increasing their appeal to a broader range of Central Asian backgrounds was illustrated in July 2023, when coordinated law enforcement operations in Germany and the Netherlands resulted in the arrest of individuals from Tajik, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz backgrounds.[23] Arrests which took place in early 2024 showed a yet wider range of nationalities involved in ISKP plots. In January 2024, Austrian authorities disrupted an ISKP cell in Vienna comprising individuals of Chechen

and Bosnian descent, suggesting a successful expansion of the group's influence into the Caucasus and Balkan regions.[24] Similarly, February 2024 saw Turkish authorities dismantle a network comprising Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijani, and Sudanese nationals and in March 2024, German police arrested two ISKP-linked Afghan nationals accused of plotting an attack on the Swedish parliament.[25,26] These arrests underscore the group's expanding global appeal and the effectiveness of its growing propaganda efforts.

The implications of this evolution are significant for counterterrorism efforts. ISKP's sophisticated digital infrastructure enables it to provide detailed operational guidance while bypassing traditional counterterrorism measures focused on physical movement and training camps. The group's demonstrated ability to recruit across diverse nationalities, incite violence, and establish operational networks from Central Asia to North America underscores how online platforms have fundamentally transformed the nature of the threat landscape.[27]

Conclusion

ISKP's strategic exploitation of digital platforms, including social media, messaging, file-sharing platforms, and archiving sites, has enabled it to overcome traditional limitations of territorial control and physical presence, creating a dynamic, multi-vector threat with expanding international capabilities. The group's distinctive multilingual propaganda strategy, spearheaded by the Al-Azaim Foundation, represents a form of "digital caliphate" that in some aspects rivals IS's multilingual online presence during the height of the caliphate era and has enabled it to simultaneously pursue regional destabilisation and global operational reach in ways that set it apart from other IS branches. Tech Against Terrorism's analysis shows this dual-track approach has yielded significant results. Regionally, ISKP has successfully executed high-profile attacks against foreign interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan while using targeted propaganda in local languages to exploit regional grievances. Globally, the group has demonstrated its expanded reach through devastating attacks in Iran, Türkiye, and Russia in 2024 while establishing operational networks extending into North America and Europe. Its propaganda now provides increasingly specific tactical guidance, transforming online platforms into operational planning tools. By remotely guiding operatives, ISKP can now coordinate attacks across multiple continents without physical training infrastructure. The group's capacity is likely to increase as it grows its influence to reach a broader range of ethno-linguistic elements from Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and elsewhere situated in the West, providing ISKP with additional opportunities for recruitment and operational planning. This threat is increasingly difficult for intelligence and law enforcement agencies to detect, monitor, and disrupt. However, this also creates an opportunity to place greater focus on the online communications space where much of this activity is concentrated and planned. Given ISKP's strategic de-emphasizing of territorial conquest, its sophisticated digital strategy, and demonstrated ability to inspire and coordinate attacks globally,

traditional military measures alone are insufficient to counter its evolving threat. A more comprehensive approach is essential - one that prioritizes enhanced online counterterrorism efforts, disruption of ISKP's digital ecosystem, and targeted counter-radicalisation messaging to undermine its ideological appeal.[28] The mere existence of ISKP's propaganda online represents a strategic victory given the digitalisation of militant warfare. Tech Against Terrorism continues to stress that information warfare is just as important as traditional military means in combating ISKP.[29] Accordingly, it is paramount that governments, organizations, and the private sector work together to remove and suppress ISKP's online content. Only through such a multifaceted strategy can the international community effectively mitigate ISKP's growing influence and prevent future attacks.

Ten Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War

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The Ukrainian military has gained respect for holding out against its numerically and technologically superior enemy through innovative tactics and technology. These adaptations, often finding cheaper and asymmetrical solutions to countering a stronger adversary, have also provided potential blueprints for terrorists to adopt. This analysis aims to focus on the twenty-first-century war tactics being employed in the Russia-Ukraine war to gain fresh insights into what types of strategies terrorists will employ and how countries will need to counter them.

Wars are not merely battles of weapons and resolve; they are testing grounds for the future and unique laboratories for technological and strategic advancements. The Russia-Ukraine war has been depicted as the first commercial space war, the first full-scale drone war, the first 3D printing war and the first Artificial Intelligence (AI) war. At the same time, the war is stealthily ushering in a new age of Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS) that are reinventing air, land and naval warfare.

War tactics and strategies are open source. With round-the-clock international news and social media coverage, terrorists worldwide can monitor the unfolding war in real time by accessing encrypted messaging apps, social media platforms, image boards, video-sharing platforms, and the dark web.

Both sides in the conflict have integrated drones into every aspect of fighting, from precision fire and strike coordination to intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR) and psychological operations. Kyiv has earned the nickname "Mil-Tech Valley", making Ukraine arguably a leader in military robotics. Drones have become the eyes of the battlefield.[1] A special reconnaissance drone team called "ochi" effectively give eyes to their artillery helping them to identify targets. The drones are linked to Starlink satellites of the American company SpaceX which supplies high-speed internet connection so everything the drone sees can be streamed to nearby brigades.

Drones have become the definitive weapons fielded in the Russia-Ukraine war. Large surveillance drones patrol high above while smaller drones (first-person view drones or FPVs), including the small Mavic quadcopter, are used for surveillance and to drop small munitions (grenades, mortar shells, bottles of petrol). The Ukrainian MOD bought these in bulk – 8,200 DJI drones for only $3,650 each.[2] Already in 2023, Ukrainian high-school students built drones by welding Chinese-supplied components on to carbon-fibre frames costing $350

a piece, they were later strapped with 2-3 pound explosives in order immobilize armored vehicles and kill artillery brigade operators. The war also introduced the large Drone Hunter F700, a six-rotor drone equipped with radar-supported autonomous technology that can launch webs to capture smaller enemy drones.

Drones allow combatants to conduct operations remotely, reducing their exposure to direct combat risks. Drones are extremely economical. Recent advancements in commercially available drones have equipped them with high-level sensors, user-friendly controls, and first-person view capabilities at a lower cost than military-grade systems. These drones, while less durable and less protected than their military grade counterparts, allow forces to absorb losses more easily.

Drones are challenging Western dominance in battlefield economics. The cost implications are substantial if a $500 drone can take out a tank, or if neutralizing a $25,000 drone requires a $250,000 missile. This can impact the balance of power and has heralded greater asymmetry in war.[3]

Ukraine launched an ambitious "Million Drone Army" program to leverage the power of unmanned aerial vehicles and AI-enabled drones. The programme has significantly bolstered its military capabilities against Russian forces. By 2024, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry had supplied approximately 1.2 million unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to its army, encompassing reconnaissance UAVs, strike drones, and FPV kamikaze systems.[4]

This large-scale deployment has enabled Ukraine to conduct deep strikes on Russian logistics hubs, ammunition warehouses, and other strategic targets, thereby alleviating pressure on Ukrainian frontlines.[5] The program's success is further underscored by the establishment of the Unmanned Systems Forces in June 2024, aiming to field 10,000 drone specialists by the end of 2025.[6] Financially, Ukraine has committed substantial resources to this endeavor, allocating $60 million monthly for new drones to support combat units.[7]

In December 2024, Ukraine deployed an all-robot assault on a Russian position for the first time. It utilized dozens of remote-controlled vehicles mounted with machine guns and unmanned kamikaze drones, indicating Ukraine's growing reliance on technology to mitigate its manpower shortages.

The Ukrainian military has begun integrating cutting-edge advancement by deploying vehicles with robotic machine guns, mine layers and electronic warfare systems. This involves modifying drone bodies by replacing traditional radio-electronic components with fiber-optic systems, significantly improving control over long distances. Fiber-optic drones are immune to terrain-related signal degradation and operate at low altitudes (20 to 50 meters), making them harder to detect. Additionally, they evade electronic reconnaissance by emitting no radio signals, enhancing Ukraine's stealth and operational effectiveness on the battlefield.

Russia is responding in kind with its new Shahed-136 suicide drones that use GPS technology to navigate. Packed with 4G data modems and Ukrainian SIM cards, they can travel using Ukrainian cell-phone towers and Chinese satellite navigation antennas, helping them to dodge Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) defenses. Russia hopes to launch autonomous drone salvos in the future.

More recently, AI has been introduced to boost such weapons. AI can process massive data and leveraging algorithms to identify and prioritize potential targets. Drones are equipped with various sensors, including high-resolution cameras, infrared sensors, radar, and LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). AI systems are being trained to recognize objects (vehicles, buildings, or people) with deep learning models to get a comprehensive view of the environment in real-time to deliver munitions with high precision.

Many remote-controlled machines produced by Ukraine, ranging from long-range aircraft and attack boats to inexpensive FPV kamikaze drones, are early versions of weapons that can eventually operate autonomously with AI. Depending on the level of autonomy programmed into the drone, the AI can either autonomously decide to strike or assist human operators by suggesting targets. Autonomous systems operate within predefined rules of engagement, while human operators typically make the final decision. In most cases humans are asked to confirm selected targets and information is sent to Ukrainian battle management systems. This has enabled the time of detection of a target to its destruction to be reduced to approximately 30 seconds. Sometimes AI can operate with a high degree of autonomy, making split-second decisions based on complex data analysis. While highly effective in modern warfare, it raises significant ethical and legal concerns.

Drone Swarms

The Ukraine conflict has underscored the advantages of deploying multiple drones simultaneously for operational advantage. Napoleon Bonapart employed the tactic of deploying his forces at multiple points of enemy weakness, allowing him to defeat armies larger than his own. He attacked the enemy as a cohesive system and created synergetic effects.

Transitioning to a theory of warfare for swarm weapons, going beyond just mass, a swarm of drones can exploit this same principle of maneuver to attack the enemy system at hundreds of dispersed weak points simultaneously. The effectiveness of swarming tactics relies on the drones' ability to communicate, coordinate,

and act cohesively. Employed as a system to attack a system, militaries can multiply the effects a swarm weapon by exploiting synergetic effects to gain a larger operational advantage.

Over the past year Ukraine has been deploying swarms of 3 to 10 drones.[8] In December 2024, the Ukrainian national guard brigade orchestrated an all-robot combined-arms operation, mixing crawling and flying drones for an assault on Russian positions in Kharkiv Oblast in northern Ukraine. The Ukrainian operation involved remote-controlled flying surveillance and minelaying drones, one-way explosive robots on the ground and in the air as well as gun-armed ground robots. [9]

Crowdsourcing Corporates and Volunteer Civilian Forces

The Russia-Ukraine war has also been depicted as the first commercial space war. Corporates are using Ukraine as a hotbed to testbed their military technology and latest AI tech. SpaceX has helped ensure Ukraine's access to high-speed internet providing the backbone of Ukraine's military communications, and, according to Mykhailo Federov,[10] "the blood of our entire communications infrastructure."[11]

Ukrainian intelligence analysts use Palantir's MetaConstellation tool to quickly access commercial satellite data through AI-assisted searches, providing crucial information when and where it's needed. It utilizes Palantir's AI software to analyze open-source data, satellite imagery, and drone footage, creating reports from the ground that present military options to commanders.[12]

Ukrainian forces have also reinforced their daily intelligence work with the help of civilians with cyber expertise who report Russian movements creating an extensive network. Deep State Map, initiated by Ukrainian volunteers provides real-time updates on front-line changes, military unit locations, and liberated territories. A crucial resource for both citizens and military personnel, it demonstrates the power of open-source intelligence. An IT army of international and Ukrainian volunteer hackers also work with the defense ministry to conduct offensive cyberwarfare operations that target Russian infrastructure and websites. The IT army is organized through a Telegram channel where new Russian targets are listed for volunteers to attack.

Supported by the Ukrainian government, drones are crowd-sourced worldwide through a UNITED24 platform "Army of Drones" initiative that focuses on fundraising for the procurement, delivery, and maintenance of professional drones for aerial reconnaissance and training pilots.

New technology is openly sourced. Ukrainian entrepreneurs, engineers and military units are using code found online and components from hobbyist computers like Raspberry Pi that can be purchased from hardware stores or Best Buy.

Naval Drones to Attack Ships

Ukraine's use of unmanned surface vehicles (USV) has given the world a genuine view of what large-scale

future naval warfare might look like and how naval drones can impact naval security. Autonomous drones present a significant threat to naval fleets. Ukraine has demonstrated this by repelling large-scale Russian mechanized attacks and crippling Russia's Black Sea Fleet. It will be more challenging to defend port infrastructure and ships in harbour – the targets are obvious and a weaker power without a navy can pose a serious asymmetric threat.

Ukraine has used remote-controlled boat drones packed with explosive to attack Russia's fleet located off the coast of Sevastopol. According to unofficial reports, an amphibious Russian landing ship, the $70 million Ivanovets, sank after it was targeted with sea drones, each carrying approximately 300 kilograms of explosives.[13] According to multiple news agencies, at least 20 medium to large Russian naval vessels have been sunk in the Black Sea.[14] (Carey, Kostenko and Pennington, 2024).

According to Chinese analysts, USVs have five advantages in combat: effective concealment, low cost to manufacture and use, strong destructive ability, intelligent modes of control, and potential to operate autonomously with diversified attack modes. USVs have greater explosive power than air strikes and can "harness wolf group tactics" for greater destructive power.[15]

In January 2025, NATO launched its new mission "Baltic Sentry", which provides enhanced surveillance in the Baltic Sea against acts of sabotage, where at least 11 undersea cables have been damaged since October 2023.[16] More than 95% of internet traffic is carried via undersea cables, with some 1.3 million kilometers of such cabling securing an estimated $10 trillion dollars of international trade daily.[17] The success of USVs on the Baltic Sea Fleet and the most recent acts of sabotage of sea cables might inspire new terrorist tactics. Houthi rebels have proven capability of hijacking ships in the Red Sea.[18] Ukraine has proven that a nation without a navy can pose a serious asymmetric threat and Russia has revealed the vulnerability of undersea cables.

Printing War Tools

Ukraine is the new laboratory for 3D printing aided by multiple states, companies and organizations. Tech Against Tanks connects 3D printing support efforts, producing items such as window barricades, tourniquets, and diversionary mines. Ukraine receives essential lifesaving gadgets at cost from WildBees Poland, which is part of a global network of 20 countries with "BeeHives" that produce items using 3D printers. The US donated Warp SPEE3D metal 3D printers that allow engineers to quickly manufacture metal parts needed for repairing damaged machines in real-time in combat zones.

Since Ukraine is greatly underequipped compared to Russian military forces and armor, 3D printing is an important strategic enabler allowing Ukraine to print crucial munitions including artillery shells. Grenades, once obsolete, are now being dropped directly onto targets, equipped with 3D-printed stabilizing fins for accuracy.

3D printing can also create futuristic new weapons: gun turrets with autonomous targeting that can reach targets up to 1,000 meters away with A.I.-trained software, guns that can shoot targets using a video game controller as well as bombs strapped to racing drones with night vision that hunt in the dark.

PSYOPS

Ukrainians have employed psychological operations (PSYOPs) effectively in the ongoing conflict with Russia to influence enemy forces, they bolster domestic morale, and sway international opinion. Ukrainians use social media, and propaganda to highlight Russian military failures, high casualty rates, and logistical problems. Messages are crafted to sow doubt among Russian troops about their mission and leadership.

Ukraine launched surrender campaigns encouraging Russian soldiers to surrender safely. Ukrainian media and social media platforms mock Russian military leaders with memes, videos, and viral posts to amplify their narratives. Heartwarming or tragic stories of civilians resisting occupation are widely shared to garner international sympathy and keep global attention on the conflict to help galvanize international support for sanctions and military aid. Figures like the "Ghost of Kyiv" (a supposed ace fighter pilot) or the defiant defenders of Snake Island became symbols of resistance. Ukraine has also used misinformation and disinformation to mislead Russian forces about the timing and location of offensives, such as the Kherson and Kharkiv counteroffensives in 2022.

While Ukrainian PSYOPs have been highly innovative, they face challenges. Russia also conducts extensive propaganda and censorship to suppress Ukrainian narratives and saturate the information space making the global information space so crowded that it is difficult to sustain attention on Ukrainian messages. Nonetheless, Ukraine's PSYOPs have been widely regarded as a critical element of its asymmetric strategy, complementing military operations and securing crucial international support.

The Ukraine conflict continues to be marked by rapid tactical and technological developments on both sides These same tactics can also be used to by violent non-state actors to pursue asymmetrical warfare. What potential lessons can terrorists learn from this conflict and how can we prepare to counter them?

Lesson One: Software is Transforming Modern Warfare.

Today's modern soldier is deeply embedded in a web of software that supports logistics, intelligence, communications, and weapon guidance. Starlink ensures Ukraine maintains internet connectivity, allowing troops to remotely control drones and stream encrypted video for intelligence purposes. The Ukrainian military's Delta System consolidates data from various sources, such as drones, satellite imagery, and intelligence from partner countries to enhance situational awareness and battlefield management. Additionally, Estonian company SensusQ has created an AI-powered "Crystal Ball" system that can predict potential attacks ahead of time.

Cyberwarfare allows combatants to hack into enemy networks to disable critical infrastructure, disrupt communication, and gather intelligence. These can paralyze military operations without a single shot being fired.

Terrorists can exploit software in various ways, including reverse-engineering open-source military programs to study tactics and defenses. Additionally, leaked battlefield applications, drone control software, and AI targeting systems can be repurposed.

Lesson Two: Drones and UAWs are Reinventing Military Opus Operandi

Drones have significantly impacted how wars will be fought in the future. We are already witnessing the emergence of advanced "deep-strike" drones, such as Iranian Shahed drones used by Russia and long-range drones developed by Ukrainian startups. In large numbers, these drones can surpass even sophisticated air defenses. Unlike traditional large standing armies, reserve drones require minimal space, no sustenance, and no salaries. Drones are also becoming easy to acquire and if needed, upgraded, repurposed and if broken, rebuilt.

Drones are not a new phenomenon for terrorists; a variety of non-state actors, including the Taliban, Boko Haram, Houthi rebels, and ISIL have utilized drones in combat. Drone innovations by the Houthis have shown that drone attacks can be highly precise and effective at long distances. A Houthi drone was able to fly for some 16 hours from Yemen over a distance of more than 2,600 kilometers to strike Tel Aviv in July 2024.

What is new in this war is that drones are being deployed with AI capabilities; innovation has transformed even cheap drones into effective guided missiles, both human-operated and AI-guided.

AI will further enhance the effectiveness of drones and autonomous weapons for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, targeting, and kamikaze missions. AI has been instrumental in analyzing satellite imagery, identifying troop movements, and predicting enemy actions.

In the future, low-cost drones will be even more effective in swarms designed to overwhelm enemy defences.

Lesson Three: 'Do-it-Yourself' Weapons

The war has introduced the concept of 'do-it-yourself' weapons. The widespread availability of easily designed software, off-the-shelf devices and 3D printing has accelerated the ability for innovative minds to build their own weapons. 3D printing means non-state actors can print whatever they need, wherever they need it. The widespread availability of off-the-shelf devices, user-friendly software, specialized AI microchips, and powerful automation algorithms are now within reach of anyone with a few thousand dollars and some technical skills.

People around the world now have access to the tools necessary to create lethal robots. Although these systems may not match the sophistication of military-grade technologies from major powers the concern lies

in the potential for these less expensive systems to be designed and developed by terrorists globally with little effort.

Lesson Four: PSYOPs and Cognitive Warfare are a Powerful Weapon

The war has featured significant cyberattacks and information campaigns. Some of the lessons that were learned is that social media and disinformation campaigns can shape public opinion and destabilize societies not only among the war combatants but across the globe.

Deepfakes and propaganda can influence public perception and sow discord. PSYOPs can also be used to mislead the timing and location of offensives and thus lead to significant operational successes. PSYOPs can be widely used as a critical element of asymmetric strategy.

Lesson Five: Non-State Actors Worldwide are Sharing Expertise

Drones are increasingly used by non-state actors around the world, with videos of drone attacks and group chats facilitating knowledge sharing. According to the Centre for Information Resilience, fighters in Myanmar have documented 1,400 online videos of drone flights from October 2021 to June 2023. Drone operators are turning to chat apps like Discord and Telegram to access 3D printing blueprints for fixed-wing drones, get information on tactics and tips on pilot training and learn how to bypass default software on commercial drones to conceal their locations.[19]

Lesson Six: David and Goliath- New Asymmetry in Wars

Wars are no longer solely determined by the number of jets, ships, or tanks a country can deploy. Instead, the focus will shift to those who are equipped to defend against the new and less expensive surge of new dual-use weapons ranging from smartphones to drones.

Terrorists will never achieve the air superiority of a state, given that most nations possess advanced defense systems like Patriot anti-air and anti-missile systems, and MIG aircraft. However, terrorists can still access MANPADS and drones, as seen in the past. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the significant advantages these drones offer for ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance).

Especially cheap drones have shifted the dynamics for terrorists. The conflict has highlighted the importance of open-source technology, unmanned systems, and AI. The spread of these technologies among non-state actors introduces a new asymmetry in warfare. This pattern has been evident in past conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, where IEDs emerged as a highly lethal, low-cost threat to military personnel. This new AI, 3D, drone and robotic war is heralding in greater asymmetry in war. Success will now depend on "innovation power," the capacity to invent, adapt, and deploy new technologies more swiftly than adversaries.

Lesson Seven: Companies are Expanding AI

Technology is transforming the nature of warfare. The

shift toward increasingly autonomous weapons systems has been developing over decades.

The growing demand for combat tools that integrate human and machine intelligence has led to substantial investments in companies and government agencies that promise to enhance the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and speed of warfare. This demand for advanced AI and autonomy has been a boon for tech and defense companies, resulting in large contracts for developing a range of weaponry, including lethal autonomous drones, unmanned fighter jets, and underwater vehicles. These companies will have a difficult time to keep the technologies under wraps. As DeepSeek has recently revealed, AI companies are openly sharing their expertise to the global community allowing anyone to further develop their technologies. AI has further democratized access to dual-use technological innovations.

Lesson Eight The Oppenheimer Moment: The AI Military Race

The rise of AI-enabled warfare and autonomous weapons systems is being likened to the "Oppenheimer moment," drawing parallels to the creation of the atomic bomb. This comparison represents a pivotal point that could either mark the beginning of a new era of great power dominance or serve as a warning of potential catastrophic consequences. As investment in AI rapidly increases, experts caution that these technologies could profoundly change society's relationship with war and technology, potentially leading to greater reliance on machines for critical decision-making. The prospect of autonomous weapons raises fears of a dystopian future reminiscent of apocalyptic fiction. The substantial investments being made in autonomous weapons and AI targeting systems are increasing global threats. At the same time, AI may be the saving grace of humanity, making people smarter and more resilient.

Lesson Nine: The Importance of Regulation of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Drone swarms are the perfect weapon for asymmetrical wars and Generative AI will have an enormous impact on global security generating new weapons and modus operandi to malicious actors worldwide. The heightened focus on LAWS and AI over the past year has given regulation advocates some optimism that political pressure for international treaties might increase. Despite differing global visions on governance, both the U.S. and China share a concern about preventing terrorists from acquiring autonomous weapons.

Lesson Ten: The World is Becoming Increasingly Transparent.

The world is becoming more transparent due to advancements in technology. Satellite imagery is able to document mass atrocities and ethnic cleansing. Nanosatellites track vessels engaged in illegal fishing through their identification systems. Amateur sleuths can assist Europol in investigating child sexual exploitation. As the world becomes more transparent, terrorists and insurgents will have fewer places to hide both in the real and virtual worlds.

Conclusion

Marc Andreessen's famous declaration that "software is eating the world" has never been more relevant, especially in the context of modern warfare. [20] Software is increasingly central to shaping military strategies and determining the outcomes of conflicts. As defense systems are challenged and data is becoming the new oil, the power of intelligence and information, traditionally controlled by global superpowers and large corporations, may eventually be harnessed by weaker, less-resourced groups like insurgents and terrorists. While the titans still hold the keys to the castle, terrorists are constantly finding new ways to breach the moat.

Youth Radicalization: A New Frontier in Terrorism and Security

Cecilia Polizzi, Founding President/CEO, Next Wave, The International Center for Children and Global Security

In September 2021, Cressida Dick, the then-Metropolitan Police Commissioner, issued a cautionary statement: a new wave of extremists was emerging among children in the United Kingdom.[1] This remark was prompted by data from the Home Office indicating a significant rise in the number of underage arrests for terror-related offenses, marking the highest figures on record.[2] By 2023, this trend reached a new apex with forty-two arrests for offenses ranging from the dissemination of terrorist propaganda to the encouragement and planning of violent attacks. With a year-on-year increase, one in every five terrorist suspects in Britain is now legally classified as a child.[3] The surge in youth radicalization is not confined to the United Kingdom; it is gaining global attention and increasingly being framed as an epidemic in major headlines, with nearly two-thirds of ISIS-linked arrests in Europe in 2024 involving teenagers.[4] In Austria, authorities uncovered a foiled terrorist attack intended to kill ´tens of thousands´ at a concert venue in Vienna and arrested three suspects, aged 17 to 19.[5] On the margins of the Olympics, French prosecutors charged an 18-year-old with 'terrorist criminal association' and uncovered several separate plots for conspiring terrorist attacks with explosive belts. The minors allegedly aspired to become ISIS martyrs.[6] Australian counter-terrorism operations exposed a network of youth who shared a 'religiously motivated violent extremist ideology' and were planning an attack. Investigators alleged that the teenagers were connected to the same movement as a 16-year-old boy who had previously been charged with a terror offense related to the stabbing of Assyrian Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel.[7] In response to these incidents, Australia elevated its terror threat level from 'possible' to 'probable,' citing a heightened vulnerability in its security environment due to emerging threats. These incidents highlight a disquieting truth: the face of extremism is growing younger, more unpredictable, and harder to contain.

The involvement of young people with extremism is embedded in a dynamic, evolving and diversifying threat landscape. One key characteristic of youth radicalization is that extremism threats are becoming more ideologically multifaceted and increasingly difficult to categorize along well-established ideological lines. A mix of political grievances, conspiracy theories, and overlapping ideologies has given rise to bespoke belief systems used to justify violence.[8] Organizations like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, once defining actors in the ecosystem of global extremism, no longer represent the predominant threats facing Western societies. The extremist environment has fragmented into an increasingly complex and ideologically diverse network of interplaying groups, movements, subcultures, and hate-fueled belief systems. At the same time, new, more radical groups are emerging from internal divisions within extremist factions, with the hierarchical structures of conventional movements no longer being followed. While both, the extreme far-right and Salafi-jihadism continue to pose significant challenges, extremist and conspiratorial narratives morph and metastasize, affecting broad segments of the youth population.[9] Ideological fluidity blurs the boundaries between belief systems, posing significant challenges to the effectiveness of prevention and intervention strategies. Youth radicalization, shaped by this dynamic environment, is inherently cross-ideological, manifesting as a consistent pattern across diverse, hybrid worldviews. Actors not only blend ideologically but also cross-pollinate in terms of tactics, reflecting the current manifestations of the youth threat ecosystem and further complicating efforts to detect and monitor it. In addition, the shift of extremist movements from hierarchical structures to a leaderless resistance model implied that the incitement of violent acts no longer required formal command, training, or operational support.[10] By decentralizing control, extremists turned ordinary individuals into autonomous agents of violence, driven by ideology rather than direct orders. Narratives that promote violent action as a universal duty and lionize mass casualty find resonance with young, aspiring militants within online forums, leading to a rise in self-radicalization and lone-wolf terrorism among young people.[11]

The increasingly central role of digital communications in extremist strategies, with actors using a broad range of mainstream and fringe digital platforms to organize, communicate, and plan has further exacerbated this issue. Technological innovation has in fact not only supported the decentralization of terror groups but allowed them also to operate in complete anonymity and in a truly transational way across a plethora of mainstream social media platforms, fringe forums, gaming environments, encrypted messaging apps and the dark web.[12] Children and young people are immersed in online cultures and comprise a large portion of internet and social media users. In fact, 80% of the world's children and youth[13] may be exposed daily to violent propaganda campaigns and the risk of online radicalization by extremist actors across the spectrum. This does not necessarily imply that the entirety of these

demographics will ultimately fall into hardcore extremist forums, radicalize, join an extremist organization, or perpetrate acts of violence. However, the widespread availability of extremist content online, social media algorithms, and the use of persuasive tactics by these so-called ´bad actors´ have fundamentally altered the **modus operandi** of violent extremism and youth radicalization processes.[14] Unlike in the past, when recruitment or mobilization was largely dependent on physical proximity or community networks, radicalization nowadays takes place in an unrestricted digital environment. Extremists exploit the virtual domain to project narratives that resonate with youth, including themes of heroism, belonging, justice, and equality, while also glamorizing violence through the so-called 'jihadi cool,' which portrays extremist lifestyles as alluring and desirable.[15] Technology has not only amplified the reach of extremist messaging but has also innovated the methods by which radicalization occurs. Algorithms designed to maximize user engagement inadvertently fuel radicalization by creating echo chambers and reinforcing ideological content. Social media platforms, in particular, use recommendation engines that funnel users toward increasingly extreme material, embedding radical perspectives as part of the digital norm over time.[16] Violent ideologies and behaviors become normalized, influencing young people's interactions online and shaping their offline actions, often fostering an interest in targeted violence. Encrypted messaging applications have given extremists secure channels for organizing and communicating. Platforms like Telegram and Rocket.Chat provide private, invitation-only spaces where recruiters can groom potential adherents without fear of surveillance.[17] At the same time, the dark web provides a hub for illicit activities and ideological exchanges, further amplifying ideological exposure and radicalization risks.

The increasing involvement of minors in homegrown terrorism, sheds light on the evolving nature of extremism and the heightened risks posed by younger demographics. Radicalized youth can pose the same credible threats as adults[18] - able to produce and disseminate violent content, organize and lead networks, recruit and radicalize others, carry out attacks - and, in some cases, may even do so more efficiently. But why?

The traits that make children and adolescents appealing to extremist groups such as their vulnerability to influence, versatility, presumed inherent non-violence, and ability to operate with a lower the level of scrutiny [19]- are the same qualities that make them more effective as executing operatives in carrying out terrorism-related activities. Therefore, children and young people become, paradoxically, both the target and an asset driving the operational efficacy of extremist groups and their ability to inflict damage. The influence of children and young people within extremist contexts is therefore substantial. However, the scenario is even more concerning. Extremists recognize a value in these demographic cohorts that goes beyond short-term tactical and strategic value.[20,21,22] Terror and extremist movements therefore intentionally develop radicalization frameworks systematically targeting children and youth as a core element of a transgenerational strategy. These actors understand youth radicalization as a long-term

investment – a sort of insurance policy[23] that allows to endure territorial losses, outlast counter-terror efforts, and perpetuate extremism across generations.

The risks posed by radicalized youth extend far beyond immediate acts of violence. Their engagement with violent extremism exacerbates polarization, undermines social cohesion, perpetuates cycles of violence and complicates efforts to counter-terrorism and extremism. Threats involving minors are harder to detect, monitor, and disrupt than those posed by adults or individuals with a known history of violent extremism. Adolescents often lack a criminal record or prior engagement with authorities and are generally afforded greater privacy protections under the law. In many countries, stricter rules govern the collection of data on minors, including online activity, communications, and personal information, which hinders authorities' awareness of potential risks. Additionally, early signs of radicalization, such as increased isolation, secrecy, or rebelliousness, can overlap with typical behavioral changes associated with the youth developmental stage of identity formation. Adolescence is a period of self-discovery, often marked by a search for independence, which may involve challenging authority, questioning societal norms, or withdrawing from social interactions. These behaviors and attitudes can be misinterpreted as part of normal development, making it difficult to distinguish between typical adolescent behavior and potential signs of radicalization. The online ecosystem further complicates effective prevention and risk mitigation. It not only serves as an echo chamber for extremist views and fosters self-reinforcing bubbles but also accelerates the radicalization process. Data shows that in 2002, the average radicalization period was sixteen months, but it shortened by over 40% by 2015,[24] due to the increased accessibility and reach of violent extremist digital content. Today, it may take place in just a few weeks.[25]

A scenario that began as a strategic response by terrorist groups under duress has evolved into a rapidly evolving core component of terrorist tactics and strategy, posing a real and present danger to young people and global security. The key trends defining the current youth threat ecosystem, such as ideological fragmentation and the exploitation of digital technology for terrorism purposes, are set to drive significant shifts in the dynamics of youth radicalization. While traditional extremist ideologies like white supremacy and Salafi-jihadism maintain their appeal, a much broader set of extremist and extremist-adjacent movements is emerging to compete for young followers.[26] Extremist groups will continue to leverage technology to expand their influence and operational capabilities. Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the metaverse will create new, expansive digital spaces to spread narratives, recruit and radicalize. As extremists magnify their reach to young people across an ever-growing array of online platforms, the concept of an identifiable epicenter of radical activity will become progressively obsolete.

Future scenarios may also evolve in fragile and conflict-affected states, where conditions such as instability, insecurity, protracted violence, and the erosion of governmental institutions create fertile ground for youth recruitment and radicalization. In these environments,

the sustained presence and systematic focus of groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and their affiliates on indoctrinating the next generation is likely to produce newer threats. Shaped by years of psychological manipulation and in the absence of proactive and effective counteractions, the future cohort of fighters will likely exhibit aggression, violence, and remorselessness on a scale beyond what has been so far encountered.[27]

Ultimately, appealing to young people is arguably among an extremist group's most important priorities – as evidenced by the long-term strategic planning and systematicity, and the tactical and strategic advantages of exploiting youth are simply too significant to be abandoned. Observation on the issue has begun, which is a positive development, but counter-extremism strategies have not evolved at the same pace as the challenge. The next wave of terrorism is already taking shape, and the recruitment and radicalization of youth needs to be recognized as key dimension of extremism and treated as an integral part of international security policy moving forward to end the terrorist cycle.

From Vulnerability to Strength: The Growing Role of Strategic Communication in Preventing Terrorism and Violent Extremism

Jodie Wrigley, P/CVE Strategic Communication Specialist Advisor

Terrorism remains an ongoing global threat—one that is constantly evolving and adapting to suit its purpose in the current context. Ideological motivations are expanding and, in many cases, becoming increasingly blurred. Advances in technology and the interconnected nature of the digital world provide new and easier ways for malign actors to reach their intended audiences.

Compounding this, the conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism are also increasing. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp decline in trust in governments and institutions. Economic pressures are bringing underlying grievances to the surface. Climate events—both sudden and long-term—are displacing populations and disrupting lives and livelihoods.

Strategic communication has long been a powerful tool to help prevent and counter the violent extremism and terrorism threat. Targeted prevention efforts, including counter-narratives, diversion, and disengagement strategies, remain critical in addressing this evolving challenge. However, in an increasingly connected world—where misinformation and disinformation are on the rise and societal grievances deepen—the need for a whole-of-society approach to prevention has never been more urgent.

Why Strategic Communication

In 2019, *They are us* was voted New Zealand's Massey University Quote of the Year.[1] Why? As part of former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's press conference and following speeches in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack, three simple words captured the feelings of a nation on one of its 'darkest days'. Simply conveyed, and repeated often, it perfectly matched the public sentiment at the time and gave people something to unite around at a time of unprecedented horror. It sparked a social movement both in New Zealand and across the world. One of solidarity, unity and a rejection of violent extremism in all its forms. Her communication throughout this time didn't just inform people with the facts alone, it helped promote togetherness and belonging, strengthening connections and cohesion.

As this demonstrates, when done well, strategic communication ensures that information is delivered in a way that fosters trust, engagement, and has a meaningful impact among diverse audiences.

Conversely, strategic communication is also central to terrorism. In fact, without communication, terrorism as we know it would not exist. It has been described as a form of violent communication designed to instil fear, create uncertainty and erode trust.[2] Historically, by publicising attacks through traditional media, terrorists have sought to capture public and government attention, amplifying their message. The broader and more sustained the media coverage, the more effective the act becomes. The greater the fear it generates, the more influence it has over its intended audiences.

Strategic communication in relation to terrorism and violent extremism is no longer just about publicity. It is now a tool for recruitment, radicalisation and the erosion of institutional trust. Extremists use it to build credibility and legitimacy, seed chaos and divide societies to further their own objectives.

The internet and social media have exponentially increased opportunities for messages to be heard. No longer having to solely rely on newspapers and broadcast media, nor the third-party interpretation of journalists, terrorist and violent extremists now directly target and reach their audiences with the messages they want, at any time, in any part of the world. The advent of generative AI means content can be created, translated, tailored and adapted more rapidly than ever before. This includes, among other things, designing convincing disinformation to trick audiences, creating chatbots to radicalise and recruit or to rapidly subvert content moderation.[3]

Not only are the tools changing but so are both the communication environment and audiences. Communities are being challenged by compounding shocks and stresses such as the rising cost of living, sustained global conflicts and increasing frequency and intensity of climate events. This makes it harder for governments and institutions to reach them, build trust, and support the resilience, cohesion and togetherness required to help protect communities and prevent the appeal of violent extremist narratives.

As such, terrorists and violent extremists continue to rapidly evolve their communication approach to leverage these emerging technologies and changing environments.

While communication responses must continue to focus on tactics like diversion initiatives and counter narratives, the broadening of grievances and vulnerabilities means there needs to be a greater focus on rebuilding protective elements such as resilience, cohesion and togetherness across the whole of society. The role that strategic communication can play in this is becoming more crucial.

Why is a Whole of Society Approach Needed – A Focus on Climate Events

Climate-related disasters and extreme events are increasing in frequency and intensity due to rising global temperatures.[4] They negatively impact health, livelihoods, and social cohesion. Floods, heatwaves, droughts, storms and wildfires disrupt access to food and water, affecting mental well-being, and weakening community resilience. These challenges are not limited to developing regions but also include high-GDP economies which also face significant risks.[5]

Like COVID-19, extreme climate events have global implications, exacerbated by mis- and disinformation, which undermine trust in authorities and hinder effective responses. A study of 167 countries (1970–2007)[6] found that a rise in disaster-related deaths correlates with increased terrorist attacks and casualties. While the link between climate events and violent extremism is still being explored, these crises deepen existing conflicts, fuel anti-democracy sentiment and erode institutional trust. Though disasters may initially unite communities, prolonged hardship often leads to disillusionment, compounding vulnerabilities and impeding recovery.

Extreme climate events often spark an airing of grievances in traditional and online public spheres, and it is at this point that trust in governments and institutions can be gained or lost. Responses, or the lack thereof, can fuel anti-government sentiment. Hostile actors are quick to exploit this, not just during crises but pre-emptively in order to sow distrust and polarisation.

As extreme climate events become more frequent, understanding how violent extremists leverage these crises is crucial.

While climate events may not directly drive violent extremism, they act as risk multipliers by exacerbating resource competition, livelihood insecurity and displacement. These factors increase vulnerability, erode trust in governments and strengthen the environment for extremist recruitment efforts.

Climate Events as Recruitment, Legitimacy and Control Tools

Countries most affected by long term severe climate events often face high risks of violent extremism, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. Climate-induced resource scarcity worsens survival challenges. This was seen in the Lake Chad region, where drought has reduced crop yields and fish stocks, forcing many into economic desperation. Boko Haram exploited this hardship, recruiting young men by promising security and prosperity. A 2021 survey found that 41% of those experiencing climate-related livelihood struggles knew someone who joined Boko Haram as a result.[7]

In Somalia, consecutive droughts and floods have displaced millions and left many struggling for food. Displaced individuals, lacking security and support, are more vulnerable to extremist recruitment. Groups like al-Shabaab have capitalised on this, running food aid publicity campaigns to gain legitimacy and trust. Their aid distributions are made to look like humanitarian efforts by mimicking elements like the packaging or labelling. The aid is then promoted not only to the community receiving it but through media outlets with the aim to expose real or perceived gaps in government responses and further enhance their influence.

In 2018, al-Shabaab expanded their legitimacy and 'reputation-building' efforts by supporting the global movement to ban single-use plastic bags, framing them as a "serious threat to humans and animals." This stance seemingly aligned them with efforts by corporations championing environmental issues through corporate social responsibility programs. Al-Shabaab capitalised on local environmental concerns of farmers and herders while publicising its move more widely to enhance and legitimatise its image.[8]

Similarly, violent extremist groups use strategic communication to exploit resource shortages and gain influence. In Iraq, water scarcity, worsened by decreasing rainfall, upstream damming and inadequate irrigation, has become a tool for coercion. Extremists have historically controlled dams, using threats of scarcity, flooding and poisoning to manipulate communities. They also offer aid through food, water and financial support, in exchange for loyalty.

Increasingly, groups like Daesh, craft tailored climate-related narratives to recruit and radicalise, blaming government neglect and promising empowerment. They leverage various community grievances such as inflaming tribal tensions by spreading misinformation about stolen water supplies or using religious rhetoric to link climate disasters to divine punishment. These narratives, once shared face-to-face, are amplified via Facebook and TikTok, making water scarcity a potent driver of division and recruitment.[9]

These examples present communication challenges at a micro, local and national level.

Exploiting Short-Term Climate Disasters

While short-term disasters often spark a momentary peak in togetherness, once the public safety threat is over, communities experience a period of shock, disbelief and disillusionment. Multiple or subsequent events that impede the reconstruction trajectory, risk compounding this community impact.

There is growing evidence showing that conspiracy theories are being used to rapidly spread misinformation and fuel grievances during the 'disillusionment period' when communities are at their most vulnerable.

Conspiracy theories often frame a world controlled by shadowy elites, corrupt governments or external threats. This "us vs. them" mentality can push individuals toward radical ideologies, particularly when they feel

disenfranchised or powerless. Many terrorist movements use conspiracy theories to justify violence.

Conspiracy theories, such as QAnon, The Great Replacement and The Great Reset, have shown the ability to radicalise individuals, undermine trust or justify violence.[10]

As an example, Great Replacement Theory, which falsely claims that elites are orchestrating demographic changes to replace white populations, inspired the mass shootings in Christchurch, El Paso, and Buffalo. QAnon, which falsely claims a secret global cabal of elites is engaging in child trafficking and satanic rituals in efforts to control the work, is reported to have fuelled the January 6 Capital Riot.[11]

Events such as the 2023 heatwaves resulting in power outages in Europe and the U.S., the wildfires in Maui and more recently Los Angeles and the floods in Spain, all have become focal points for mis- and disinformation, further eroding trust in governments, institutions and impeded emergency responses.

The 2023 Maui wildfires claimed over 100 lives and burned 2,500 acres. While historically rare in the region, climate change is contributing to an increase in these more extreme events. As the community grappled with loss and sought accountability, misinformation and conspiracy theories flooded social media, prompting news outlets like Reuters and CNN to debunk false claims.

Four main conspiracy themes emerged, drawing from existing theories such as QAnon, the New World Order, the Great Reset, and the Great Replacement. These theories were often amplified by bots and linked to extreme content on alternative platforms.

A news report on children being evacuated was twisted into claims that they had vanished, fuelling baseless theories of a cover-up for human trafficking. A single home left standing in a burned-out neighbourhood sparked theories that the fire was deliberately caused by the government using energy weapons. Scientific reports linking the wildfire to climate change were dismissed as a hoax to push government control.[12]

These conspiracy theories spread fear and division at a time of crisis, undermining trust in emergency efforts. It was reported that some residents ignored official instructions, to stay in evacuation centres due to fears around direct energy weapons. Some also refused to wait to return to their property because they believed the government would seize control of their houses. There were also rumours of a military takeover.

Similar claims of direct energy weapons, DEWS, or government controlling water supplies, resurfaced again in the 2025 California wildfires hampering the emergency response.[13] Instead of managing the crisis, authorities had to allocate time and resources towards debunking false claims and conspiracy theories.[14]

Similar patterns of disinformation were seen following the 2024 floods in Valencia, a region of Spain, surrounding weather control or the intentional removal of dams.[15]

In these situations, the communication challenge is two-fold. The immediate impacts on public safety and diversion of resources presents a significant challenge for disaster and emergency response communication. In addition, the longer-term impacts of the ongoing legitimisation of these conspiracy theories and erosion of trust should be a focus for violent extremism prevention efforts.

An Opportunity for Whole of Society Strategic Communication

Whether it's climate events, widespread economic hardship, COVID-19, or global conflicts, any situation that tests social cohesion makes communities more vulnerable. This, combined with declining trust and the pervasive influence of social media, creates fertile ground for those with violent, extreme views to recruit and radicalize others and spread fear and hate.

During these times it is critically important to rapidly strengthen protective factors such as connection, cohesion, trust, and resilience at a whole-of-society level. From governments to individuals, everyone has a role to play in making communities stronger and more cohesive. Building trust, fostering belonging, respecting differences and diverse perspectives, and reinforcing our shared humanity are all essential protective measures.

As demonstrated by Prime Minister Ardern's approach, strategic communication plays a vital role in this effort. However, it cannot be activated only in times of crisis—it is far more difficult to implement when communities are already fractured or lack strong social fabric.

Therefore, alongside traditional targeted initiatives such as counter-narratives and diversion interventions, whole-of-society strategic communication must be an everyday focus to make communities stronger and more resilient to these efforts.

Three urgent priorities are clear: (1) creating a strong alternative narrative centred on community and common humanity, (2) preparing communities for and protecting them from misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, and (3) fostering strong connections—between individuals, their families and friends, their broader communities, and all levels of government.

Through this we can help build the protective measures needed to prevent the impacts of violent extremism and terrorism in our communities.

A

GTI Ranks & Scores, 2024

GTI Rank	Country	2024 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2023–2024)
1	Burkina Faso	8.581	0.001
2	Pakistan	8.374	0.407
3	Syria	8.006	0.06
4	Mali	7.907	-0.098
5	Niger	7.776	0.489
6	Nigeria	7.658	0.071
7	Somalia	7.614	-0.21
8	Israel	7.463	-0.656
9	Afghanistan	7.262	-0.572
10	Cameroon	6.944	-0.07
11	Myanmar	6.929	-0.614
12	Democratic Republic of the Congo	6.768	0.243
13	Iraq	6.582	-0.539
14	India	6.41	0.059
15	Colombia	6.381	0.147
16	Russia	6.267	3.199
17	Mozambique	6.251	-0.074
18	Iran	6.056	1.325
19	Kenya	5.366	-0.299
20	Philippines	5.166	-0.3
21	Chile	5.162	-0.542
22	Yemen	5.08	0.125
23	Chad	5.032	0.045
24	Togo	5.004	0.334
25	Palestine	4.93	-0.057
26	Benin	4.802	-0.096
27	Germany	4.748	1.933
28	Thailand	4.63	0.372
29	Egypt	4.416	-0.805
30	Indonesia	4.17	-0.118
31	Burundi	4.043	0.111
32	Türkiye	3.968	-0.2
33	Uganda	3.702	-0.692
34	United States of America	3.517	-0.633
35	Bangladesh	3.03	-0.381

GTI Rank	Country	2024 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2023–2024)
36	Greece	2.928	-0.151
37	Oman	2.927	2.927
38	Jordan	2.913	2.458
39	Czechia	2.906	-0.671
40	France	2.712	-0.258
41	United Kingdom	2.639	0.217
42	Algeria	2.415	0.218
43	Tunisia	2.184	-0.73
44	Peru	2.062	-0.68
45	Ukraine	2.003	0.317
46	Australia	1.973	0.498
47	Poland	1.962	1.539
48	Canada	1.87	-0.053
49	China	1.863	1.281
50	Sweden	1.842	1.107
51	Angola	1.657	-0.597
52	Malaysia	1.626	1.434
53	Libya	1.612	-0.857
54	Senegal	1.578	-0.588
55	Tanzania	1.573	-0.694
56	Ecuador	1.55	1.383
57	Djibouti	1.461	-0.574
58	Côte d'Ivoire	1.454	-0.606
59	Brazil	1.43	-0.558
60	Netherlands	1.402	0.825
61	Belgium	1.347	-0.557
62	Switzerland	1.265	0.638
63	Spain	1.256	-0.553
64	Lebanon	1.237	-0.325
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.218	1.218
66	Norway	1.198	-0.549
67	United Arab Emirates	1.178	0.945
68	Nepal	1.113	-1.05
69	Slovakia	1.023	-0.069
70	Tajikistan	0.999	0.128
71	Central African Republic	0.957	-0.488

GTI Rank	Country	2024 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2023–2024)
72	Finland	0.949	0.949
72	Japan	0.949	-0.24
74	Italy	0.929	-0.518
75	Saudi Arabia	0.845	-0.521
76	Argentina	0.801	-0.473
77	Ethiopia	0.787	-0.485
78	Kosovo	0.782	-0.436
79	Armenia	0.72	0
79	Denmark	0.72	0.72
81	Venezuela	0.71	-0.464
82	Austria	0.582	-0.371
82	South Korea	0.582	0.582
82	Mexico	0.582	-0.458
82	Serbia	0.582	0.582
86	Cambodia	0.423	0.423
86	Lithuania	0.423	0.336
86	Latvia	0.423	0.423
89	Cyprus	0.347	-0.269
90	Azerbaijan	0.233	-0.19
90	Belarus	0.233	-0.19
90	Ireland	0.233	-0.21
90	Uzbekistan	0.233	-0.19
94	New Zealand	0.217	-1.73
95	Iceland	0.123	-0.11
96	Eswatini	0.087	-0.093
97	Paraguay	0.073	-0.168
98	Bahrain	0.059	-0.064
98	Uruguay	0.059	-0.055
100	Albania	0	0
100	Bulgaria	0	0
100	Bolivia	0	0
100	Bhutan	0	0
100	Botswana	0	0
100	Republic of the Congo	0	0
100	Costa Rica	0	0
100	Cuba	0	0
100	Dominican Republic	0	0
100	Eritrea	0	0
100	Estonia	0	0
100	Gabon	0	0
100	Georgia	0	0
100	Ghana	0	0
100	Guinea	0	0
100	The Gambia	0	0
100	Guinea-Bissau	0	0
100	Equatorial Guinea	0	0
100	Guatemala	0	0
100	Guyana	0	0
100	Honduras	0	0

GTI Rank	Country	2024 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2023–2024)
100	Croatia	0	0
100	Haiti	0	0
100	Hungary	0	0
100	Jamaica	0	0
100	Kazakhstan	0	0
100	Kyrgyz Republic	0	0
100	Kuwait	0	0
100	Laos	0	0
100	Liberia	0	0
100	Sri Lanka	0	-3.072
100	Lesotho	0	0
100	Morocco	0	0
100	Moldova	0	0
100	Madagascar	0	0
100	North Macedonia	0	0
100	Montenegro	0	0
100	Mongolia	0	0
100	Mauritania	0	0
100	Mauritius	0	0
100	Malawi	0	0
100	Namibia	0	0
100	Nicaragua	0	0
100	Panama	0	0
100	Papua New Guinea	0	0
100	North Korea	0	0
100	Portugal	0	0
100	Qatar	0	0
100	Romania	0	0
100	Rwanda	0	-0.114
100	Sudan	0	0
100	Singapore	0	0
100	Sierra Leone	0	0
100	El Salvador	0	0
100	South Sudan	0	0
100	Slovenia	0	0
100	Turkmenistan	0	0
100	Timor-Leste	0	0
100	Trinidad and Tobago	0	0
100	Taiwan	0	0
100	Vietnam	0	0
100	South Africa	0	0
100	Zambia	0	0
100	Zimbabwe	0	0

B

50 Worst Terrorist Attacks in 2024

Rank	Country	Date	State/Province	Organisation	Fatalities	Attack type
1	Niger	21/7/2024	Tahoua	Jihadist (undetermined)	237	Armed attack
2	Burkina Faso	24/8/2024	Centre-Nord	JNIM	200	Armed attack
3	Burkina Faso	11/6/2024	Sahel	JNIM	170	Armed attack
4	Russia	22/3/2024	Moscow City	Islamic State - Khorasan Province	144	Armed attack
5	Niger	10/12/2024	Tillabéri	Jihadist (undetermined)	138	Armed attack
6	Burkina Faso	16/3/2024	Est	Jihadist (undetermined)	100	Armed attack
7	Nigeria	1/9/2024	Yobe	Boko Haram	100	Armed attack
8	Iran	3/1/2024	Kerman	Islamic State - Khorasan Province	95	Bombing
9	Nigeria	24/4/2024	Borno	Islamic State West Africa (ISWA)	85	Armed attack
10	Burkina Faso	22/5/2024	Nord	JNIM	70	Armed attack
11	Burkina Faso	30/6/2024	Est	Jihadist (undetermined)	70	Armed attack
12	Mali	17/9/2024	Bamako	JNIM	60	Armed attack
13	Syria	10/12/2024	Hims	Islamic State (IS)	54	Undetermined
14	Burkina Faso	7/2/2024	Est	Jihadist (undetermined)	50	Armed attack
15	Niger	25/6/2024	Tillabéri	JNIM	47	Armed attack
16	Burkina Faso	29/5/2024	Centre-Est	JNIM	46	Armed attack
17	Burkina Faso	23/4/2024	Centre-Est	JNIM	45	Armed attack
18	Burkina Faso	26/6/2024	Boucle du Mouhoun	JNIM	45	Armed attack
19	Democratic Republic of the Congo	12/6/2024	Nord-Kivu	Islamic State (IS)	42	Armed attack
20	Democratic Republic of the Congo	7/6/2024	Nord-Kivu	Islamic State (IS)	41	Armed attack
21	Burkina Faso	24/2/2024	Sahel	Jihadist (undetermined)	40	Armed attack
22	Chad	27/10/2024	Lac	Boko Haram	40	Armed attack
23	Somalia	2/8/2024	Banaadir	Al-Shabaab	37	Bombing
24	Nigeria	1/9/2024	Yobe	Islamic State West Africa (ISWA)	37	Armed attack
25	Democratic Republic of the Congo	23/7/2024	Nord-Kivu	Islamic State (IS)	35	Armed attack

Rank	Country	Date	State/Province	Organisation	Fatalities	Attack type
26	Niger	20/7/2024	Tillabéri	Islamic State (IS)	34	Armed attack
27	Mali	27/1/2024	Mopti	Jihadist (undetermined)	30	Armed attack
28	Mali	28/2/2024	Koulikoro	JNIM	30	Armed attack
29	Burkina Faso	23/4/2024	Nord	JNIM	30	Armed attack
30	Nigeria	26/5/2024	Borno	Jihadist (undetermined)	30	Armed attack
31	Burkina Faso	1/6/2024	Est	JNIM	30	Armed attack
32	Burkina Faso	27/6/2024	Centre-Nord	JNIM	30	Armed attack
33	Nigeria	29/6/2024	Borno	Jihadist (undetermined)	30	Bombing
34	Burkina Faso	9/3/2024	Centre-Est	JNIM	27	Armed attack
35	Cameroon	11/4/2024	Extreme-Nord	Boko Haram	27	Armed attack
36	Burkina Faso	29/6/2024	Centre-Nord	JNIM	27	Armed attack
37	Niger	15/9/2024	Tillabéri	JNIM	27	Armed attack
38	Mali	21/7/2024	Mopti	Jihadist (undetermined)	26	Armed attack
39	Burkina Faso	25/8/2024	Boucle du Mouhoun	Jihadist (undetermined)	26	Armed attack
40	Mali	20/12/2024	Mopti	JNIM	26	Armed attack
41	Niger	22/7/2024	Tillabéri	Jihadist (undetermined)	25	Armed attack
42	Pakistan	9/11/2024	Balochistan	Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)	25	Bombing
43	Burkina Faso	29/6/2024	Centre-Est	Jihadist (undetermined)	24	Armed attack
44	Niger	20/3/2024	Tillabéri	Islamic State (IS)	23	Armed attack
45	Pakistan	26/8/2024	Balochistan	Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)	23	Armed attack
46	Niger	28/1/2024	Tillabéri	Jihadist (undetermined)	22	Armed attack
47	Syria	18/4/2024	Hims	Islamic State (IS)	22	Armed attack
48	Niger	20/5/2024	Tillabéri	Islamic State (IS)	22	Armed attack
49	Russia	23/6/2024	Dagestan	Jihadist (undetermined)	22	Armed attack
50	Russia	23/6/2024	Dagestan	Jihadist (undetermined)	22	Armed attack

C

GTI Methodology

The GTI ranks 163 countries based on four indicators weighted over five years. A country's annual GTI score is based on a unique scoring system to account for the relative impact of incidents in the year. The four factors counted in each country's yearly score are:

- total number of terrorist incidents in a given year
- total number of fatalities caused by terrorists in a given year
- total number of injuries caused by terrorists in a given year
- total number of hostages caused by terrorists in a given year

Each of the factors is weighted between zero and three, and a five-year weighted average is applied in a bid to reflect the latent psychological effect of terrorist acts over time. The weightings shown in Table C.1 were determined by consultation with the GPI Expert Panel.

The greatest weighting is attributed to a fatality.

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE OF A COUNTRY'S GTI SCORE

To assign a score to a country, each incident is rated according to the four measures. The measures are then multiplied by their weighting factor and aggregated. This is done for all incidents and then all incidents for each country are aggregated to give the country score. To illustrate, Table C.2 depicts a hypothetical country's record for a given year.

TABLE C.1

Indicator weights used in the Global Terrorism Index

Dimension	Weight
Total number of incidents	1
Total number of fatalities	3
Total number of injuries	0.5
Total number of hostages	0.5

TABLE C.2

Hypothetical country terrorist attacks in a given year

Dimension	Weight	Number of incidents for the given year	Calculated raw score
Total number of incidents	1	21	21
Total number of fatalities	3	36	108
Total number of injuries	0.5	53	26.5
Total number of injuries	0.5	20	10
Total raw score			166.5

Given these indicator values, this hypothetical country for that year would be assessed as having an impact of terrorism of

(1×21) + (3×36) + (0.5×53) + (0.5×20) = 166.5.

FIVE-YEAR WEIGHTED AVERAGE

To account for the aftereffects of trauma that terrorist attacks have on a society, the GTI takes into consideration the events of previous years as having a bearing on a country's current score. For instance, the scale of the 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway continued to have a psychological impact on the population for many years after the event. To account for the lingering effects of terrorism, the prior four years are also included in the scoring with a decreasing weight each year. Table C.3 highlights the weights used for each year.

TABLE C.3

Time weighting of historical scores

Year	Weight	% of Score
Current year	16	52
Previous year	8	26
Two years ago	4	13
Three years ago	2	6
Four years ago	1	3

LOGARITHMIC BANDING SCORES ON A SCALE OF 1-10

The impact of terrorism is not evenly distributed throughout the world. There are a handful of countries with very high levels of terrorism compared to most countries which experience only very small amounts of terrorism, if any. Hence, the GTI uses a base 10 logarithmic banding system between 0 and 10 at 0.5 intervals.

As shown in Table C.4,C.4 this mapping method yields a total number of 21 bands. This maps all values to a band of size 0.5 within the scale of 0-10. To band these scores, the following method is used:

1. Define the Minimum GTI Score across all countries as having a banded score of 0.

2. Define the Maximum GTI Score across all countries as having a banded score 10.

3. Subtract the Minimum from the Maximum GTI scores and calculate 'r' by:

4. a. root = 2 X (Highest GTI Banded Score – Lowest GTI Banded Score) = 2 X (10–0) =20

5. b. Range = 2 X (Highest Recorded GTI Raw Score – Lowest Recorded GTI Raw Score)

6. c. r = root range -1 for all values of root between 1 to 21

This method produces the set of bands used in the GTI listed in Table C.4.

TABLE C.4
Bands used in the GTI

Band number	Bands	Band cut off values	Band number	Bands	Band cut off values
1	0	0	12	5.5	578.19
2	0.5	1.78	13	6	1030.79
3	1	3.18	14	6.5	1837.66
4	1.5	5.67	15	7	3276.14
5	2	10.1	16	7.5	5840.64
6	2.5	18.01	17	8	10412.57
7	3	32.11	18	8.5	18563.3
8	3.5	57.24	19	9	33094.25
9	4	102.04	20	9.5	58999.71
10	4.5	181.92	21	10	105183.4
11	5	324.32			

ENDNOTES

SECTION 1: RESULTS

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2. TerrorismTracker

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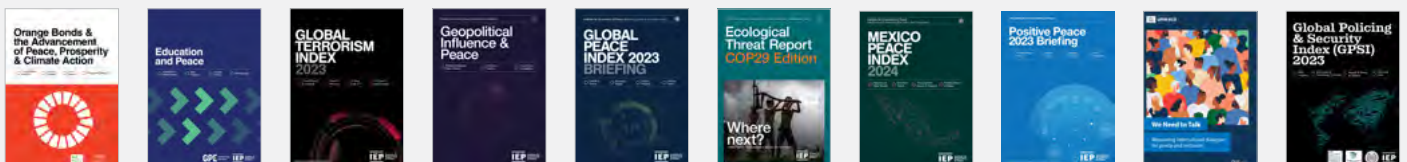
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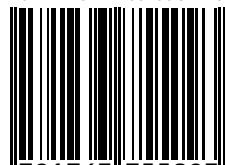GlobalPeaceIndex

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