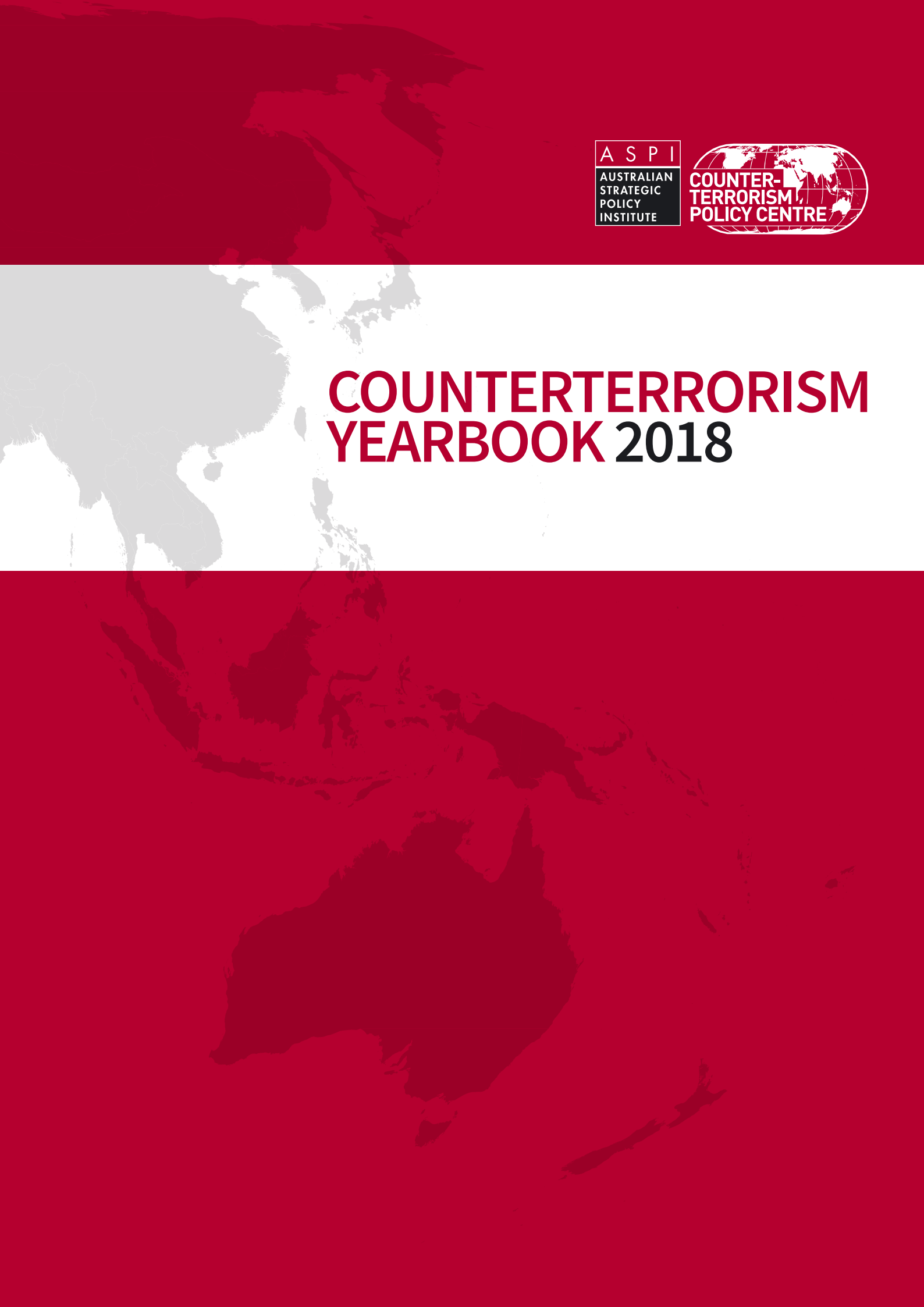

COUNTERTERRORISM YEARBOOK 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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COUNTERTERRORISM YEARBOOK 2018

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Preface

THE HON PETER DUTTON MP

Minister for Home Affairs

Australian security agencies are operating in challenging times and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The competence and professionalism of our personnel has saved untold lives over recent years. In July last year they disrupted a group attempting an attack on a plane departing Sydney. Had they succeeded the ramifications would have reverberated around the world. We say thank you to the Australian men and women who covertly and overtly protect us on a daily basis, many of whom put their own lives on the line to do so. As a Government, we take our responsibility very seriously and have acted to ensure they have all reasonable powers and resources available to them to provide for the nation's ongoing security.

While counter-terrorism matters may ebb and flow in the public discourse, our agencies and policy makers cannot take their eye off the ball for a moment. Since the terrorism threat level was raised to probable in 2014, 85 people have been charged as a result of 37 counterterrorism related operations around Australia. There have been six attacks and 14 major CT disruption operations. Much of this operational detail is canvassed in this publication. There is no sign the situation will abate anytime soon.

The fall of the so-called ISIL caliphate and the liberation of around 7.7 million people living under its barbarous rule is a humanitarian milestone. Nevertheless, it poses new challenges. We are now seeing the displacement of battle-hardened foreign fighters. There is an estimated 40,000 foreign fighters, including 7,500 from Western countries. That's a lot of people with warped ideology and combat experience potentially at large.

From an Australian perspective, there are about 110 Australians still in Iraq and Syria out of 220 who travelled to the region to fight with or support terrorist groups. As many as 90 Australians have been killed. I made it clear at the National Press Club in February that the Government is determined to deal with those who remain as far from our shores as possible and to ensure that, if they do return, it is with forewarning and into the hands of authorities.

Meeting the evolving threat, the Australian Government has introduced nine tranches of legislation, invested an additional $1.5 billion since 2014, and continued to promote and enhance the CVE response. Our response has also included amending the law to provide, in the context of ADF operations against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, the legal certainty needed to target members of organised armed groups with lethal force.

Significantly, we have also established the Home Affairs portfolio, building the foundations of a more integrated approach to our nation's security. This represents the most significant reform to our law enforcement and domestic security arrangements in decades. The new portfolio includes the Department of Home Affairs, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Border Force, Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (following the passage of legislation that will preserve the role of the Attorney-General in authorising ASIO warrants). The new structure will provide a coordinated common purpose not only in relation to our domestic security, but also in facilitating legitimate trade and travel, and helping secure our future economic prosperity.

However, governments cannot act in isolation in protecting the community, especially given the broad range of plots ranging from sophisticated large scale

attacks to simple opportunistic assaults. We are actively engaging with the private sector, local governments and community organisations, including through *Australia's Strategy for Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism*. The strategy is the product of extensive consultation, supports ongoing engagement and provides guidelines on active armed offenders, improvised explosive devices, chemical weapons, and hostile vehicle attacks. State and territory police play a particularly valuable role supporting the strategy through their hosting of Crowded Places Forums, the key vehicle through which the latest threat information and general protective security guidance is shared with owners and operators of crowded places. It includes measures that help mitigate risks and respond to incidents, mindful of limiting the intrusiveness on the ordinary operation of events and the aesthetics of venues.

We are also alive to the technological challenges facing our agencies. I have stated that law enforcement access to encrypted communications should be on the same basis as telephone and other intercepts, in which companies provide assistance in response to court orders. The ubiquitous use of messaging encryption and social media platforms to facilitate illicit and terrorist related activity is becoming more entrenched. It's an issue our Five Eyes partners are also confronting. My preference is to work with providers to facilitate specified legal access on the same basis as has existed for phone calls and text messaging. We are targeting those who are using new technology for terrorist or illicit purposes, not the many who are using it for legitimate security and privacy purposes.

It is in this context of constantly evolving threats and challenges that the second edition of ASPI's counter-terrorism yearbook makes a valued contribution to the analysis, assessment and debate on these issues. I have no doubt it will serve as an important contemporary resource for academics, policy advisors, law makers and agency personnel. It is on that basis that I am pleased to endorse the publication and thank the contributors for their considered work.

Introduction

ISAAC KFIR, SOFIA PATEL AND MICAH BATT

The *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2018* provides a comprehensive assessment of how different countries and regions across the world are tackling the threat of terrorism.

The objective of the yearbook is to communicate the complex and often impenetrable aspects of counterterrorism (CT) measures to a wide audience of academic, professional and general interest readers.

The chapters are written by subject matter experts and regional scholars. Their detailed knowledge of CT is demonstrated in their careful and nuanced explanations, assessments and critiques of how high-level CT policies, strategies and operations affect people on the ground.

The yearbook reflects the constantly changing terrorist threat landscape and the ways in which governments need to develop flexible and adaptable policies and strategies to be able to address those changes. For example, this year we've dedicated a chapter to exploring the insurgency in Marawi, southern Mindanao, which was led by Islamic State (IS), and the implications for CT policies in the Philippines and surrounding region. We also felt that more attention needed to be paid to how governments are dealing with the growing threat of 'cyber-terrorism'. We have a chapter authored by a leading practitioner on the challenges of fighting IS in Iraq, as well as two chapters on Africa aimed at highlighting how violent the Islamist insurgency has become in the non-Western world.

Three themes emerge from the *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2018*.

First, there's a shift towards broader approaches to CT that go beyond military power. In multiple countries, such as the UK, Australia, the US, Morocco and Tunisia, governments have been working to address the sociocultural and political issues that create conditions conducive to radicalisation towards violent extremism. There's been a conscious shift to try to move away from 'deradicalisation' and 'counter-radicalisation' towards a social policy focused approach that calls for prevention and engagement as more effective tools. It will be of paramount importance to learn from mistakes made in the past if this shift is to be implemented successfully. The yearbook highlights a growing urgency—particularly in Western Europe, the UK, the US and Australia—to develop robust monitoring and evaluation measures to assess policies and programs for countering violent extremism. The difficulty has been in identifying best practice in this emerging and highly controversial field, in which no two paths into and out of violent extremism are the same.

Second, the aftermath of the military defeat of the Caliphate in Iraq has generated new challenges for the international community. After the military operations conducted by the anti-IS coalition, the international community acknowledges its moral—and statutory—obligation to work with Syrians and Iraqis to promote and nourish sustainable rebuilding and regeneration. The sociopolitical situation remains extremely fragile, and mishandling the recovery effort would inevitably exacerbate existing political, sectarian and geostrategic tensions, further fracturing regional stability and providing fertile ground for non-state actors to exploit. IS has not vanished; it has merely faded into a volatile insurgency that could erupt again at any point, given the right social and political climate.

Third, although the contemporary terrorist threat remains very much attributable to *Salafi-jihadi* terrorism, there are indications that the nature of Islamist terrorism across the globe has morphed, and that participants are becoming criminally rather than ideologically inspired. This development has posed a challenging for security services and CT operations, especially as traditional intelligence-gathering processes have had to adapt considerably to remain effective.

The *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2018* indicates that CT strategies must continue to evolve towards more proactive and inclusive approaches that can better pre-empt the adaptability of terrorists and their causes.

The foresight to map out where future terrorist threats will emerge is crucial in developing robust CT policy. We suspect that, next year, we're likely to see more policies aimed at addressing the crossover between technology and social change as the threat posed by IS in the post-'caliphate' period becomes clearer.


INDONESIA
TIMOR-LESTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Arafura Sea
Timor Sea
Darwin
Gulf of Carpentaria
Indian Ocean
Coral Sea
Cairns
Northern Territory
Queensland
AUSTRALIA
Western Australia
South Australia
Brisbane
New South Wales
Perth
Great Australian Bight
Adelaide
Young
Sydney
Canberra
A.C.T.
Victoria
Melbourne
Tasman Sea
Tasmania
Hobart
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
State boundary
0
500 km
0
250 Miles
The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

Australia

JACINTA CARROLL
Director, National Security Policy, National Security College, Australian National University

In many ways, 2017 was a turning point in Australia's approach to counterterrorism (CT).

Since 2014, in particular, Australia had been progressing a range of actions to prevent and respond to terrorism. By 2017, many of those initiatives had matured, being complete or having evolved to another phase.

Australia's offshore CT operations contributed to the effective destruction of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group's insurgency in Iraq and Syria, including the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa during the year.

CT laws and policies, steadily developed since 2001, were reviewed and revised and continued to draw upon lessons learned overseas.

But global Islamist terrorism continued to affect Australia. The predicted refocusing of IS operations into the Indo-Pacific region saw attacks in Jakarta and Marawi, and IS directly affected Australia through the most complex terrorist plots seen to date. While both developments were expected by Australian Government agencies and analysts, the pressure on CT capabilities appears to continue unabated.

TERRORIST THREAT ENVIRONMENT

Australia's National Terrorism Threat Level has been 'Probable—a terrorist attack is likely' since September 2014[1]; in 2017, that level was reaffirmed.[2] Since 2014, Australia has experienced five terrorist attacks—all low-level, single-actor—and authorities advise that they have disrupted 14 terrorist plots to conduct complex, mass-casualty attacks in Australia. Two of those disruptions occurred in 2017. Australians have also been killed and injured by terrorists overseas.

Terrorism and violent extremism in Australia are primarily focused on and inspired by Sunni Islamist extremism in the Middle East, and IS in particular. In October 2017, Director-General of Security Duncan Lewis stated that:

> Terrorist threats in Australia and to Australians continue to be shaped by the influence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL; and also by the conflict more broadly in Syria and Iraq.[3]

The high level of internet, smartphone and social media usage in Australia also facilitates technologically enabled access to overseas propaganda and communication between extremists.

The decline of IS's fortunes in the Middle East has seen the group turn its attention to activities beyond that region, calling for attacks anywhere in its name and seeking support from and alliances with other insurgent groups. Since 2014, Australia has faced a small but persistent threat from homegrown terrorist supporters of Islamist extremism. That threat progressed to another level in late 2016 and 2017 as IS expanded its calls, finances and technical support to assist complex plots. While Australia had previously experienced complex Islamist terrorist plots—most notably those disrupted by Operation Pendennis in 2005 and Operation Neath in 2009—these were undertaken primarily in Australia, drawing inspiration from overseas and with timeframes of more than a year. None reached the stage at which an attack was imminent.[4]

In November 2016, as the coalition's Mosul offensive progressed in Iraq, IS produced a new-style propaganda video. Gritty and showing mobile, guerrilla-style fighters, it was interspersed with tourist footage of Melbourne.[5] The next month, Victoria's Joint Counter-Terrorism Team (JCTT) stopped a multiple-venue, mass-casualty attack on the Melbourne CBD, planned for Christmas; police allege that those involved were inspired by IS to undertake the attacks. The plot was uncovered only three weeks before the planned attacks, and authorities said it was the most complex and sophisticated seen to date.[6]

Only seven months later, in July 2017, the threat developed further, as the New South Wales (NSW) JCTT disrupted a planned explosives attack on a passenger plane departing Sydney. The group allegedly received plans, funds and equipment from IS in the Middle East to undertake the attack and possibly another, involving the release of toxic chemicals in a public place. The IS connection was reportedly through an Australian foreign fighter related to some of the men. Authorities became aware of the plans only days before disruption.

Another incident directly linked to IS was uncovered in February 2017. As part of the broader Operation Marksburg investigation, the Australian Federal Police's (AFP's) Counter Terrorism Canberra Operations team, working in conjunction with NSW Police, arrested and charged an electrician in the rural town of Young in NSW with attempting to help IS to use laser-guided missiles.[7] The man had recently relocated from Sydney and was involved with relatives who had left Australia in 2015 and are accused of funding IS and facilitating IS access to weapons through the Eastern European black market.[8]

Remote support to IS featured in another case in October, when a Melbourne man was charged with administering a pro-IS website on behalf of an American foreign fighter and providing funds to IS.[9]

All of these matters are still progressing through the courts.

There was one terrorist attack in Australia during 2017. On 5 June, in the Melbourne suburb of Brighton, a man on parole for non-terrorism-related offences laid siege to a motel, killing one person. The attacker invoked both IS and al-Qaeda during the siege, in which he was also killed. He'd been acquitted of involvement in the 2009 terrorist plot to attack a Sydney army base.[10] This was the fifth terrorist attack in Australia since 2014; all were single-actor, low-level attacks inspired by Islamist extremism.

From late 2016 to the end of 2017, Australian authorities stopped a number of planned terrorist

attacks, including the most complex seen to date, experienced a low-scale terrorist attack, and identified further development of links between Australians and IS in the Middle East. While there had previously been instances of IS members attempting to direct attacks—such as the failed Anzac Day plots of 2015 and 2016—and some cases of low-level funding, these cases demonstrated a higher level of involvement than previously seen. Those charged with terrorism offences continued to be primarily men aged from the mid-20s to the mid-50s with Middle Eastern backgrounds, Muslim backgrounds, or both. The turnaround times for attack disruptions continued to be short; international collaboration also continued to play a vital role in alerting investigators to leads in Australia.

Low technical skills and difficulty accessing weapons continued to limit Australian would-be attackers, but the Melbourne and Sydney plots demonstrated their ability to access technical planning and support either directly from IS in the Middle East or via IS propaganda, social media and encrypted communications. The group involved in the Melbourne plot had allegedly progressed some way towards making an improvised explosive device, but had been unable to obtain firearms.[11] Australia's effective firearms regulation means that terrorists typically look to the black market and organised crime to obtain weapons, as was the case in all three terrorist attacks using firearms. A concerning development in links between organised crime and terrorism emerged in July 2017, when two men who are related to well-known extremists were arrested in Sydney on firearms offences. While terrorism charges weren't laid, police stated that the men would be likely to supply extremists with firearms and other weapons.[12]

One Australian was killed in a local terrorist attack, and Australians were also casualties in the year's terrorist attacks in the Middle East and Europe. Kai Hao was killed in the Brighton attack, which also injured three police officers. Twelve-year-old Australian Zynab Al-Harbiya was killed in a suicide bombing attack on an ice-cream parlour in Baghdad, while Kirsty Boden and Sara Zelenak—both in their twenties—were killed in the London Bridge attack, in which two other Australians were injured. Seven-year-old Julian Cadman was killed in the September attack on Las Ramblas in Barcelona, and four more Australians were injured. Of the four Australians murdered overseas, the two children were on holiday with their families and Zelenak was on a short-term working holiday, while Boden was residing in London.

Despite their success to date, authorities warn that a mass-casualty attack in Australia is a matter of 'when, not if'. The reach of Islamist terrorism from the Middle East into Southeast Asia and Australia during the year indicates that this concern is not going away.

While CT measures and the decline of IS's fortunes in the Middle East have effectively halted the movement of Australians to join the group, an estimated 110 Australian foreign terrorist fighters remain. To date, it appears that no fighters associated with IS have returned to Australia, although around 40 who were involved with other groups in the Middle East have done so.

A particular concern for Australia is the movement of IS and its brand of terrorism to Southeast Asia. In 2016, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull observed in his annual national security statement that Australians were most likely to be targeted in Southeast Asia—a sentiment that he restated in his 2017 statement and at the Shangri-La Dialogue:

> With the bitter memory of the 2002 Bali bombing, I am keenly alert to the risk that the next mass casualty attack on Australian victims could well be somewhere in Southeast Asia, where ISIL propaganda has galvanised existing networks of extremists and attracted new recruits.
>
> As ISIL's so called caliphate is destroyed in Syria and Iraq more fighters will seek to return to our region—battle hardened and trained.[13]

During 2017, the Australian Government watched with concern as an IS-aligned collective of local militant groups took the city of Marawi in the Philippines, terrorists staged attacks in Indonesia, and Malaysia and the tri-border area was a focus for movement of terrorists, terrorist finances and weapons.

COUNTERTERRORISM

Since 2001, Australia has steadily progressed a broad range of CT initiatives and regular CT reviews. A federation of states and territories, the various jurisdictions have collaborated with each other and with the Commonwealth Government, supported by the Australian and New Zealand Counter Terrorism Committee (ANZCTC), which is a standing committee of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and includes New Zealand. Australia has also benefited from a bipartisan approach to CT, which has led to collaboration and consistency.

2017 saw a major inquiry into intelligence, the finalisation of reports of coronial inquiries into the two 2014 terrorist attacks, statutory reviews of a range of CT legislation, and announcements of some new security agency arrangements, policies and legislation. The states demonstrated their responsibility for dealing with CT and countering

violent extremism (CVE) as dedicated organisations and programs reached maturity.

REVIEWS AND INQUIRIES

The Independent Intelligence Review—the third in a decade—considered CT among a range of intelligence roles, and its recommendations will have a significant impact on many agencies. The most significant is the call to establish a strategic direction and oversight agency, the Office of National Intelligence, which was agreed by government. The agency will take a long-term, strategic approach to intelligence, enabling shared intelligence priorities and more effective and efficient capability development and management.[14] The government also announced the creation of a new Home Affairs portfolio, bringing various national-security-related agencies and functions into one ministerial portfolio with a shared, strategically focused oversight department. Both new agencies were established by 2018.

These are both good initiatives. They take Australia's management of national security and intelligence matters to a more mature level, provide structure for the already effective relationships between agencies, and should provide improved strategic direction and capability across all organisations.[15]

The coronial inquiry into the three deaths in the December 2014 Lindt Café siege was completed in 2017, and the coroner's much-anticipated report was published in May.[16] The inquiry was a high-profile and drawn-out matter, commencing more than six months after the incident and proceeding for almost two years. The findings were particularly scathing about NSW Police handling of negotiations. In all, the 472-page report made 45 recommendations across a range of areas. In responding to the report, the NSW and Australian governments accepted all the recommendations in some form and advised that progress had already been made in many of those areas in the two and a half years since the siege.

While the military wasn't involved in responding to the Lindt Café siege, the inquiry created a high-profile public debate about the role of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in CT, prompting the Australian Government to advise in 2016 that it was conducting a review of military support to domestic CT.[17] In July, the government announced legislative changes to make it easier for the states to access ADF support to CT and arrangements to enhance ADF training support to police.[18] In making these announcements, the government advised that these initiatives were informed by developments in the global terrorism environment and weren't a direct response to the Lindt Café coronial inquest.[19]

A second terrorist-related coronial report was handed down in 2017. The Victorian coroner's inquest into the 2014 death of a lone actor who attacked two police officers at Endeavour Hills police station in Melbourne was conducted without the high profile of the Lindt matter. The inquiry was self-consciously restrained, being limited to the events of the incident and the events immediately preceding it—probably partly in reaction to the high public profile of the NSW Lindt siege inquiry. In contrast to the Lindt inquest, the Victorian inquiry made no recommendations about state or national CT arrangements.

The coronial inquiries have played an unusual role. The Lindt siege inquiry, in particular, effectively took the place in the public realm of official reviews into and lessons learned from that and subsequent incidents, including the 2015 murder of Curtis Cheng and the recent Melbourne and Sydney plots. With the NSW Police in the firing line, official comment was stymied. Despite this, the findings provided relatively little insight or recommendations about broader approaches to CT, thereby missing the opportunity to learn much from those experiences.

POLICY INITIATIVES

Australia was a vocal player in 2017's global initiatives to address terrorists' use of encrypted communications, raising the issue at a Five Eyes conference and being involved in the G20 declaration on the issue. The government's approach of seeking collaboration with technology businesses, rather than imposing new requirements on them, has been sensible. Attorney-General George Brandis said of the Five Eyes meeting, 'these discussions will focus on the need to cooperate with service providers to ensure reasonable assistance is provided to law enforcement and security agencies'. This approach contrasted with the more legalistic approach to the issue taken by the UK and others.[20]

The ANZCTC produced new guidelines, *Australia's strategy for protecting crowded places from terrorism*, which arose from a review of attacks on crowds that was commissioned after the July 2016 attack in the French city of Nice.[21] A notable and welcome development in the new document is its focus on business and community taking a role in preparing for, preventing and responding to terrorist attacks. The package builds on existing strategic-level guidance to provide more detailed advice, points of contact and tools, including a security audit and a self-assessment risk management tool. Commentators, including Anthony Bergin, have suggested that such arrangements need to go further to involve a closer and more dynamic relationship with the private security sector and local governments.[22]

In October, COAG held a meeting dedicated to CT, affirming its ongoing commitment to a nationally consistent approach. The governments signed an updated Intergovernmental Agreement on National Counter Terrorism Arrangements and endorsed an updated National Counter Terrorism Plan. COAG also announced that the various jurisdictions would introduce technical systems—rather than the existing manually based system—to enable the sharing of drivers licence details and other data in terrorism-related matters while maintaining existing

access safeguards. COAG members also announced that they would develop a shared approach to biometric data management across various crime types, including a national facial biometric matching capability.[23] While the biometrics announcement created some debate about privacy, the longstanding national approach to security and CT mitigated contention on the issue.

COAG's commitment was supported by significant work in all states and territories throughout the year. Due to the threat environment in NSW and Victoria—where all of the attacks and plot disruptions to date have occurred—those states did the most work on CT laws, policies and programs.

In January, NSW took a significant step in coordinating its approach when the Premier appointed the state's first Counter-Terrorism Minister—the first appointment of this type in the states and territories. This is appropriate, as NSW has so far experienced Australia's highest levels of terrorism and CT activity. The NSW Government has also stated its intention to better use its agencies to assist in prevention and CVE, in addition to the work of law enforcement in disrupting and responding to attacks.[24]

Victoria continued to progress initiatives in CT, CVE and its state-wide 'resilience' program; it also conducted reviews of CT and resilience. Victoria Police's Counter-Terrorism Command entered its third year of operation and hosted its second annual international CT professionals conference, providing a valuable opportunity for information sharing. During the year, in response to international terrorist developments as well as a non-terrorist-related vehicle attack in the Melbourne CBD in January, enhanced security arrangements were implemented to protect crowded places. They included installing bollards and loudspeakers for use in emergencies and deploying armed response units at peak periods. Those arrangements complemented others already in place for various government installations and major venues.

Queensland reviewed its approach and updated its strategy during 2017. It also announced that it would increase the number of CT police, build a new police CT training facility and provide dedicated CT training for the broader Queensland Police Service.[25]

LEGISLATION

Australia has passed eight packages of CT legislation since a 2010 COAG legislative review. Some aligned laws across jurisdictions, while others arose from developments in the terrorist threat environment and the experience of agencies. By convention, at the federal level this legislation has mostly been subject to public inquiry under the auspices of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS), and all CT legislation is subject to ongoing review, including through a dedicated Independent National Security Legislation Monitor (INSLM), the PJCIS and various other bodies, and ultimately in the courts. In 2017, both the PJCIS and INSLM undertook separate statutory reviews of Australia's control orders; preventative detention orders; police stop, search and seizure powers; and the declared areas regime.[26] The INSLM also reviewed the high-risk terrorist offenders legislation, which provides for the ongoing detention of terrorists who have completed their custodial sentences but still present an unacceptable risk to the community.[27] The INSLM reports found that all of the laws remained appropriate; the PJCIS is due to report by March 2018.

NSW, Victoria and Queensland all conducted significant reviews of policy and procedure during the year.[28]

In June, NSW passed laws allowing greater powers for police to 'shoot to kill' during a terrorist incident. This followed the NSW State Coroner's recommendation in the Lindt Café siege coronial report to ensure that police officers 'have sufficient legal protection to respond to terrorist incidents'.[29] Western Australia and Victoria announced similar enhancements to the use of lethal force in terrorist incidents in October and December, respectively, reflecting the assessed threat and required response in those states; the governments of South Australia and Tasmania affirmed during the year that such powers weren't required due to the nature of the local threat.[30] All state and territory police forces have progressed training in dealing with armed offenders.

In June, Victoria introduced new bail laws that will have an impact on terrorism. They require magistrates to place greater priority on community safety when considering bail decisions. This was informed by a review of recent cases of serious crime, including terrorism, in which the offender was on bail for serious or violent offences.[31]

NSW become the first state or territory to update its laws to incorporate the 2016 federal high-risk terrorism offenders legislation; this was important, as NSW is home to a high number of people serving sentences for terrorism offences, including a number whose custodial sentences are due to end soon.

Another law from 2016 was put into effect for the first time in 2017, when Khaled Sharrouf became the first—and to date the only—Australian to lose his or her citizenship on terrorism grounds. Sharrouf had been found guilty of terrorism offences in relation to 2005's Operation Pendennis and was imprisoned until 2009. He travelled to

the Middle East and joined IS, and was reportedly killed later in 2017. Citizenship cessation can apply only to dual nationals assessed to be terrorists and whose return to their other home nation would not breach Australia's international obligations.[32]

At COAG's October meeting, the governments affirmed their commitment to a consistent national approach to legislation, noting that NSW and Victoria had recently seen the need to extend detention without charge in CT cases beyond that provided for in federal and other state laws. COAG also endorsed a recommendation from the Lindt Café coronial inquest report for a shared approach to fixated threat assessment; both NSW and Victoria established dedicated fixated threat assessment units in 2017, following Queensland's earlier lead.[33]

SECURITY VERSUS INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

Getting the balance right between individual rights and public security is the classic conundrum of CT.[34] Australia's CT laws include some powers, such as control orders and declared area offences, that are stronger than many in comparable democracies and have attracted criticism. Legal experts Professor George Williams and Dr Nicola McGarrity have stated that those provisions breach Australia's international obligations and domestic human rights laws.[35]

The control order regime allows actions short of arrest and detention to prevent terrorist acts. It has been in place for more than a decade and fills the gap between formal arrest and prevention. The laws have been subject to regular review and scrutiny—including in the two statutory reviews in 2017—and consistently found to be necessary and appropriate. Control orders are described by federal law enforcement as a 'method of last resort'.

The declared area offence makes it a crime—subject to specified exclusions—to be in designated areas that are essentially in the control of a terrorist organisation. To date, only Mosul and Raqqa have been 'declared areas', and the provisions are subject to a sunset clause. This is a novel and effective way to address the issue of criminalising foreign terrorist fighters, but has been criticised as lacking due process of justice, and McGarrity and Williams have highlighted particular concerns about the law's reverse onus of proof.[36]

The high level and number of oversight mechanisms provides some of the balance necessary in the use of these laws, but questions remain about their overall effectiveness. After significant investments of effort and time in progressing the laws and putting in place substantial review mechanisms, the more controversial elements are rarely used—and in some cases have never been used. Only six control orders have been sought, no-one has yet been charged with declared area offences, and Australian citizenship cessation on terrorism grounds has occurred only once. While in theory these laws are sound and appropriate, serious consideration needs to be given to why they aren't being used. Could the oversight arrangements be too onerous for agencies to use them?

Overall, the combination of activities across the spectrum of CT, and the oversight and review mechanisms in place—including sunset provisions for some laws—ensure balance between security and individual rights.[37]

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Over the three years to 2017, CT authorities and agencies spoke openly of the need for Australia to be engaged offshore to take away the inspiration for terrorist supporters in Australia and counter the rise of terrorism in Australia's region. In May, the global terrorist threat made a dramatic arrival in the region when an IS-aligned and supported group took the Philippines city of Marawi. Australia offered almost immediate support to the Philippines, providing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support under Operation Augury through the provision of two Royal Australian Air Force P3C Orion aircraft in support of operations by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, concluding in October after a four-month deployment. In the same month, the government announced Australian Army training support to the Philippines military in an advise and assist role, drawing upon the ADF's successful experience in a similar role with the Iraqi Armed Forces. At the diplomatic level, Australia engaged with its ASEAN neighbours to support a regional approach to CT. And, in September 2017, Australia listed the Islamic State East Asia group as a terrorist organisation[38]—an important step in any further legal actions in relation to the group and individuals associated with it.

Pre-existing commitments continued through the year, with Prime Minister Turnbull observing that ADF involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq was 'a long-term commitment'.[39] During a landmark visit to Australia in April by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Australia entered into a four-year, $320 million development agreement with Afghanistan. The agreement focuses on infrastructure, agriculture, the education and employment of women and girls, the civil service and anti-corruption, all of which are important initiatives to prevent extremism. The ADF commitment to Afghanistan was increased in May by 30 personnel to 300, mostly in training and headquarters roles.[40]

Australia maintained its military commitment to anti-IS coalition operations in Iraq and Syria, including by providing training to the Iraqi military and providing air force ISR, command and control, and strike capabilities.

Australia continued its support for the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation, which was established in the wake of the 2002 Bali bombings. In March, the Indonesian and Australian governments announced that the highly regarded training facility would broaden its role to include being a hub and forum to discuss important issues such as terrorism.[41] Making this successful venue a hub for regional and global partners to discuss difficult issues in a trusted

environment is vitally important at a time when the threat is rising in Southeast Asia, with very real links back to the Middle East and Europe.

Through its legal arrangements and operational commitments, Australia is contributing effectively to its international commitments—including UN Security Council Resolutions—to counter terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters.[42]

COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS AT HOME

The volume and pace of CT operations continued to stretch the resources of CT and law enforcement agencies during the year, but the success of CT efforts continued, as all major plots were disrupted. Authorities advise that they have disrupted 14 major mass-casualty plots since mid-2014.[43] In the same period, 34 major operations were undertaken, involving raids, arrests and charges, with the result that 78 people were charged with terrorism offences. Of those charged, 21 are in prison serving sentences, while the remaining cases are proceeding through the courts.[44]

The plots at the centre of 2017's significant operations are listed in Table 1.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

During 2017, Australia continued its existing approaches to CVE. A wide variety of programs were delivered at the community level across the country, informed by strategic programs at the state and federal levels and federally funded research. CVE and other aspects of prevention were considered in the strategic reviews conducted by various jurisdictions during the year.

Intervention programs are in place or being developed in each of the states and territories, and provide individualised case management plans to assist at-risk individuals. Preventing radicalisation in prisons has been an issue of increasing concern, particularly in NSW and Victoria, where most terrorism offenders are imprisoned.

Like other countries, Australia remained focused on the issue of returning foreign fighters and their children. Current plans call for any such cases to be managed through existing multiagency intervention programs. This should include assessments of whether intervention is appropriate and whether prosecution is warranted.

In March, the Australian Government announced new policy and funding programs to direct foreign aid to assist CVE efforts.[45] The policy ensures that CVE is considered in overseas development projects.

ASSESSMENT: HOW'S AUSTRALIA GOING?

That Australia has to date avoided a mass-casualty attack, despite the intent and capability of Islamist terrorist groups, is testament to the success of its approach to date. The resources and direction being provided by IS to its small group of supporters in Australia suggest, however, that a major attack may yet occur. The steady and thorough approach taken to the regular review of arrangements speaks to a carefully balanced and relatively open approach to CT.

But there remains a need for a more operationally focused approach to reviewing terrorist incidents and CT actions for lessons learned, rather than the ad hoc approach currently taken. While a range of mechanisms are focused on various elements of CT, it's only in the area of reviewing and scrutinising CT law that Australia has established and regularised procedures. Outside coronial inquests—which are concerned primarily with the cause of death, not CT arrangements—there's no regular mechanism for reviewing CT operations and activities. A good starting point for this would be the Australian and NSW governments' joint review of the Lindt Café siege, which was published in February 2015, soon after the event.[46] There have not been similar reports on and lessons learned from the other four terrorist attacks or the 14 major terrorist plots. Reviews of those incidents would provide evidence-based understanding of the effectiveness of Australia's arrangements and areas for improvement.

The federal arrangements, in which state jurisdictions have the lead in any terrorist incident, also need to be subject to regular exercise and testing. Training and exercises between operational response units occurs regularly through the ANZCTC arrangements, have been augmented under the revised National Counter-Terrorism Plan, and are typically focused on exercising within one particular jurisdiction, while other police and the ADF are involved as participants or observers; 2017's Exercise Outback—a multiagency and multijurisdictional exercise focused on returning foreign fighters—usefully demonstrated the agencies' ability to address emerging threats. But the high level of operational-level interaction doesn't appear to be matched by similar and regular exercising of strategic-level decision-making in ambiguous environments. This would be particularly valuable to familiarise decision-makers, such as federal and state cabinet ministers and business leaders, with their roles and responsibilities.[47] Paul Barnes and Anthony Bergin have also called for the health sector to be involved in such exercises to a greater extent.[48]

TABLE 1: Major CT disruptions in Australia in 2017

Operation and JCTT/Unit	Date	Location	Incident or alleged plot	Relationship to IS	Charges
Operation Kastelholm Victorian JCTT	23 December 2016	Melbourne, Victoria	Multiple-venue attack in Melbourne CBD using vehicles, firearms, IEDs and bladed weapons	Target inspired by IS; technical capability obtained via internet	Four men charged with terrorism offences
Operation Marksburg AFP Counter-Terrorism Canberra Operations Team	February 2017	Young, NSW	Providing technical support to IS	Direct contact with IS Middle East	One man arrested and charged with terrorism support offences
Siege response Victorian Special Operations Group and Victorian JCTT	5 June 2017	Brighton, Victoria	One person murdered; another held hostage during siege	None known	Lone attacker killed at scene; four men charged with firearms offences
Operation Rosenburg NSW Police	July 2017	Sydney, NSW	Illegal firearms importation and distribution by individuals related to terrorist	None stated; familial links to known terrorists	Two men arrested and charged with firearms offences
Operation Silves NSW JCTT	29 July 2017	Sydney, NSW	Planned IED attack on airliner departing Sydney airport; planned gas attack in public place	Direct contact with IS; IS provided technical planning support and equipment	Two men arrested and charged with terrorism offences; one man charged with firearms offences
Operation by Victorian JCTT	August 2017	Melbourne, Victoria	Arson: setting the Imam Ali Islamic Centre mosque on fire in 2016	None stated	Two men charged with arson
Operation Pontefract Victorian JCTT	October 2017	Melbourne, Victoria	Funding an IS foreign terrorist fighter and administering a pro-IS website on that man's behalf	Direct contact with an IS foreign terrorist fighter in Syria	One man arrested and charged with providing funds and services to a foreign terrorist fighter
Operation San Jose Victorian JCTT	28 November 2017	Melbourne, Victoria	Planned New Year's Eve firearms attack on CBD crowd	IS sympathizer; associated with other Victorian extremists	One man arrested and charged with terrorism offences

While neither the government nor the coronial reports on the Lindt Café siege made findings or recommendations directly relating to cabinet-level and interjurisdictional activities and operations, the coroner's report makes some telling observations about the lack of communication between NSW Police and the AFP and between the NSW Police and the higher levels of NSW Government it also found a lack of understanding among senior NSW Police about the role of the ADF. The absence of any discussion of federal cabinet in an otherwise voluminous report suggests that there was little involvement at the Australian Government level. The establishment in May 2015 of an Australian Government Counter-Terrorism Minister and a Coordinator within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to improve coordination among agencies was a positive development in enhancing coordination mechanisms, and was helped further at the federal level by the new Home Affairs portfolio.

The coroner's report does, however, remark on a lack of understanding on all sides about how the ADF could be used; this continues to be borne out in public political discussions on that issue. In Australia's federal system, in which various agencies are responsible for different roles and capabilities and are spread over a large country, it's vital that key actors understand their roles in an unfolding and uncertain terrorist incident. During such an event is not the time to learn about those different roles and capabilities, which need to be both well understood and exercised.

Australia should institute regularised strategic decision-making exercise arrangements to supplement the larger field exercises; they should involve state and federal cabinets and other senior authorities, as well as business.

While the complexity of terrorist plots, and the type of terrorist support to IS, reached a concerning level in Australia in 2017, that was matched by a high level of CT activity and coordination across agencies, jurisdictions and the community.

NOTES

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2 Malcolm Turnbull, *National Security Statement*, 13 June 2017, online.

3 Duncan Lewis, testimony to Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, *Official Committee Hansard, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Estimates*, 24 October 2017.

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Indian line
Chinese line
INDIA
CHINA
JAPAN
BANGLADESH
MYANMAR
(Burma)
Rakhine State
Nay Pyi Taw
LAOS
Yangon
THAILAND
Bangkok
VIETNAM
CAMBODIA
Manila
Pacific Ocean
South China Sea
PHILIPPINES
Prachuab Khiri Khan
Gulf of Thailand
Surat Thani
Phuket
Patani
Yala
Narathiwat
Banda Aceh
MALAYSIA
Kuala Lumpur
Singapore
Bandar Seri Begawan
BRUNEI
MALAYSIA
Sulu Sea
Mindanao
Marawi City
Celebes Sea
Sulawesi
I N D O N E S I A
Jakarta
Bandung
Java Sea
Banda Sea
TIMOR-LESTE
Arafura Sea
Timor Sea
AUSTRALIA
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
State/province boundary
Disputed boundary
Disputed area
0 500 km
0 250 Miles
The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

Southeast Asia

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In 2017, Southeast Asia's terrorism threat increased significantly. While it was expected that as IS forces in Syria and Iraq came under increasing pressure there might be collateral consequences in Southeast Asia, including increasing attacks by returning fighters and local individuals, it wasn't anticipated that IS fighters would seize an entire Southeast Asian city. But that's exactly what happened when IS jihadists captured the southern Philippines city of Marawi in May. Thereafter, the Philippines military and police were unable to retake the city for over 150 days. This was the most significant development in Southeast Asian Islamic extremism since the 2002 Bali bombings and has serious implications.

The gravity of the Marawi crisis has led to unprecedented security cooperation between Southeast Asian countries. First, in a historic development for the region, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia have begun trilateral air and sea patrols in the Sulu Sea to reduce the risk of jihadists moving between the three countries. Second, ASEAN has finally moved to establish an integrated database for police in the region to share intelligence on militants. It has also encouraged Australia to pay more attention to the region, as seen in the decision by AUSTRAC (the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre) to share critical intelligence with CT units in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as the establishment of the Southeast Asia Counter-Terrorism Financing Working Group, which is aimed at linking finance intelligence units across the region so as to disrupt the increasing flow of funds suspected of being used to fund terrorist activities.[1]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

By demonstrating the potential for IS to hold territory and keep a military at bay, the Marawi crisis created jubilation among Southeast Asian jihadist groups. The Marawi 'East Asia *Wilayah*' also demonstrated the possibility of an effective chain of command spanning Syria, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. While the city was 'liberated' in October, it has already provided *jihadis* with opportunities for gaining skills in bomb-making and urban warfare.[2] Also, Indonesia and Malaysia are both exposed to the outflow of IS fighters from Marawi. Both could see arrivals travelling by boat across the Sulu Sea.

If the Marawi crisis were not enough, the violence and forcible expulsion of Muslim ethnic Rohingya from Myanmar in August produced a serious refugee crisis in neighbouring Bangladesh. This severe deterioration of the already long-running Rohingya crisis on Myanmar's western border is like the Marawi crisis in becoming a magnet for international jihadism. Not only has the crisis created a cohort of disaffected and marginalised refugees, potentially vulnerable to being recruited as militants for regional Islamist extremist organisations, but the plight of the Rohingya refugees may be likely to inspire attacks elsewhere in the world to avenge the persecution of fellow Muslims at the hands of the Myanmar military. Masood Azhar, the leader of Jaish-e-Muhammad, a UN-designated terrorist group, has called on the faithful to help the Rohingya.[3] In September, IS released several videos calling for Muslims to travel to the Myanmar–Bangladesh border region for a 'humanitarian jihad'. It's likely that some will see a necessity for armed violence.[4] The Myanmar situation also places pressure on ASEAN's cohesion, as tensions between Buddhist and Islamic members threaten to make religion a prominent dynamic in intra-ASEAN relations for the first time in ASEAN's history.

INDONESIA

Because Indonesia is the most populous and largest Muslim state, the CT posture of the sprawling archipelago is critical for all Southeast Asia. Indonesia takes a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism, and in 2017 Joko Widodo's government decisively bolstered its CT legislative framework.

The conflict in Marawi directly affects Indonesia, meaning that Widodo's government has had to act quickly and firmly. At least 14 Indonesians are known to have been killed in the Marawi conflict, and Indonesian police have made seven arrests involving Indonesians planning to travel to Mindanao or otherwise support IS.[5] Marawi has also exposed at least four networks operating to facilitate the travel of radicalised Indonesians to Mindanao.[6] One of them, the Sulawesi group Mujahadin Indonesia Timur, led an insurgency outside Poso in central Sulawesi between 2011 and 2016. While the likelihood of a large-scale Marawi-style assault on an Indonesian city is low due to the absence of an existing insurgency from which to draw fighters, the Marawi conflict may inspire further terror attacks in Indonesia.

The evolving situation over the past few months points towards a continued high level of threat. In May, suicide bombers attacked a busy bus terminal in Jakarta, killing themselves and three police officers.[7] In August, police arrested five militants in Bandung, West Java, who were planning to construct and detonate a 'dirty bomb' that would have distributed radioactive material;[8] however, their plan to transform low-grade radioactive thorium 232 into deadly uranium 233 was technically infeasible.

Furthermore, the already complex role of Islam in Indonesia's national politics is becoming increasingly more challenging. While Indonesia's Constitution doesn't mention Islam, Indonesian society is experiencing a longer term trend towards stricter and more devout forms of Islam.[9] These trends are playing into Indonesian politics. Political elites have used religious sentiments and allegiances with devout groups to gain electoral advantages. The jailing of the former Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama ('Ahok') on blasphemy charges at the end of 2016 exemplified this trend.

Considering these developments, Indonesia's state apparatus and political leadership are wedged. While there are political imperatives to show respect for groups with a demonstrated capacity to mobilise Islamic sentiment, there's also a strong view that Indonesia should remain a multi-faith state under the nationalist ideology of Pancasila.[10] The Indonesian military, in particular, remains a firm bastion and champion for Pancasila, and has launched its own ideological indoctrination program to counter both Islamist extremism and calls for the Indonesian state to adopt sharia as its fundamental basis. This complex dynamic can produce very diverse outcomes; on the one hand, police gave in to demands from the extremist Islamic Defenders Front to break up academic discussions about the killings of alleged leftists in 1965 and 1966; on the other hand, the government banned the extremist organisation Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and charged the Islamic Defenders Front's leader with pornography offences.

The Widodo government is approaching the final stages of amendments to its 2003 CT law; at the time of writing, a vote is yet to take place.[11] The amendments are expected to strengthen provisions against foreign terrorist fighters by criminalising extraterritorial fighting, preparatory acts, and material support for terrorism. They may also strengthen Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) and clarify arrangements for the deployment of Indonesia's military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI). Key amendments could:

- criminalise the possession or dissemination of writings that might incite violence, and make convictions punishable with a 3–12 year jail term (Article 13A)[12]
- increase the length of detention for investigatory purposes to 180 days and pre-trial detention to two weeks (Article 25)
- strip citizenship from Indonesians who travel abroad to engage in terrorism, paramilitary training or foreign wars (Article 12B).

The BNPT will also soon release a White Paper mapping Indonesia's terrorist networks, including those affiliated with IS, and terrorism funding networks.[13]

On 10 July 2017, Indonesia passed a regulation amending the 2013 Law on Societal Organisations, which is also known as the *Undang-undang ORMAS (Organasasi Masyarakat)*.[14] The regulation was aimed more at political Islam than terrorism, and was issued in part to give legal effect to the banning of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia in May 2017. However, the amendment increases the ease with which the government can ban any organisation deemed to hold an ideology inconsistent with the state ideology of Pancasila. By removing checks and balances, including the role of the judiciary, it allows the government to legally arrest and charge any members of a banned group immediately when the ban is put in place. According to the Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law and Security, General (retd) Wiranto, the law was amended because the older formulation applied only to organisations teaching Marxism, Leninism or atheism. Conceivably, the law could be used to more rapidly ban new militant Islamist groups, although it could equally be applied to other minority groups, such as LGBTIQ or Papuan organisations.

As a tool to defend Pancasila, the ORMAS amendment aligns with the Indonesian military's Bela Negara (National Defence) program. The program is intended to encourage all civilians, particularly children, to love the Republic of Indonesia and be willing to defend national unity.[15] Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu believes the Bela Negara program is important to counter the influence of IS in Indonesia. In 2017, the program was expanded to encompass the Law and Human Rights Ministry, the Education and Culture Ministry, the Social Affairs Ministry, the Communications and Information Ministry and dozens of community groups.

Overall, Indonesia has been remarkably successful in containing its numbers of IS militants to a few hundred and attacks to a handful. This result can be attributed to the skills of its well-resourced and well-trained CT unit, Detachment 88, and also to its religious tolerance (which broadly remains, despite the trend towards greater piety), political stability and social harmony. The Indonesian Government's decision to move towards a more repressive CT framework that would potentially ban organisations, increase detention without charge and inflate the role of the TNI may appear justified in the light of the Marawi and Rakhine crises, but also represents a risk to its thus far successful formula of effective policing and liberal politics.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia holds concerns about citizens travelling to fight for IS in Syria, and now closer to home in Marawi and Myanmar. In January 2017, Malaysian authorities arrested a potential Indonesian IS operative planning to travel to Myanmar to conduct attacks.[16] Malaysia is also concerned that the 59,100 Rohingya now living in Malaysia may offer a potential pool of recruits for IS.[17] Those concerns will grow as jihadists such as Pakistan's Masood Azhar argue that the world's inaction on the Rohingya crisis is evidence of double standards. He stated that if what was done by Myanmar was 'done by a Muslim country to its non-Muslim minorities, there would have been an uproar'.[18]

Malaysia's terrorism concerns have increased since 2013, as several hundred Malaysians travelled to fight with IS in the Middle East, and as many as 60 are currently fighting in Syria.[19] In 2016, Malaysian authorities arrested 119 Malaysians on terrorism-related charges, significantly more than the 85 arrested in 2015.[20]

In 2017, there was no sign that Malaysia could relax its vigilance. In March, four Yemeni citizens were detained for planning attacks during a visit by Saudi Arabia's King Salman.[21] In September, the Malaysian police detained eight suspected militants, among them Malaysians, Filipinos and an Albanian.[22] Some had links to the Abu Sayyaf Group. One of the Malaysians was planning to attack Muslim, Christian and Hindu places of worship to create enmity between faiths and races in Malaysia.[23]

In addition to the CT legislative reforms of 2016, which included the powerful National Security Council Act granting powers of warrantless arrest and less restricted use of lethal force, in 2017 the Malaysian Government moved to strengthen the capabilities of the Royal Malaysian Police.[24] A new federal CT department will be created and staffed with a proposed 500 officers, up from the current 200.[25] The department is intended to be in place before the next Malaysian general election, which must occur before August 2018.

Malaysia has been active in pursuing ideological and countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. King Salman's visit in March 2017 coincided with the announcement of a new institution to combat Islamic extremism, the King Salman Center for Global Peace. The Malaysian Government will build a new structure to house the centre at Putrajaya. It will be established jointly by the Saudi and Malaysian defence ministries, with the Malaysian University of Islamic Studies and the Saudi Muslim World League as other stakeholders. Meanwhile, Malaysia also announced in January 2017 that its Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communication Centre (RDC3), established in 2016, would be expanded through cooperation with China.[26] The centre counters IS propaganda and, more specifically, IS's misuse of Islam in cyberspace. It does so in part by disseminating content from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia.

SINGAPORE

Singapore's main CT agency, the Ministry of Home Affairs, has assessed that the regional situation is worsening due to increased pressure on IS in Syria and the Middle East, impelling IS to encourage terror attacks in the home countries of followers. Singapore assesses that it's a key target because of its participation in international coalitions against terrorism and has uncovered jihadist publications that are promoting attacks on Singapore. Singapore's Muslim youth have proven to be susceptible to online radicalisation and indoctrination, much like Muslim youth in Western countries. In 2017, the first case of a Singaporean teenage woman becoming radicalised was detected.[27] This followed the placing of 13 people, including two teenagers, into detention or under restriction orders since 2015.[28]

Singaporean authorities are responding with both hard and soft measures. They've continued to develop response capabilities, and have launched appropriately trained police emergency response teams that patrol shopping malls. Police camera coverage and CT exercising have increased.

On the legislative front, in April 2017 Singapore amended its Public Order Act to require organisers of large crowd events to implement security measures.[29] Additionally, a new Infrastructure Protection Act that requires any new large-scale development to incorporate security measures its design will be introduced.

Singapore, regarded as Southeast Asia's leader in CT, has pursued successful and innovative strategies in CVE.[30] For example, the Singaporean Religious Rehabilitation Group is run by clerics and takes religious re-education as its core mission. The group seeks to analyse and critically examine ideas that underpin militant Islam and actively counters distortions of Islam through multiple means, including a counselling centre, a smartphone app, publications by religious scholars, conferences and community outreach events.[31]

BRUNEI

The micro-state of Brunei, while strongly Islamic, hasn't suffered a terrorist attack. Its security apparatus remains vigilant. In April 2017, Brunei deported four Indonesian nationals with demonstrated interest in IS ideology and contact with known IS members overseas.[32]

MYANMAR

Myanmar's state-building remains a work in progress. The February 2016 swearing-in of the first elected Myanmar Government in decades did little to resolve differences between the state and rebel ethnic armies.

Tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim Rohingya community in Rakhine State have deep roots, which go back to the establishment of independent Burma during the aftermath of World War II. Preceded by a pattern of insurgent attacks and security force reprisals since late 2016, violence escalated in August and September 2017 to the largest scale in decades. On 25 August, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a militant Rohingya group, mounted attacks on 30 police posts and an army base in Rakhine.[33] ARSA killed 12 security personnel and suffered losses of some 80 insurgents. Myanmar accused ARSA of murders after the recent discovery of a mass grave in the state.

ARSA's actions provoked massive reprisals from Myanmar's military, including alleged burnings of villages, murders and rapes. Amnesty International estimates that hundreds were killed or injured in the military's ensuing operations.[34] Consequently,

more than 600,000 Rohingya fled across the border into Bangladesh and are living in unsanitary conditions. These circumstances have the potential for a humanitarian disaster. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called the Myanmar military's actions 'a textbook example of ethnic cleansing'. Global terror groups, including al-Qaeda, and regional extremist groups such as Indonesia's Islamic Defenders Front are calling for adherents to go to the Myanmar–Bangladesh border area and fight for their co-religionists. Concurrently, anger at the plight of the Rohingya has prompted public demonstrations in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, the Southeast Asian Muslim capitals.

The religious dimension to conflict in Myanmar's western Rakhine provinces makes the region unique in its potential for fomenting terrorism and drawing foreign jihadists into the area, including from across Southeast Asia. There's a real possibility that IS will seek to use the Rohingya issue to establish itself in Myanmar in the same manner that it made Marawi in the southern Philippines an IS stronghold. IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi cited Rakhine as a region ready for jihad in 2014.[35] This increased pressure comes after signs that Myanmar is becoming a nexus for South Asian Islamic extremist and IS affiliates seeking to enter Southeast Asia. In January 2017, Malaysian authorities arrested two Bangladeshis with links to Islamic State in the southern Philippines.[36]

Although pan-Islamic groups have existed since the 1970s, ARSA began in 2013, when the leader of the organisation, Ata Ullah, along with a committee of some 20 senior leaders, established the organisation from Saudi Arabia. The group's ethnically oriented name was adopted after the original adoption of the title of Harakah al-Yaqin, or 'the Faith Movement'. According to a report by the International Crisis Group, ARSA members have trained abroad and are led by Rohingya emigres living in Saudi Arabia. Like the southern Thai groups, the militants disguise themselves among the broader population and use a neighbouring country (Bangladesh) as a sanctuary. Also like insurgents in southern Thailand, the group denies any direct links to jihadist or transnational terror groups. Suspicions remain, as the group's leader was born in Karachi and was educated in Saudi Arabian religious schools. Another member and Pakistani of Rohingya descent, Abdus Qadoos Burmi, has appeared in social media calling for jihad in Myanmar. ARSA has foreign members and links with Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Myanmar's military approach to the crisis is squarely part of its heavy-handed *modus operandi,* which since 1948 has been employed against Myanmar's ethnic rebel armies. The Rakhine crisis is heavily militarised; for example, there are reports that the Myanmar military has been laying new mines along its already heavily mined border with Bangladesh.

The upswing in violence has thrown into doubt a peace plan developed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Annan's report recognised the potential threat posed by radicalisation and called for political, developmental, security and human rights reforms to address the root causes of violence. It recommended merging the Border Guard Police into the national police, as well as improved training in human rights, community policing, civilian protection and languages to improve intelligence gathering and relations with local communities. Whether any of the report's recommendations will be implemented remains unknown, especially given that Myanmar's 2008 Constitution places the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar military above political checks, while the State Counsellor (currently Aung San Suu Kyi) has no real executive or judicial power to supervise the home, border affairs and defence ministries.

Myanmar has introduced some CT measures. In 2016, it adopted a CT package for its police force developed with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and participated in Interpol-led CT training in Southeast Asia. In January 2016, Myanmar's Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Brigadier General Kyaw Zan Myint, advised that Myanmar CT officers worked closely with their ASEAN counterparts.[37] Myanmar also improved its capacity to counter terrorist financing in 2016 with the Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental body that sets standards on anti-terrorism financing measures, removing Myanmar from a list of states assessed as weak on terrorist financing.[38]

THAILAND

Thailand's 13-year-old southern provinces insurgency seems largely contained.[39] In 2016, there were fears that the insurgency might have reached an inflexion point, with a shift in strategy towards attacks outside the three southern border provinces of Patani, Yala and Narathiwat. In August 2016, a series of small IEDs detonated by cell phone killed four people and injured at least 37 in Surat Thani, Phuket and Prachuab Khiri Khan, raising concerns because the attacks occurred outside the three southern provinces. In 2017, however, those fears of expansion weren't realised, and there were few attacks during the year.

Older fears that the southern Thailand insurgents would join forces with global terror franchises such as al-Qaeda or IS also continued to be unrealised. The Thai Government continues to insist that the southern Thai insurgency remains a domestic issue. Among analysts, there's disagreement. Some warn that Thailand might

not be immune to regional trends, including the rise of IS in Southeast Asia. Others, including analysts from the International Crisis Group, continue to emphasise that linking their struggle to an outside Islamist agenda would be 'counter-productive, if not suicidal'[40] for the southern insurgents. What's more certain is that there are ideological linkages with the broader Muslim world, many of the separatists having studied and lived in Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere.[41]

While the domestic insurgency still shows few operational links to transnational jihadism, such as significant exchanges of logistical support, neither is the conflict purely a matter of ethno-nationalism. Strengthening Islamic faith is probably playing a part in the insurgency, for example, through the use of jihadist rhetoric in the recruitment and training of insurgents and in Islamic discourse, including in the online sphere. When combined with specific historical grievances pertaining to the region's past status as the independent kingdom of Patani, these sentiments heighten sectarian tension, even though the insurgents' goal remains self-determination rather than support for broader Islamist goals, such as a regional or global caliphate.

Progress in quelling the violence in the three southern border provinces of Patani, Yala and Narathiwat, where 6,800 people have been killed since January 2004, remains slow. Shootings and bombings continued in 2017. In March, a family of four Thai Buddhists, including an 8-year-old boy, were killed on their way to a school in Narathiwat. In April, a Thai Army vehicle carrying six Thai Rangers was ambushed by suspected separatist militants in the Cha Nea district in Narathiwat. In May, a large car bomb was detonated at the entrance to a shopping centre in Patani, critically injuring at least two shoppers. There were also many incidents in 2017 outside the border provinces, but evidence of expansion in those areas is thin, despite fears. A bomb explosion that occurred at a Bangkok hospital in May appears to have been the action of a single individual opposed to the Thai military coup.[42]

The fragile peace process in southern Thailand is continuing. Overall numbers of violent incidents in the border provinces, and of people killed or injured in incidents, while still unacceptably high, fell in comparison with the numbers in 2016.[43] Doubts remain about the utility of the peace dialogue. The Thai military government launched the current round of peace talks in 2015. Negotiations have centred on an umbrella organisation, MARA Patani, which is representing several insurgent groups, while the Malaysian Government has been supporting the peace process. The latest milestones in the talks are an agreement on 'safe zones' in largely urban areas. However, there continue to be doubts about the extent to which MARA Patani can exert control over insurgent planning. For example, less than a than a week after talks between the Thai Government and MARA Patani in August 2017, militants stole pick-up trucks and took hostages from a second-hand car dealership in Songkhla Province.[44] Two of the hostages were shot, and one later died. There are divisions within the Thai Government over whether MARA Patani is the right negotiating partner for the government. Some have suggested that the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (National Revolutionary Front) would be a better option.

The junta pulled regular army troops out from the restive region and replaced them with locally hired, poorly trained paramilitary rangers who form part of the military's security grid in the region. Outsourcing security work to locally hired officials, such as village chiefs and defence volunteers, is a work in progress. These local officials, who fall under the Ministry of Interior, have been accused by the army of turning a blind eye to insurgents' activities.

At the national level, Thailand's capacity to detect, deter and respond to terrorist incidents is complicated by overlapping law enforcement responsibilities. The Royal Thai Police, the Department of Special Investigations and elements of the Thai military all have law enforcement responsibilities in CT cases. Other challenges hampering efforts include coordination, sharing of information and rapid turnover at the leadership level.

MULTILATERAL AND SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION

Historically, ASEAN hasn't been a particularly prominent or effective forum for the management of transnational terrorism threats. For example, while an agreement on countering terrorism was finally ratified in 2013 (the ASEAN Convention for Counter-terrorism), few concrete mechanisms have been agreed. An agreement on regional extradition has yet to be put in place.

However, developments in the southern Philippines are finally galvanising substantive cooperation. First, joint Sulu Sea patrols, announced at the Shangri-La Dialogue of 2016, were officially launched in June 2017 in a ceremony aboard an Indonesian naval vessel in the Javanese province of North Kalimantan.[45] The agreement is to be supported by increased intelligence sharing between maritime command centres in each nation—Tarakan in Indonesia, Tawau in Malaysia and Bongao in the Philippines. Cooperation will aim to address porous borders that currently allow unobserved movements by boat between the southern Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, each of which abuts the Sulu–Sulawesi seas.

Second, ministers and officials from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei, together with Australia and New Zealand, met in July 2017 to discuss foreign terrorist fighters and cross-border terrorism. The meeting produced several concrete outcomes, including the establishment of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Strategic Forum to enhance information sharing and align priorities between law enforcement agencies across the sub-region. The

initiative could either use existing databases or establish new databases on foreign fighters and cross-border terrorist movement.[46] There was also agreement to hold a roundtable on best practice for managing terrorist offenders in prison and following release. ASEAN police forces subsequently agreed in September to establish an electronic ASEAN police database system to share intelligence on militants and transnational crime.[47] Singapore has also pledged to lead a strong focus on CT during its term as chair of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting forum in 2018.[48]

In contrast, Myanmar's Rohingya crisis could have the opposite effect to the Marawi crisis and strain intra-ASEAN cooperation if not handled correctly. Former ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan has already noted the potential for the crisis to bring identity politics to the forefront of relations between the predominantly Buddhist countries of mainland Southeast Asia and the predominantly Muslim countries of maritime Southeast Asia.[49]

EXTERNAL POWERS

The US continues to support CT efforts in multilateral as well as bilateral settings. In October 2017, the State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism conducted a regional workshop for CT practitioners from Southeast Asia in Kuala Lumpur.[50] Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand participated in the workshop. The participants discussed methods to tighten regional cooperation and build capabilities to defeat IS and the flow of foreign terrorist fighters returning from the Middle East. US Defense Secretary James Mattis has also proposed a tabletop exercise for Southeast Asian countries on lessons learned from the Marawi crisis, and the US will host a workshop on regional terrorist threats at the Asia–Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii.[51]

Australia, having played a significant role in strengthening Indonesia's CT policing following the Bali bombings, is now playing a support role in countering IS forces in the southern Philippines. Equally importantly, Australia is helping to nudge Southeast Asian countries towards greater cooperation, including by co-hosting the July sub-regional meeting on foreign terrorist fighters and cross-border terrorism. Canberra recently announced that Australia's CT financing agency, AUSTRAC, would share intelligence with CT units in Southeast Asian countries.[52] Australia's hosting of a regional summit for ASEAN leaders in Sydney in March 2018 will be another opportunity for Australia and other regional leaders to review CT collaboration and agree on new initiatives. [53]

CONCLUSION

The onset of the Marawi and Rakhine crises makes the prognosis for terrorism in Southeast Asia the most troubling since the Bali bombings of 2002. Even with the deaths of the leaders Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute, the Marawi crisis is worrying on three key levels. It inspired extremists all over Southeast Asia, it proved the existence of a model for distant command and control of urban military operations, and it provided practical experience and training for militants. While the Rakhine crisis may yet prove to be a mainly localised insurgency more akin to the Thai southern insurgency than to Marawi, at the very least it offers a plausible case of Muslim oppression with which to justify jihad elsewhere. More worryingly, the Rakhine crisis will generate large pools of disenfranchised Rohingya in Bangladesh or further afield, who might be potential recruits for IS. It may also attract IS militants from outside Myanmar into the country and adjacent borderlands.

Southeast Asian governments are responding both individually and multilaterally, which they will need to continue to do if they're to keep pace with the elevation of threat levels. Indonesia has led the way, as two major legislative reforms are expected to be passed by early 2018, the ORMAS Bill has already been passed, and significant amendments to the 2003 CT laws are also likely. The government has judged that toughening of those laws is required, but there's a risk that they may tear at Indonesia's delicate social fabric and engender what they're seeking to prevent if they're used clumsily or repressively. Malaysia is doubling the resourcing of its police CT forces and appears to be closely monitoring would-be jihadists promoting violence or seeking to travel to or from global terrorist hotspots such as the Middle East, Marawi and Myanmar. Singapore, already the most CT-capable state, continues to incrementally adjust its laws to reduce the risks of attacks on public events. However, Myanmar's military is raising the terror risk for the entire region by pursuing a scorched earth policy against its Rohingya minority.

A more positive development is the unprecedented increase of practical cooperation between Southeast Asian states. Some four years after the 2013 ASEAN Convention for Counter-terrorism was ratified, Southeast Asia is finally moving towards a shared database on militants in the region. At the same time, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines have stepped out of the traditional strictures of ASEAN for military cooperation to set up a significant example of sub-regional maritime security management in the Sulu Sea.

The outlook for Southeast Asian terrorism presents some significant policy challenges. To prevent jihadists exploiting suffering, the most urgent need is to alleviate the Rohingya situation. The international community must act to support Bangladesh in providing aid to the refugees now camped on the border. It's important for ASEAN to continue engaging with Myanmar to seek a longer term solution to the management of this ethnic minority. More broadly, ASEAN, together with external partners, must continue to nourish a culture of sharing best-practice solutions in policing, intelligence and deradicalisation to ensure that Southeast Asia is improving its capabilities in line with the increasing threat. The sub-regional meeting in July should be regularised to the greatest extent possible.

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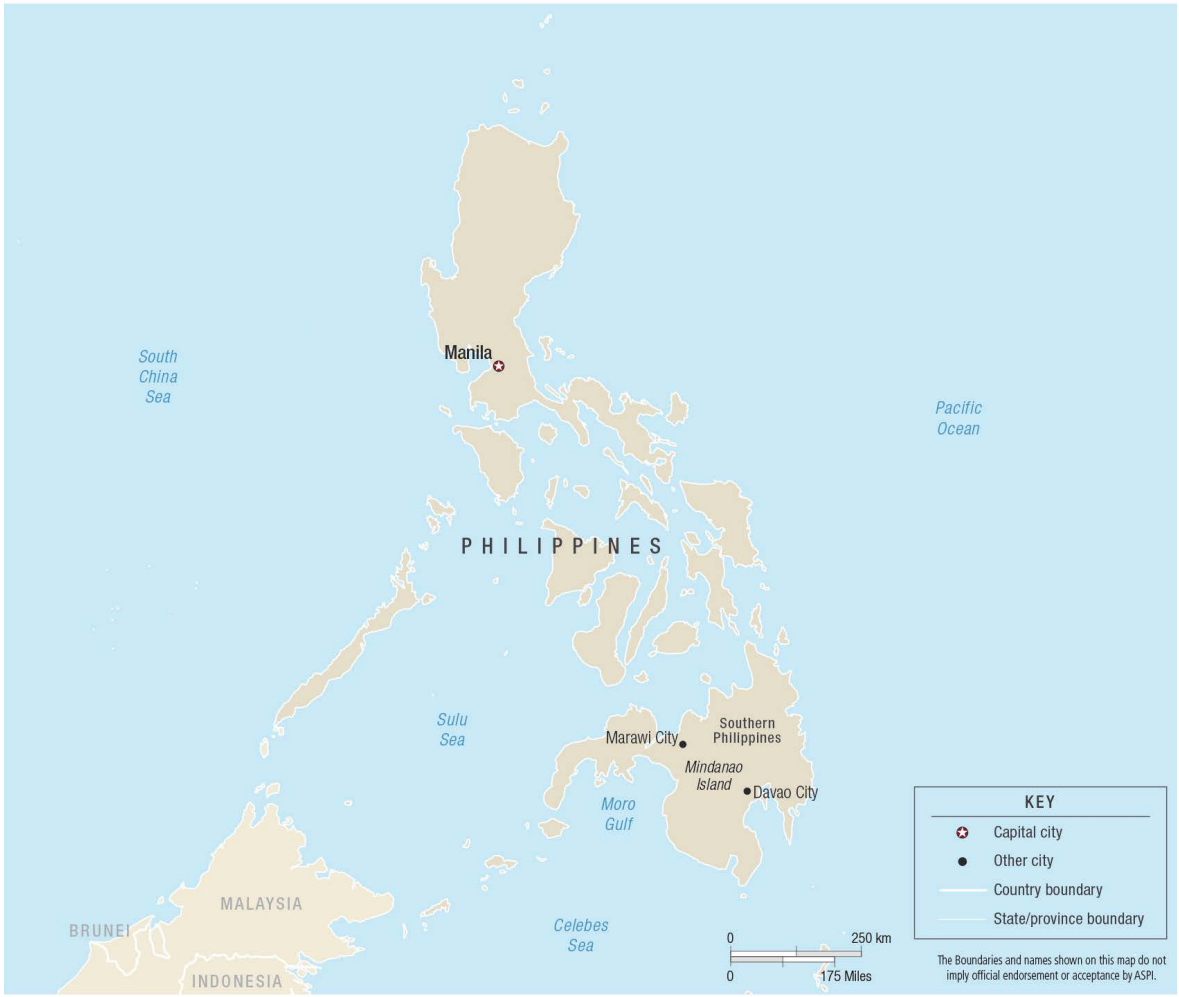
South China Sea
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Southern Philippines
Mindanao Island
Davao City
Moro Gulf
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Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
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The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

Philippines

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The Philippines is now the site of the greatest terrorism threat in Southeast Asia. That much is clear from the dramatic developments in the southern island of Mindanao during 2017. For some five months, a group of pro-IS jihadists captured and held parts of the city of Marawi in the province of Lanao del Sur, prompting a massive counteroffensive by the Philippines military that included extensive bombing of the city. Apart from Filipino fighters, jihadists from elsewhere in region and the Middle East also took part in the battle. Casualties exceeded a thousand, and more than 300,000 people were displaced.

This was the most significant jihadist operation in Southeast Asia since the 2002 Bali bombings and it was the first time that a Southeast Asian city had been taken by Islamists. Like the Bali attack, Marawi has captured the attention of jihadists globally and has inspired emerging extremists. IS's media outlets in the Middle East have began featuring Marawi in their videos and online publications, urging jihadists from across the globe to join the cause in Mindanao. There are already signs that dozens, perhaps hundreds, of prospective fighters have left for the southern Philippines or are seeking to go there.

The Marawi conflict has exposed the low competence of Philippines security services in combating armed jihadists in urban settings, as well as the failures of President Rodrigo Duterte's government in managing the propaganda fallout. There's a high likelihood that Mindanao will entrench itself as the centre of pro-IS extremism in Southeast Asia, assisting jihadists from around the region to gain the skills needed to escalate operations in their own countries.

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC STATE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Muslim insurgents in Mindanao have for decades had ideological, financial and strategic links to other Islamist militants across the world. Moro (the term that Mindanao Muslims used to describe themselves) jihadists received training in Libya from the 1970s and in Northern Pakistan and Afghanistan from the mid-1980s till the early 1990s. Al-Qaeda provided financial and technical support to the largest regional insurgent group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in the early 2000s and also, more tenuously, to the smaller Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). However, despite those international connections, Moro jihadism remained overwhelmingly local in its focus. The declared aim of the MILF and the ASG was the creation of an autonomous Moro Islamic state in the southern Philippines.

With the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in late 2013, growing numbers of Moro militants began to pledge their allegiance to the group, particularly from early 2014, when ISIS won a string of military victories and declared itself a caliphate, to be known simply as the Islamic State, in June 2014. One of the ASG's commanders, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon, was among the first prominent jihadists to declare fealty, bringing some, but not all, ASG fighters with him.

Although Hapilon was referred to as 'the mujahid authorized to lead the soldiers of the Islamic State in the Philippines', and *al-amir* (the emir) in a video by IS's Furqan Foundation, he wasn't named as their *wali* (provincial governor).[1] Jihadists from Indonesia and Malaysia also appeared in the video expressing their loyalty to him. IS did not bestow the status of *wilayat* or province on Mindanao, which it had done for 13 other areas of the Islamic world where there were supportive movements, and instead referred to the Philippines as *al-filibin*, part of *ard al-jihad* (land of jihad), rather than *ard al-khilafa* (land of the caliphate).[2]

Another armed Moro movement to pledge allegiance to IS, in April 2015, was the Maute Group, led by brothers Abdullah and Omar Maute. The Mautes had several hundred fighters in their group and had clashed with Philippines security services repeatedly since 2013. The group escalated its attacks in November 2016, capturing part of the middling city of Butig in Lanao del Sur and raising the black standard of IS on the town hall. Surprised by the brazen takeover, the Armed Forces of the Philippines took six days to clear the militants from the city.[3] The Butig operation became a blueprint for the subsequent attack on Marawi conducted by the Maute group with Hapilon's ASG fighters.

The response of the Philippines Government to Butig was one of complacency. After Butig was secured, President Rodrigo Duterte dared the Maute group to attack Marawi, the largest 'Islamic city' in Mindanao, saying, 'Go ahead [and burn down Marawi], be my guest. We will wait for you there. No problem.'[4] The armed forces also continued to assert that IS had no operational links within the country.

Indeed, debate raged among government analysts and researchers as to how to characterise the Hapilon and Maute allegiance to IS. For some analysts, it was merely a pragmatic tactic of essentially insurgent and criminal elements to gain an advantage in a long-running conflict with the Philippines state. But other observers believed that Hapilon and the Maute brothers had developed a genuine ideological commitment to ISIS that at least partly transcended their previous parochial concerns.[5] The weight of evidence increasingly favours the latter view.

THE BATTLE FOR MARAWI

Fighting broke out between the jihadists and government forces on 23 May 2017, after Philippines military units searching for Omar and Abdullah Maute in Marawi instead discovered Hapilon. Up to 500 Maute and Hapilon fighters from ASG launched operations against army and police facilities, quickly

taking strategic sites, including government offices, hospitals, schools, churches and jails. The distinctive black flags of IS were soon displayed in many parts of the city. The government immediately began evacuating the city's more than 200,000 residents, leaving less than 10% of the population there by the end of May. Several thousand civilians were trapped in jihadist-controlled areas, and several dozen of them were held hostage. Reports emerged of non-Muslims being killed if they refused to convert to Islam, and IS videos showed the desecration of churches in the city.

Government spokesmen boasted that the jihadists would quickly be defeated, but it soon became apparent that they grossly underestimated the difficulty of the task. The Hapilon–Maute forces were well entrenched in a part of the city that featured fortified buildings and tunnels—a product of the frequent clan conflicts (*rido*) in that part of Mindanao. The jihadists were well armed and trained and proved adept at ambushing and sniping at Philippines government soldiers and using grenades and IEDs. They also had excellent local knowledge and could move personnel and supplies via the large lake that their Marawi stronghold abutted. Alarmed at the rising casualty rate, the Philippines defence forces began large-scale bombing of the city, which rapidly caused extensive destruction of buildings and infrastructure.[6] By July 2017, journalists who beheld the devastation began referring to Marawi as 'the Mosul of Southeast Asia'.[7]

It wasn't until mid-August that the defence forces could claim to have gained the upper hand in the battle. By that stage, the jihadists had been forced back into a few neighbourhoods. Still, the task of defeating them proved difficult, and Philippines soldiers had to conduct the sort of intensive street-by-street urban warfare that they had little expertise in. On 16 October, the government announced that Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute had both been killed in firefights. Less than a hundred fighters were estimated to remain in Marawi at that point.[8]

Eventually, on 23 October, exactly five months after the beginning of the battle, the Philippines military was able to declare that Marawi had been totally cleared of jihadists.[9] The final death toll, according to official figures, was 1,226, comprising 974 jihadists (34 of them foreigners), 165 soldiers and police, and 87 civilians. Some 1,400 government security force members were listed as wounded, to which can be added several hundred jihadist and civilian casualties.[10] Moreover, more than 5,000 buildings in the main battle area of Marawi had been either destroyed or heavily damaged as a result of the Philippines defence forces' bombing.

In December 2017, Philippines officials were claiming that most of the pro-IS leadership in the Philippines had been wiped out, including not only the Maute brothers but also Hapilon's son and leading Malaysian IS figures, Dr Mahmud Ahmad and Amin Baco. It's unclear who currently leads IS in the Philippines or Southeast Asia.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARAWI

Despite the eventual defeat of the jihadists, the battle for Marawi was in many ways a strategic and propaganda success for pro-IS forces in the region. The ability of the Hapilon–Maute fighters to seize and control a major city for almost half a year, and to militarily withstand the Philippines Army's counterattack, won them valuable regional and international credibility in *jihadi* circles. The presence of as many as a hundred US advisers to the army as well as US and Australian intelligence support added to the propaganda dividend for the jihadists, allowing them to cast the battle as not just a local conflict but also as part of a broader global Muslim–Christian contest.[11]

Moreover, the jihadists succeeded in drawing the Philippines defence forces into a massive overreaction that has alienated the local Muslim population and added to the already deep levels of resentment towards Manila's handling of Islamic issues. Most of the damage to buildings and infrastructure in Marawi resulted from the defence forces' bombardment, not from jihadist actions. This allowed the jihadists to portray the Philippines Government, rather than themselves, as the source of suffering and destruction. The defence forces compounded the problem by claiming to hold title to much of the land in Marawi, creating anxiety among evacuees about their ability to return to their former properties. Many Marawi residents also fear that the Duterte government will use the rebuilding process as a way of Christianising the city. In effect, Manila has played into the hands of jihadists and greatly elevated the risk of pro-IS recruitment among disaffected communities.

The Philippines Government may have overstated its success following the quashing of the Marawi insurgency. The idea that pro-IS groups have been dealt a heavy blow from which they'll struggle to recover seems optimistic, as Moro jihadists have demonstrated their regenerative capacity over many decades. The ASG has gone through multiple leadership changes after the death of commanders and remains a dangerous and resilient jihadist group, as Hapilon so recently demonstrated. Many of those in the Maute group could easily re-form under new leadership.

But, above all else, Marawi showed that the southern Philippines, with its porous borders, tenuous government control over large land areas, and corrupt and inept security services, is the most favourable site in the region for training jihadists and mounting major operations. At a time when IS in Syria and Iraq is shrinking rapidly after a succession of military defeats, Mindanao stands as one of the more promising new theatres of activity. This elevated profile was evident when the Philippines received cover-story status in IS's *Rumiyah* magazine in June 2017, the first time that Southeast Asia had so featured.[12] Similarly, editions 3 and 4 of the *Inside the Caliphate* videos from IS's al-Hayat Media Centre were also devoted to Marawi and Mindanao.[13] This international attention is likely to lead to greater numbers of jihadists from outside Southeast Asia joining pro-IS groups in Mindanao, bringing the attendant risk that, in time, they'll take their skills to other countries, thereby perpetuating and intensifying the terrorist threat.

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12 'The jihad in East Asia', *Rumiyah*, Issue 10, Ramadan 1438.

13 See *Inside the caliphate*, nos. 3 and 4, at *Jihadology.net*.


UZBEK.
TURKMENISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
Siachen Glacier
Chinese line
Indian line
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Line of Control
CHINA
AFGHANISTAN
Kabul
Jalalabad
Uri
Jammu and Kashmir
IRAN
North Waziristan
Islamabad
Federally Administered Tribal Areas
Kandahar
Indian line
Chinese line
PAKISTAN
Baluchistan
New Delhi
NEPAL
BHUTAN
Sindh
BANGLADESH
Dhaka
MYANMAR (BURMA)
Arabian Sea
INDIA
Bay of Bengal
Andaman Islands (India)
Nicobar Islands (India)
SRI LANKA
MALDIVES
0 500 km
0 250 Miles
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
State/province boundary
Disputed boundary
Disputed area
The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

South Asia

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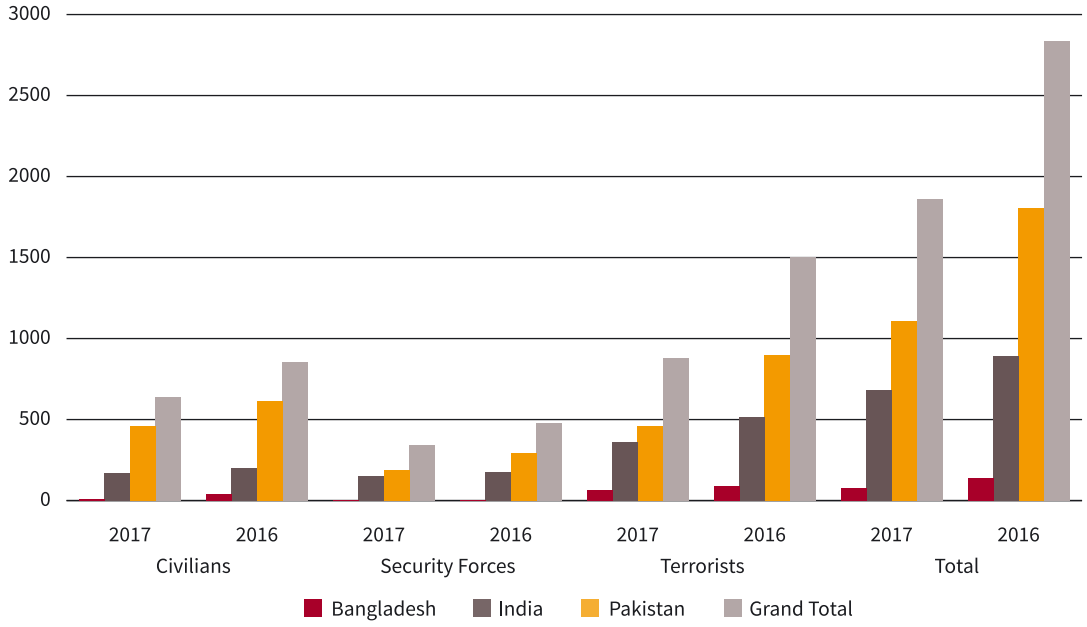
CT in South Asia in 2017 showed the same mixed trends as in the previous year: a reduction in the overall number of attacks and fatalities (Figure 1) but the continuation of violence in pockets in certain countries with no hope of a complete end to violent extremism. However, the downward trend in casualties isn't conclusive evidence of marked success in eliminating violent extremism or of law enforcement and security agencies in dealing with terrorism. The continuation of political conflicts, ongoing tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the absence of a strategy to deal with religious radicalism are some of the many factors behind the situation. Afghanistan and Pakistan remain most affected due to presence of local and transnational violent extremist groups. In other regional states, such as Bangladesh, where casualties are not comparable, transnational groups continue to threaten peace and stability. Despite India's relative control over violence and deterring Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and IS from proliferating in its territory, transnational terror organisations continue to operate and are likely to make the situation more complex in Kashmir. But, more than just the militant groups, it's the lack of political solutions and ongoing animosity with Pakistan that sustain extremist tendencies and influences in India.

FIGURE 1: Violence in South Asia, 2016 and 2017



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), online.

Despite the data indicating a reduction in violence (excluding in Afghanistan), a robust CT policy is still lacking. The various states tend to use CT as a tool to deal with all types of violence and with political issues, raising questions about the accountability of law enforcement and security agencies. A detailed analysis of the security establishment is also needed to determine the reasons for the downward trend in terrorist casualties compared to 2016. Issues such as lack of coordination, internal problems in the law enforcement and security agencies and high levels of tolerance for some militant groups in states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan contribute to mixed performance.

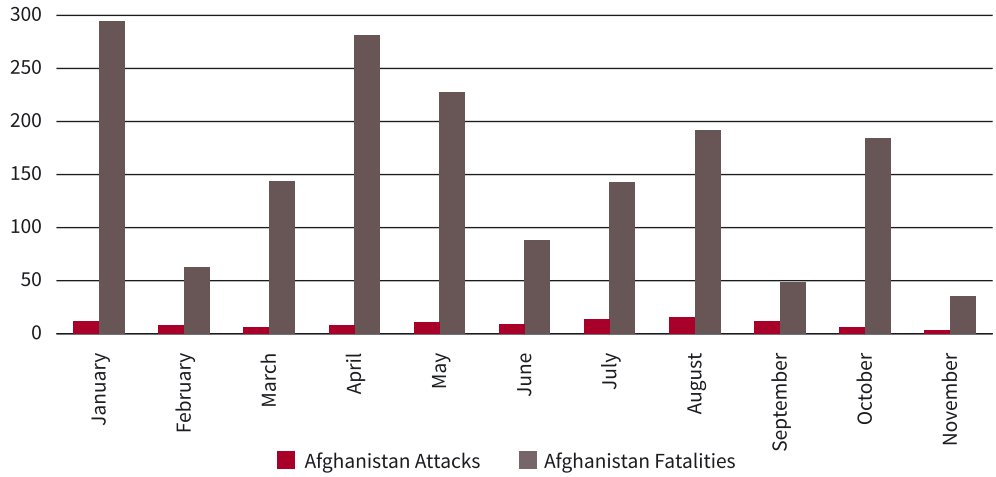
This chapter examines the terrorism threat in four critical countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan—that are the centre of violent extremism and remain concerning due to the influence or presence of transnational terrorists and continued radicalism. The objective is to review the conditions and the CT initiatives in each of the four, including the legal and cooperative frameworks adopted unilaterally, bilaterally or multilaterally. I also present a prognosis.

REGIONAL TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN TERRORISM

AFGHANISTAN

In 2017, of the South Asian countries, Afghanistan suffered from the highest number of attacks and resulting casualties (Figure 2). The increase in civilian fatalities was due to the use of homemade bombs and American aerial bombing, which was the heaviest since 2013.[1] The US Army lost about 13 men in the country.[2]

FIGURE 2: Terrorist attacks and fatalities, 2017



Source: Environmental Systems Research Institute, *Story Maps*, online.

The Taliban carried out the bulk of the attacks with heavy casualties in populated areas such as Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad. The Haqqani network, which is accused of having links with Pakistan, also mounted an attack that cost Afghanistan 150 lives. The Taliban has continued to use a dual approach of launching attacks on urban centres while keeping control of rural districts, approximately 57% of which were under its control in early 2017.[3] Despite renewed commitment to Afghanistan's stability by US President Donald Trump, the stalemate between the Coalition forces and the Taliban continued. The Coalition controls approximately 12% of the territory.[4] The stalemate may be due to the new American policy, which echoes the Trump administration's intent to adopt a more aggressive approach but has yet to be thrashed out clearly and tested on the ground. A fully trained Afghan police and security force that would be able to take on the Taliban might not be able to meet the target in the short term. President Trump also increased pressure on Pakistan to stop aiding the Taliban in Afghanistan, but the US still needs Islamabad to bring some of the Taliban to the negotiating table, and it continues to need to use Pakistan's territory to bring equipment and other supplies for additional American troops promised to Afghanistan. This means that results might not be as fast as expected.[5] Adding to the problem is an increase in terrorism financing due to a rise in opium poppy cultivation and the heroin trade. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan remains widespread.[6]

The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan is caused by political instability, poor economic conditions and the competing interests of regional and international players. A coalition comprising the Afghan Government, India and the US is confronted with a loose understanding between Russia, China and Pakistan to minimise the American role in the region, which is viewed as creating instability. At the regional level, India–Pakistan rivalry has direct impacts on the options adopted by the two states and their partners.

While the Taliban is the main beneficiary of such confusion and lack of consensus on how to end the war, al-Qaeda and IS have used the opportunity to expand their followings. IS is suspected to have carried out about 16 out of a total of 105 attacks in 2017.

COUNTERTERRORISM

The Afghan Government employs a three-pronged approach to CT: negotiate with warlords and the Taliban, increase the strength of the security forces, and build partnerships with the US and India to provide firepower.

In line with that approach, a peace deal was signed with warlord Gulbadeen Hekmatyar in May 2017, in which he agreed to abide by the Constitution in return for being included in the government.[7] Kabul struck the deal to encourage the Taliban to negotiate with it. Even of this doesn't help in bringing the Taliban on board, it will help to use Hekmatyar's influence to neutralise his supporters, despite growing scepticism about his overall credibility as a leader.[8] This strategy has failed to convince the Haqqani network and Pakistan to provide a helping hand in the negotiations. Kabul continues to have a difficult relationship with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, President Ashraf Ghani presented his vision of security, to be implemented by 2020. It included a four-phase plan to increase the operational capabilities of the Afghan armed forces and police to enable them to carry out

offensive operations.[9] The strengthening of security capabilities is not only required, but is also in line with US President Trump's new policy on Afghanistan that aims at improving security and CT capacity. The idea is to train Kabul's security forces to fight and end terrorism, instead of committing US taxpayers' money to a long-term goal of Afghanistan's development.[10] Deviating from Barack Obama's policy of withdrawal from Afghanistan, Trump committed an additional 3,000 US troops dedicated to training and CT operations. He also warned Pakistan against rendering any support to the Taliban or any other terrorist group. However, the downside of this approach is that, thus far, the US hasn't been able get Pakistan to change its policy. Furthermore, the focus has shifted away from the development that Afghanistan requires for its postwar reconstruction.[11] Continued poor governance will remain a major obstacle to strengthening the state and putting an end to violence.

BANGLADESH

Since the 2016 attack on the Holey Arakan bakery in an upscale neighbourhood in Dhaka, in which 28 people (20 civilians, 6 terrorists and 2 security personnel) were killed, Bangladesh seems to have increased its CT efforts and contained the overall number of attacks and fatalities. Yet the threat is far from over. The country remains open to the influence of religious radicalism and a target for domestic and transnational terrorist outfits.

Established as an independent Islamic state in 1971, Bangladesh was operationally secular. However, it drifted gradually towards a religious ethos that not only neutralised its secular tendencies but also combined with other factors to produce radicalism among the populace. Bengalis joined the jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s, and that allowed some to develop links with al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which seem to have attracted AQIS and IS to Bangladesh. The appeasement of the right-wing religious parties was another contributing factor. The first military government of General Ziaur Rahman recognised the Jamaat-e-Islami, a religious party that had been unpopular because of the role it played during the 1970–71 civil war, when it supported Pakistan's military. That relationship continued with the Bangladesh National Party that Rehman built, even after his assassination in 1981. The political coalition that formed government in 2006 was led by Rahman's wife, Khaleda Zia, and included Jamaat-e-Islami.

After it was elected in 2008, the current Awami League government embarked on a policy of punishing people accused of 1971 war crimes. In 2010, it set up a war crimes tribunal that indicted nine Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, six of whom have been hanged. Although supported by a segment of the population, the trials and death sentences were controversial and have divided Bangladeshi society. Rejected as a political ploy, they have encouraged further societal division, which terrorist organisations have capitalised on to radicalise university-educated youth, who are at the forefront of violent extremism.[12] Reportedly, one out of 10 university students supports violence.[13] The 2 July 2016 attack on the bakery in Gulshen involved university graduates.[14] Women, to, are affected by growing radicalism, which was demonstrated when a woman blew herself up during a police raid in December 2016.[15]

Despite a reduction in the number of fatalities since July 2016, the footprints of AQIS and IS remain visible. IS claimed responsibility for terrorist acts twice in 2017.[16] Despite this, the government argues that transnational terrorists are claiming responsibility for acts carried out by local militant organisations, such as Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh and the Bangladesh-based Ansar ul-Islam.[17] Nevertheless, it's difficult to neatly separate the groups, as local groups are eager to form linkages with transnational terrorists. For example, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh is suspected of having links with both IS and Jamaat-e-Islami. Similarly, AQIS has links with Ansar ul-Islam.[18]

There's also been a rise in Islamist-motivated violence to punish perceived blasphemy. In November 2017, a mob attacked a Hindu village in Rangpur and burned it down over an accusation of blasphemy against a resident.[19]

The prospects for Bangladesh as a secular state are looking decidedly grim.

COUNTERTERRORISM

In response to the threat posed by religious extremism, the Awami League government gave additional powers to law enforcement agencies, created new CT units and engaged in international and regional cooperative measures to boost its capacity. The Counter-terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit, which was formed in 2014 as part of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, was strengthened after 2016. In February 2017, it was authorised to carry out operations across the country to capture terrorists, in which it arrested about 14,000 Bangladeshis. However, as the data indicates, there was a reduction in terrorism fatalities of more than 50% between 2016 and 2017, which might be attributed to earlier deficiencies in police training, internal organisational politics and inefficiency. Those problems might not necessarily be resolved in the short term, even through training cooperation with India and the US. In November 2017, Bangladesh and India participated in joint CT exercises in which around 25 Bangladeshi personnel were trained in many CT methods.

Bangladesh's ongoing political problems and inability to strengthen legal frameworks to support the judiciary in dealing with terrorists will continue to pose problems, especially given the government's continued appeasement of religious hardliners. In May 2017, for example, the government agreed to remove the statue of the Greek Lady Justice at the Supreme Court, on the demand of Islamist groups.[20] Many believe that the disappearance of writer Mubashar Hassan, who worked for the US Institute for Peace's Resolve project on CT issues, was orchestrated by law enforcement to silence people drawing attention to the growing problem of radicalism in the country.[21]

INDIA

In India, violence and the resulting human losses have declined more or less steadily since 2001 (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Fatalities in terror attacks, India, 1994 to 2017

	Civilians	Security forces	Terrorists	Total
1994	1,696	417	1,919	4,032
1995	1,779	493	1,603	3,875
1996	2,084	615	1,482	4,181
1997	1,740	641	1,734	4,115
1998	1,819	526	1,419	3,764
1999	1,377	763	1,614	**3,754**
2000	1,803	788	2,384	**4,975**
2001	1,693	721	3,425	**5,839**
2002	1,174	623	2,176	**3,973**
2003	1,187	420	2,095	**3,702**
2004	886	434	1,322	**2,642**
2005	1,212	437	1,610	**3,259**
2006	1,118	388	1,264	**2,770**
2007	1,013	407	1,195	**2,615**
2008	1,007	374	1,215	**2,596**
2009	720	431	1,080	**2,231**
2010	759	371	772	**1,902**
2011	429	194	450	**1,073**
2012	252	139	412	**803**
2013	303	193	388	**884**
2014	407	161	408	**976**
2015	181	155	386	**722**
2016	202	180	516	**898**
2017	171	152	359	**682**
Total	25,012	10,023	31,228	66,263

Source: South Asia Portal, data until 26 November 2017, online.

However, violent extremism continues to pose a problem due to inefficient governance and the absence of a political solution, especially in two major areas: the northeast and the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The highest casualties and greatest fears of violent extremism continue to be centred on Jammu and Kashmir, partly because of terrorist groups operating from across the border (Table 3). Pakistan's military has continued to use groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad, both of which use bases inside Pakistan to attack civilian and military targets in India as part of an ongoing strategy to internationalise the continuing Kashmir dispute. In January 2016, five Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorists launched an attack on an air base that resulted in eight casualties (five terrorists and three security force personnel).[22] Another attack against 22a hard target—the army base in the garrison town of Uri—mounted in September 2016 was attributed to the LeT.[23] The LeT claimed the att23ack by holding *in absentia* funeral services for the terrorists who died at Uri.[24]

TABLE 3: Militants killed in Ja24mmu and Kashmir, 2015 to 2017

	Lashkar-e-Taiba	Jaish-e-Muhammad	Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen	Unidentified	Total
2015	6	6	1	45	**58**
2016	13	0	0	91	**104**
2017	21	12	0	69	**102**
Total	**40**	**18**	**1**	**205**	**264**

Source: *Indian Express*, 10 November 2017.

After those attacks, Indian forces increased pressure in the Kashmir Valley to crack down on cross-border infiltration and violent extremists. Between January and October 2017, the security agencies managed to kill 182 militants, including 102 foreign militants. They targeted leaders, which helped to reduce the flow across the border.2

But that hasn't helped in 25overcoming the insurgency and violence in the valley, which has been largely caused by the heavy deployment of law enforcement and security agencies into local communities, which resulted in the eruption of instability in 2015. The use of pellet guns against protesters, which resulted in many losing their eyesight, and constant abuses by the security forces have fed into general discontent and increased susceptibility to violence.[26] The frustration of the loc26al population in the absence of a political solution to their problems has also provided opportunities to transnational terrorists groups such as AQIS and IS, which are attracted to the Kashmir Valley in response to the narrative of atrocities against a Muslim population. Although those groups have only a limited presence, they add to the complexity of the situation.

The absence of a political solution, compounded with poor governance, has also contributed to ongoing violence in other parts of India, such as the northeast, where left-wing extremist groups continue to cause fatalities. The highest number of fatalities in the region was reported in Manipur (21 civilians and 21 terrorists). The cause was the response of Naga ethnic group militants to the government's decision to carve out a new district in the state. Those incidents aside, violence has consistently declined in the northeast even though the government hasn't solved core political issues (Table 4). There were 93 reported casualties in the region in 2017, compared to 165 in 2016. Continuing the downward trend will require concrete measures to end the economic blockade.2

TABLE 4: Cumulative fatalities, by27 conflict theatre, 2005 to 2017

Years	Jammu and Kashmir	Insurgency in the northeast	Left-wing extremism	Punjab
2005	1,739	717	717	0
2006	1,116	637	737	0
2007	777	1,036	650	7
2008	541	1,051	648	0
2009	375	852	997	0
2010	375	322	1,180	4
2011	183	246	602	0
2012	117	316	367	2
2013	181	252	421	0
2014	193	465	314	0
2015	174	273	251	10
2016	267	165	433	22
2017	323	93	285	2
Total	**6,361**	**6,425**	**7,602**	**47**

Source: South Asia Portal.

The above data on India doesn't include casualties caused by the Hindu right wing, which is one of the rising challenges to the country's domestic stability.

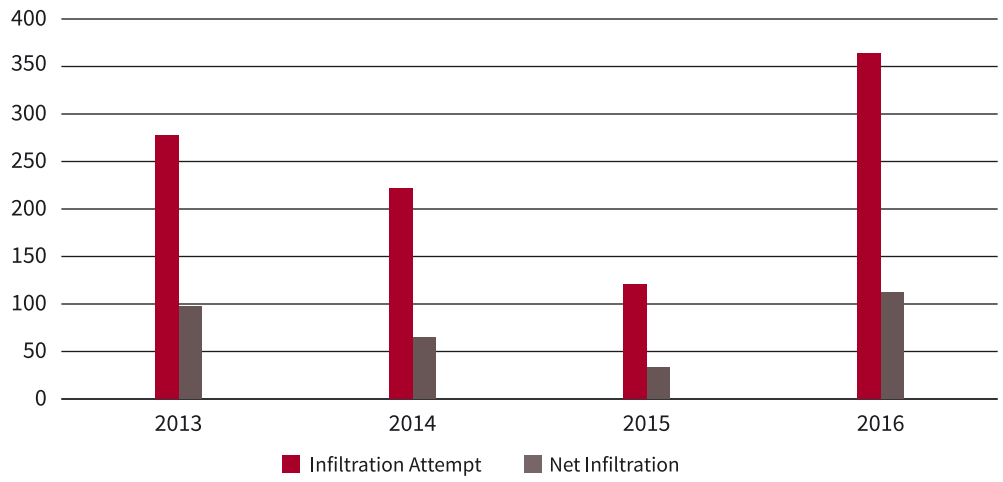
COUNTERTERRORISM

In 2017, India's main CT focus was on bringing down levels of violence through operations against violent extremists, especially in Jammu and Kashmir, which continues to have highest number of fatalities. The police were encouraged to perform through financial incentives provided mainly to the Special Police Forces.[28] In addition, the Central Armed Police F28orces were provided to the state government of Jammu and Kashmir on a regular basis.

The focus remained on countering cross-border violations and fighting foreign terrorists. Militants from across the border are among India's major worries, and it has negotiated with Pakistan and brought pressure to bear, directly and indirectly, to deter it from supporting militants such as the LeT and Jaish-e-Muhammad. India's National Security Advisor negotiated with his counterpart, Lieutenant General Naseer Janjua (ret'd), to resolve the Pathankot attack case against Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorists.[29] India seems to have narrowed down its r29elations with Pakistan, making them conditional on Pakistan taking concrete action against terrorists based in its territory. However, Pakistan refuses to take any action in both the 2016 Pathankot and 2008 Mumbai cases. Islamabad claims that the evidence provided by India against the LeT terrorists and their leader, Hafiz Saeed, isn't sufficient. Moreover, Islamabad continues to support militancy in India, especially Kashmir.

Part of India's approach has been to strengthen border infrastructure with the aim of stopping infiltration, improving border fencing, using technological surveillance, providing weapons and equipment to security forces, improving intelligence and operational coordination, and using force against infiltrators. Another part was to put pressure on Pakistan by launching 'surgical strikes' against militants' launch sites in Pakistan in September 2016. Although Pakistan denied such action by India, the denial was meant to prevent tensions escalating.[30] After September 2016, firing across the30 line of control was also increased to discourage border crossings and deter other aggressive movements, but that had limited impact (Figure 3).[31] Pakistan remained unimpressed, and ther31e's no evidence of any shift in its overall policy towards India.

FIGURE 3: Cross-border infiltration, Jammu and Kashmir, 2013 to 2016



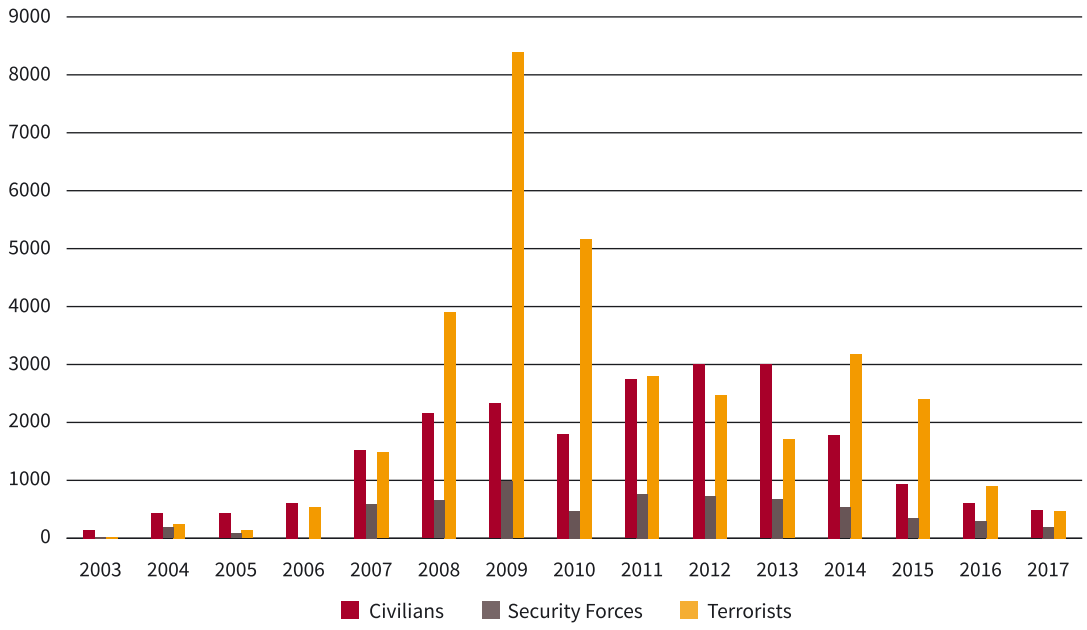
Source: Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual report, 2016–17*. p. 7.

Domestically, steps such as removing 500-rupee and 1,000-rupee banknotes from circulation were taken to weaken the black economy and dry up terrorist financing, although some argue that this hasn't worked.[32] India has also failed to bring about a more sustainable political solution to the Jammu and Kashmir conflict and has instead continued to deal with it by the use of excessive powers provided to the security agencies through the *Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1980*. Other measures, such as providing job opportunities and economic incentives to youth in Kashmir, were started but had little impact. Clearly, precarious conditions will prevail unless a political solution is found and the population has confidence that it will work.

PAKISTAN

In 2017, Pakistan continued to be one of the two countries in the region most affected by violent extremism, despite a 63.3% decrease in total fatalities from the previous year (Figure 4). However, unlike in 2016, when most violence occurred during the first four months of the year, the violence was spread throughout the year in 2017.[33]

FIGURE 4: Fatalities from terror attacks, Pakistan, 2003 to 2017



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal, online.

The reduction could be explained by fewer instances of violence and deaths in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the adjoining Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, where conditions improved.

Although the army claimed to have cleared the bulk of the FATA through various military operations, including in North Waziristan, where it refused to take any action before 2014, the influence of the Taliban and other militant groups remains. Operation Zarb-e-Azab, which was launched in June 2014, was meant to purge North Waziristan and other parts of the country of all terrorists, with no exceptions. However, the aim was primarily to eliminate the state-unfriendly Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. The operation didn't eliminate the Taliban's influence. Despite peace being restored in most areas, the cultural norms popularised in the larger society due to Taliban influence remain prevalent. Those norms aren't necessarily associated with the ethnic Pashtun code of honour (*pushtunwali*). On 21 November 2017, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan expressed concern about the 'Peace Committee' in Wana, Waziristan, forcibly applying the Taliban's sociocultural norms, including putting restrictions on women's movement.[34]

This indicates a radicalisation of the society after decades of Taliban presence but also the fact that various militant groups weren't entirely cleared out, out despite official claims. The Trump administration accuses Pakistan of continuing to support the Haqqani network. The Taliban groups continue to have access to Pakistani territory, which was demonstrated by the presence of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Akhter Mansur on Pakistani soil when he was killed in an American drone attack in the southern province of Baluchistan in 2016. The country's security and intelligence agencies continue to maintain links with different militant groups, which is one of the reasons that it was unable to completely clear the tribal areas and terrorism spread to other areas, despite the military launching a fresh operation called Radd-ul-Fassad in February 2017.

According to the country's military, extremist groups hiding in Afghanistan are responsible for attacks inside Pakistan.[35] Notwithstanding that such claims are challenged from across the border, the growing level of conflict between the two neighbours has contributed to violence and unrest. The problem of violent extremism won't dissipate unless Afghanistan–Pakistan relations improve, but that doesn't appear likely at the moment.

Despite a gradual reduction in violence, the country remains exposed to violent extremism. Terrorist activity has spread beyond the tribal areas into the rest of the country. Since the beginning of the military operation in February 2017, the violence seems to have shifted from FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa to other provinces, particularly the southern and southwestern provinces of Baluchistan and Sindh, where terrorists have killed more people than in the tribal areas. Out of the 48 reported attacks in Pakistan in 2017, 24 took place in Baluchistan (Table 5).

TABLE 5: Terrorist attacks, groups and fatalities, Pakistan, 2017

Month	Place	Terrorist group	Fatalities
January	Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	0
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Unknown	2
	Parachinar, FATA	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi / Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	25
	Sheikhupura, Punjab	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	0
	Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	10
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Unknown	2
	Karachi, Sindh	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	1
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	0
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	2
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	0
February	Wana, FATA	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	6
	Lahore, Punjab	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	18
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	2
	Charsadda, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	7
	Sewan, Sindh	IS	91
	Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	2
	DI Khan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Unknown	1
March	Parachinar, FATA	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	24
April	Parachinar, FATA	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	14
	Lahore, Punjab	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	1
	Lahore, Punjab	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	8
	Karachi, Sindh	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	1
May	Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Unknown	0
	Quetta, Baluchistan	IS	0
	Gwadar, Baluchistan	Baluchistan Liberation Army	3
	Gwadar, Baluchistan	Baluchistan Liberation Army	10
	Mastung, Baluchistan	IS	28
June	Parachinar, FATA	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	78
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	13
	Karachi, Sindh	Islamist	4
	Quetta, Baluchistan	IS	3
	Quetta, Baluchistan	IS	2
	Quetta, Baluchistan	IS	2
July	Lahore, Punjab	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	26
	Karachi, Sindh	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	4
	Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	2
	Chamman, Baluchistan	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	1
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	4
	Chamman, Baluchistan	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	3
August	Quetta, Baluchistan	IS	15
September	Chamman, Baluchistan	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	1
	Karachi, Sindh	al-Qaeda	2
October	Mastung, Baluchistan	Unknown	0
	Gwadar, Baluchistan	Unknown	0
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	7
	Quetta, Baluchistan	al-Qaeda	5
November	Quetta, Baluchistan	Unknown	5
	Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	Lashkar-i-Islam	2
	Quetta, Baluchistan	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan	3

Source: Environmental Systems Research Institute, *Story Maps*, online.

Most of the attacks in Baluchistan were carried out by a combination of Islamist groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (a splinter of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan), al-Qaeda and IS. The expansion into Baluchistan and Sindh is connected with both external and internal factors. While Pakistan's security forces believe these attacks to be a result of an international conspiracy to thwart the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, there were fewer attacks by the Baluchistan Liberation Army or any of the militant Baluchi nationalist groups, which challenge the Pakistani state and its political and economic interests. Notwithstanding that there was a 60% drop in violence in 2017 compared to 2016,[36] little attention is paid to the fact that the expansion of the LeT and its charity front group, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) in Baluchistan and Sindh has caused greater radicalisation and nourished an ideology that has created followers who are then poached by groups such as al-Qaeda, IS and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. The LeT and the other groups viewed as dangerous share a common dislike for the syncretic Sufi tradition, which has come under attack on several occasions. Among the worst attacks in 2017 was one against the famous Sufi shrine at Sehwan, Sindh, in which 91 people were killed. Sindh Province reported a rise in fatalities compared to other parts of the country.[37] The ideological factor was visible in an over 25% increase in sectarian killings from 2017.[38] In comparison, Punjab, which is politically the most powerful province, experienced a reduction in violence: the number of attacks was limited to three.

Al-Qaeda and IS continue to have a presence in various areas of Pakistan, where they have focused on less guarded and less settled areas, rather than on urban centres.[39] Therefore, there were a greater number of fatalities reported in attacks by IS, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. Besides those groups, other groups such as the Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen, Jaish-e-Muhammad and LeT/JuD, which are on the UN list of proscribed organisations, continue to operate freely in the country. Although these violent extremist groups don't attack the state, their presence has contributed to greater radicalisation in Pakistan. The LeT/JuD network, in particular, is encouraged by the state to enhance its presence in society through setting up social and welfare ventures. Despite criticism, the security agencies refuse to reduce the role of some of the Pakistan-based militant groups.[40]

The country is experiencing growing radicalisation, the clearest example of which is the rise in militancy and extremism among some of the Sunni Barelvi groups. The Barelvi sect, which has traditionally been considered non-violent, was held responsible for motivating the killing of the Punjab governor over blasphemy in 2010. In late November 2017, the Barelvi political party Tehreek-e-Labaik held the capital city hostage to its demands for 20 days. As in Bangladesh, radicalism has also seeped into the educated middle class.[41] Young middle-class people are proving susceptible to propaganda from al-Qaeda and IS.

COUNTERTERRORISM

The military used kinetic means to counter the threat of terrorism by launching a military operation in 2014, followed by another one in 2017. The 2017 effort, Operation Radd-ul-Fassad, was aimed at consolidating gains made during the earlier clean-up operation and at expanding operations in Punjab through the use of a paramilitary force, Rangers in Punjab, which hadn't happened in the previous operation. The civilian government permitted the army to conduct intelligence and interception operations in Pakistan's largest province if there was credible information about a terrorist threat from Afghanistan-based groups.[42] This was accompanied by a decision to repatriate more than 1.5 million legal and illegal of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan back to Afghanistan. The process, initiated in the second half of 2016, continued during 2017 despite protests by various domestic and international human rights bodies that it was 'the largest unlawful forced mass return of refugees'.[43] Pakistan's military tends to blame Afghanistan for acts of terrorism inside Pakistan.

Although not properly negotiated, the exodus of Afghan refugees was one of the items on the 20-point agenda highlighted as part of the 2015 National Action Plan, which is Pakistan's basic framework for eliminating terrorism. It was formulated in response to the tragic terrorist attack at the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014 in which 150 people, including 144 children, were killed. However, the plan was constantly weakened by inaction or compromise on various issues. For instance, the agreement between the civilian government and the Barelvi extremists in November 2017, negotiated by the army chief, allowed lesser restrictions on the use of loudspeakers by clerics, which was a point documented in the plan to curtail hate speech.

Referring to the CT mechanism, the government empowered the military through the 21st amendment to the 1973 Constitution, which was later extended as the 28th amendment to set up special military courts to try terrorist cases. Criticised by human rights organisations for lacking transparency and not meeting legal standards, the military courts have continued to function.[44] The government has also been less effective in implementing other provisions covering hate speech or monitoring religious seminaries and their funding.

Contrary to the US's and India's demand to ban and root out groups such as LeT and Jaish-e-Muhammad, little was done to limit the groups. The LeT/JuD network is part of a group of 64 terror outfits that was proscribed under section 11B(1) of the *Anti-Terrorism Act 1997*. Considering pressure from the UN, the government put the LeT/JuD head, Hafiz Saeed, under house arrest in January 2007, but he was released in November that year. He has continued to appear on television and make public speeches underscoring the need for an aggressive policy vis-a-vis India. The head of Pakistan's primary intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, has proposed mainstreaming terror groups by bringing them into formal politics.[45] The LeT/JuD formed a political party called the Milli Muslim League

in October 2017. Despite not being authorised to contest elections, the party has continued with its political activity. The LeT/JuD network has also managed to expand its welfare apparatus and continues its activities unabated. Such policy is contrary to any effort to deradicalise or check violent extremism.

One of the key issues highlighted in the 2015 National Action Plan pertained to FATA reforms, which aimed at integrating tribal areas into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province. Although a key religious party opposed those reforms, a transitional mechanism was approved by the Prime Minister and his cabinet in September 2017.[46] This is meant to consolidate gains made by the military through political means. Meanwhile, the National Counter-terrorism Authority, which was formed in 2009 and had its powers spelled out by the parliament in the *National Counter-terrorism Authority Act 2013*, remains a struggling organisation. There remain a lack of consensus and no clear plan for its power and direction.

PROGNOSIS

Despite reductions in violence in South Asia, the region remains vulnerable to violent extremism and radicalism. Violent extremism isn't just a matter to be dealt with by security agencies but is also a political issue. The governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan appear equally incapable of introducing sustainable political measures.

Growing radicalism in the region is feeding violence or potential violence. That radicalism isn't a condition that can be improved through focusing only on poverty eradication. In fact, poverty is a contributor rather than a major driver of violent extremism in the region. This is a long-term issue that needs focused planning and serious consideration.

Violence in Afghanistan isn't likely to be eliminated without Kabul resolving its disputes with the Taliban, which isn't a cohesive group. The government in Kabul remains divided on the issue of accommodating the Taliban, which continues to be a tool in the hands of various regional governments, including those of Iran and Pakistan. Moreover, many significant stakeholders tend to view the Taliban as a preferred alternative to al-Qaeda and IS, which have established themselves in Afghanistan and the rest of South Asia. Bilateral competition between Afghanistan and Pakistan and between India and Pakistan, which benefits the Taliban and other non-state actors, is a major source of continued violent extremism. Strengthening the Afghan security forces is a long-term task, but won't overcome the much more important need to develop a consensus among regional and international stakeholders about Afghanistan's future, without which violence and terrorism will remain a permanent feature.

Strengthening the security capabilities of individual states will be further delayed if the militants fighting in the Middle East, particularly Syria, filter back into South Asia. It will add to existing levels of violence and may contribute to the influence of al-Qaeda and IS. The short-term reduction of violence in 2017 isn't indicative of the problem of violent extremism being solved, as high levels of religious and political radicalism prevail throughout the region. The absence of political options from India, and the appeasement of extremists by India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, continue to feed into violent extremism. However, policymakers in all those states should be cautious about creating social frustration and radicalism in their efforts to root out violent extremism. Bangladesh is a case in point. Other countries, such as Pakistan, must disengage from militant groups and carefully evaluate the huge social cost of the continued use of militant religious groups or keeping them intact through its dubious policy of mainstreaming them into the sociopolitical fabric of the state and society. Indeed, radicalism in Pakistan grows unabated.

The various regional and international partnerships to counter terrorism will bear fruit only when individual states cease to view extremists as policy tools.

Coordination among intelligence agencies and operations needs to be strengthened further for better outcomes.

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Faryab
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Jalalabad
Herat
Nangarhar
Ghor
AFGHANISTAN
INDIA
Gardez
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Afghanistan

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Violence continued to worsen in Afghanistan in 2017. The country's been caught in a downward spiral since it assumed primary responsibility for security following NATO's late 2014 withdrawal of combat forces. Only Syria ranked lower in 2017's Global Peace Index. In a bleak prognosis, the US intelligence community contended that Afghanistan's security situation might not be reversible, assessing it that would 'very likely continue to deteriorate, even if international support is sustained'.[1] The country's poor CT scorecard for the year reflects this pessimism.

If there was good news to be had, it was that, despite the Afghan Government's inability to provide effective security amidst a growing insurgency and relentless terror campaign, it didn't collapse. Nor did it lose US support—an outcome the government most likely feared when Donald Trump assumed the US presidency in January 2017 after previously calling for a withdrawal from Afghanistan. Instead, Trump launched a new strategy for Afghanistan in August—one that saw US troop numbers increased, constraints on targeting and the use of air power loosened, and a commitment to an ongoing presence in the country without a timetable for withdrawal.[2]

Terrorist attacks that took place in 2017 were part of broader insurgent campaigns, and terrorism was one of many tactics used by groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State–Khorasan (ISIS-K) in their efforts to wrest control from the Afghan Government and, increasingly, one another. Accordingly, this chapter outlines Afghanistan's security situation before giving an overview of significant attacks of the past year. It concludes with a discussion of CT initiatives and strategies.

AFGHANISTAN'S SECURITY SITUATION

Afghanistan's military and security personnel experienced a record number of armed clashes in the first 8 months of 2017. Casualty numbers were so high that they were deemed to be 'unsustainable' in the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction's final assessment for 2017.[3] Violence against media personnel surged, while the Red Cross announced that it was reducing its operations owing to deteriorating conditions and the murder of staff members.[4] The Taliban continued its forward momentum to control an estimated 43% of the country—the most it has held since the war began in 2001.[5] This was despite the organisation dealing with internal leadership schisms and splinters, and no longer maintaining a monopoly on insurgency in Afghanistan since the rise of ISIS-K.

Meanwhile, ISIS-K, fighting both the government and the Taliban, managed for a time to gain control of Tora Bora (the mountain location famed as the place of al-Qaeda's last stand before it fled into Pakistan) until the Taliban wrested it back.[6] Despite concerted efforts to roll back ISIS-K—including the dropping of a MOAB on one of its purported training facilities, the killing of its third emir in little over a year, and the alleged loss of 750 men from an estimated 2,000-strong fighting force—the group continued to hold territory in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province.[7] It also had a reported presence in Badakhshan, Jawzjan, Faryab, Ghor, Kunar and Baghdis provinces.[8] In some of those areas, ISIS-K and the Taliban fought one another, resulting in civilian deaths and displacement.[9]

OVERVIEW OF ATTACKS

The year had barely begun when on 10 January the Taliban unleashed coordinated IED attacks intended to target senior National Directorate of Security (NDS) personnel in Kabul, Kandahar and Helmand provinces. In Kabul, twin bombings targeted a minibus carrying NDS personnel near Afghanistan's National Assembly, killing more than 30 people.[10] A suicide bomber in Helmand killed another seven people when targeting a guesthouse used by an NDS figure.[11] In Kandahar, an IED hidden inside a sofa was detonated in the governor's guesthouse while visiting UAE diplomats were meeting with senior province officials, including NDS and police figures.[12] Twelve people died from the attack, including the UAE ambassador and the deputy governor.[13] ISIS-K was active, too, allegedly carrying out a bombing and kidnapping of 12 teachers from a religious school in Nangarhar Province on 15 January.[14]

February fared little better. An ISIS-K member carried out a suicide attack at Afghanistan's Supreme Court in Kabul on the 7th, killing at least 22 people.[15] The following day, the group killed six employees of the Red Cross in Jowzjan Province.[16] On 11 February, a Taliban member detonated a car bomb on a street outside a bank in Lashkar Gah in Helmand Province, where Afghan Army personnel had arrived to collect their pay, killing or wounding more than 20 people.[17]

March began with the Taliban's dual suicide bombing and armed assault on police and intelligence facilities in Kabul, killing 22 people and wounding over 100 more.[18] On 8 March, ISIS-K struck with a suicide bombing and armed assault on a Kabul military hospital that lasted six hours and killed more than 30 people.[19] April, too, was marked by violence. ISIS-K mounted a suicide bombing close to the Presidential Palace in Kabul on the 12th, killing five people and injuring 10 more.[20] On 21 April, the Taliban carried out an attack against a military base in Mazar i Sharif in Afghanistan's northern Balkh Province. Suicide bombers along with armed gunmen stormed the base, killing more than 140 soldiers.[21]

There was little respite in May. An ISIS-K member detonated a car bomb to target a passing NATO convoy in Kabul on the 3rd, killing eight people and injuring another 25,[22] while on 17 May ISIS-K militants stormed a government-run TV station in Jalalabad using a suicide bomber, killing six people and injuring 16 more.[23] A Taliban attack on a bank in Gardez in

Paktia Province on May 21 wounded 31 people, while in Ghazni Taliban militants drove a captured Humvee packed with explosives into the entrance of a district governor's compound and detonated it, after which militants attempted to storm the location.[24] On 21 May, ISIS-K struck a compound in Kabul housing foreign aid workers, killing two people and abducting another.[25] Kabul was struck on 31 May with one of worst attacks since the beginning of the war, when a truck bomb was detonated in the green zone, killing over 150 people and injuring 300 more.[26] The attack went unclaimed, but is believed to have been the work of the Taliban, its affiliated Haqqani network, or both.[27]

The 31 May attack led to protests about the government's inability to provide security and caused serious social unrest in Kabul, which resulted in the deaths of several people following an excessive use of force against protesters.[28] On 3 June, triple suicide bombings targeted the funeral of one of the protestors, resulting in the deaths of another 12 people and the injuring of 90 more.[29] An ISIS-K suicide bomber struck a Shia mosque in Herat on 6 June, killing 33 and wounding another 64.[30] On 15 June, ISIS-K targeted a Shia mosque in Kabul with a suicide bombing, killing four people and injuring another eight.[31] The Taliban struck in Helmand on 21 June with a suicide car bomb attack, again outside a bank in Lashkar Gah, targeting government officials waiting to collect their monthly salaries and killing more than 34 people.[32]

Early July saw seven people killed and another nine kidnapped by the Taliban in an attack on a bus in Farah Province on the 12th.[33] On 20 July, the Taliban struck checkpoints in Helmand with suicide attacks using three captured Humvees packed with explosives. The driver of one vehicle was reportedly a son of Taliban emir Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada.[34] Two days later, the Taliban reportedly killed seven people and abducted 63 more in Kandahar, while on 24 July it targeted Ministry of Mines employees in Kabul with a suicide car bomb, killing at least 30 people and injuring 42.[35] On 31 July, ISIS-K attacked the Iraqi Embassy in Kabul using a suicide bomber and an armed assault, killing two.[36]

August began with ISIS-K suicide bombers attacking a Shia mosque in Herat, killing 32, while on 2 August a Taliban suicide bomber targeted a foreign convoy near Kandahar.[37] The following day, the Taliban targeted a foreign military convoy in Kabul, killing three.[38] On 14 August, a Taliban attack in Ghor Province killed three aid workers and wounded two more.[39] Additionally, on 23 August a Taliban car bomb struck the Lashkar Gah police headquarters, which also housed a bank branch where government employees were waiting to receive their pay, killing seven and injuring 40.[40] Earlier attacks by the Taliban against banks in Helmand had led to a branch being moved into what was thought to be the more secure police headquarters.[41] On 25 August, ISIS-K again targeted a Shia mosque in Kabul with a suicide bomber and armed gunmen, killing 40 and injuring another 90.[42]

September was mostly marked by attacks against Afghan security forces. They included a Taliban suicide bombing at Bagram on the 6th and again on the 11th, and a suicide attack against a NATO convoy in Kandahar on the 15th.[43] On the 16th and 17th, the Taliban carried out a series of attacks against police in Badghis and Ghazni provinces, and on the 24th a suicide bomber targeted a Danish convoy in Kabul.[44] ISIS-K launched a rocket attack on Kabul airport on the 27th, while the Taliban carried out bombings in Kandahar, Farah and Kabul provinces the following day, killing more than 20 people. On 29 September, an ISIS-K suicide bomber detonated his device near a Shia mosque in Kabul, killing five people and wounding another 20.[45]

October delivered authorities a mid-month CT success when security forces foiled an attempted truck bomb attack on Kabul, which was thought to be the work of the Taliban, the Haqqani network, or both.[46] However, the remainder of the month saw a spate of violent attacks. On 17 October, the Taliban attacked security forces in both Paktia and Ghazni provinces with car and Humvee bombs and armed assaults. In Paktia, the police training centre in Gardez was attacked; the province's police chief was killed along with 40 others and a further 158 were wounded. In Ghazni, 30 people were killed and another 15 injured when Taliban forces bombed and then stormed a security compound.[47] The following day, the Taliban attacked a military base in Kandahar Province, again using a Humvee bomb and an armed assault, killing 43 people and destroying the compound.[48] On 20 October, an ISIS-K suicide bomber struck a Shia mosque in Kabul, killing more than 40 people and wounding 45.[49] A suicide bombing also took place at a mosque in Ghor Province, killing 33, although no claim of responsibility was made for the attack, which reportedly targeted a local warlord.[50] Finally, on 31 October, an attack by an ISIS-K child suicide bomber in Kabul's green zone killed five and injured another 20.[51]

November saw ISIS-K again target a television station, this time in Kabul. The attack on 7 November involved a suicide bomber and armed assailants disguised as security forces and resulted in the deaths of two people and injuring of another 24.[52] On the night of 13 November, the Taliban carried out attacks against checkpoints in two provinces using night-vision technology of apparent Russian origin.[53] In Farah Province, the Taliban used night-vision goggles to carry out a stealth attack that resulted in the killing of eight security personnel while they were still in their

beds.[54] In Kandahar Province, multiple attacks resulted in the killing of 22 police and wounding of another 15.[55] On 16 November, a car bomb in Kabul killed 18 people and wounded another 10. The bombing, targeting a political gathering, was claimed by ISIS-K.[56] The group struck again on 23 November, this time in Jalalabad, killing eight people and wounding another 15 in a suicide bombing targeting a rally protesting in support of a local police commander who had recently been relieved of his duties.[57] On 28 November, a roadside bomb in Kandahar, alleged to be the work of the Taliban, killed eight civilians.[58]

On 2 December, ISIS-K launched an attack in Jalalabad that first targeted a television station. That was followed by bombings at the scene, targeting security officials who had arrived to investigate. Among those injured was reportedly the Jalalabad head of the NDS in Nangarhar Province.[59] The attack killed three and injured another 10. The city experienced another attack the following day, when a suicide bomber drove his motorcycle into a crowd rallying in support of the Afghan President, killing six and injuring another 13.[60]

In mid to late December, the Taliban launched a series of attacks against security forces in Helmand. More than 25 people were killed in the attacks, which used roadside bombs, suicide bombers and ambushes.[61] In Kandahar Province, a Taliban suicide bomber struck a NATO convoy on 17 December, killing one civilian and injuring another four, while on 22 December, a Taliban suicide bomber struck a district police headquarters in the province, killing six officers and wounding nine.[62]

ISIS, meanwhile, continued its efforts to target Kabul. On 18 December, ISIS militants wearing police uniforms attacked an NDS training centre in Kabul. The attack resulted in a siege lasting several hours until security forces killed the ISIS assailants.[63] On 28 December, ISIS struck again, attacking a Shia cultural centre in Kabul, killing more than 40 people and injuring another 80.[64] An attack at the funeral of a local official in Jalalabad on 31 December killed more than 17 people. Neither ISIS nor the Taliban, both of which operate in Nangarhar Province, claimed responsibility.[65]

COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS

As the above overview of selected attacks highlights, several worrying trends emerged in both Taliban and ISIS-K attacks in 2017, despite an ongoing campaign against both groups. Those attacks, along with others in the broader insurgency, were responsible not only for record casualties and steady attrition among Afghanistan's security forces, but also a loss of public confidence in the government's ability to provide safety. The corruption and inefficiencies that continued to plague the government were certainly not conducive to effective CT, and, as a result, it remained acutely vulnerable to terrorist attacks that bolstered the public's perception that the government was unable to maintain security.

The Afghan Government appeared powerless to stop the Taliban's devastating use of suicide operatives driving captured military vehicles packed with explosives to attack hardened targets, followed by armed assault teams. It fared a little better with its successful foiling of an attempted truck bombing in Kabul after the assailant failed to stop at a security checkpoint and was shot.[66] However, this lucky break wasn't replicated elsewhere and, for the most part, the government seemed unable to stem the tide of attacks in Kabul or elsewhere.[67]

Another trend visible in 2017 was the Taliban's repeated targeting of security and intelligence forces and financial institutions where government personnel gathered to collect monthly salaries. A countermeasure put in place—moving a bank into a police headquarters—was defeated when the Taliban then targeted that location. The Taliban's use of night-vision technology in night attacks, while not new, was also a notable development, primarily because of an accompanying change of target. For example, the November 2017 Taliban attacks using this technology appeared to single out and target Afghan forces (such as police) known to lack access to night-vision equipment.

The attack capabilities of ISIS-K also proved resilient, despite concerted efforts to reduce its territorial presence and capacity. It proved not only capable of carrying out complex Taliban-like attacks, such as in its targeting of a military hospital in Kabul, but was also able to stoke fears of sectarian tension through its repeated targeting of Shia mosques and places of gathering. The group's ability to do so was another worrying development for the government, which, in recognition of its own inability to provide effective security, approved the arming of civilian teams to protect Shia mosques and other places of gathering.[68] ISIS-K's targeting of television stations, most likely in an effort to project strength and in so doing undermine the government narrative of public safety, was another discernible trend of 2017.

Under the terms of its international commitments, Afghanistan reported on its CT progress in a statement to the UN General Assembly in July 2017. Scant on detail, it did, however, outline several accomplishments, including recognition by the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering that Afghanistan was compliant with money laundering and terrorism financing standards.[69] The statement also highlighted Afghanistan's multilateral efforts, making particular mention of its convening and hosting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation as well as its involvement in the Heart of Asia Process.[70] Without providing further detail, the statement noted that the government had amended its criminal code and strengthened national legislation to meet the various provisions and Security Council resolutions concerning terrorism.[71] It also indicated that work was being carried out on a National Counter-Terrorism

Strategy and Action Plan, coordinated by the National Security Council.[72]

Afghanistan made another step forward with its initiation of the Afghan Compact, which contained a series of 200 target benchmarks in four key areas, one of which was security (including CT).[73] The compact was reportedly instrumental in developing the US administration's new Afghanistan strategy, which has a heavy CT focus.[74] This strategy, which came into effect following President Trump's 21 August announcement, allowed for an increase of up to 4,000 troops, most of whom were to be deployed at the battalion and brigade level to support and advise Afghan forces.[75] The strategy also green-lighted a loosening of constraints, specifically the removal of proximity requirements for calling in air support and strikes.[76] Those changes would have been welcomed by President Ghani, who, in an interview in May, made clear that in his view his government's lack of air power had affected its ability to stem the momentum of the Taliban following the withdrawal of NATO combat forces in late 2014.[77]

From an air-power perspective, the US strategy came into almost immediate effect. It was reported that 751 munitions were dropped on Taliban and ISIS-K targets over September, the highest number since 2012.[78] This was on top of an increase in bombings in Afghanistan over the first nine months of the year. This wasn't without consequences: the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan alleged a 52% increase in civilian casualties from government and allied airstrikes over the same reporting period, which probably fed into the widespread public perception of lack of safety.[79]

LOOKING FORWARD

It remains to be seen how effective the Trump strategy and its renewed support for the Afghan Government will be in 2018. While Trump was typically bombastic, claiming the strategy and the support provisions it provided would turn the tide, the US military has been more cautious, calling 2017 'a year of setting conditions to build momentum'.[80] With elections in Afghanistan scheduled for mid-2018, the pressure is certainly on.

The potential for increased violence in the lead-up to the elections will test both the Afghan Government and its international partners. The Taliban is likely to intensify its activities against the government and international partners with a series of complex high-profile attacks in advance of and immediately following the elections. It will also continue to target government officials, and, as the elections approach, its target range is likely to expand from security forces and intelligence officers to include election officials. ISIS-K may use similar tactics. Attacks in 2017 show that it, too, has targeted government officials.

Terrorist attacks by ISIS-K are also likely to intensify as the group moves to make more use of this tactic following its loss of territory and cadres. If recent reports claiming that foreign ISIS fighters have arrived in Afghanistan from Syria and Iraq to join ISIS-K prove true, the group's attack capabilities may be boosted.[81] The implications of an arrival of potentially well-trained and experienced operatives could go well beyond the insurgency in Afghanistan. ISIS-K is already known to have been willing to consider requesting permission from ISIS central command to sanction an attack in New York when approached by a group of people plotting to mount one in 2016.[82]

A presence of foreign ISIS operatives in Afghanistan could significantly expand the networks and capability projection of ISIS-K and potentially result in the group being deputised to act outside of its primary area of operations and authorise, direct or sanction external operations activities in conjunction with, or on the behalf of ISIS central command. Such a development would generate an added element of pressure on the Afghan Government and its international partners in what is already set to be a challenging year.

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GREECE
TURKEY
SYRIA
CYPRUS
Tripoli
Ras Baalbek
LEBANON
Arsal
Beirut
Bekaa Valley
Mediterranean Sea
Shebaa Region
Damascus
Rukban Refugee Camp
IRAQ
ISRAEL
Irbid
Tureibil Crossing
West Bank
Amman
IRAN
Gaza
Karak
JORDAN
Sinai Peninsula
KUWAIT
Kuwait City
Persian Gulf
EGYPT
SAUDI ARABIA
Manama
BAHRAIN
QATAR
Doha
Abu Dhabi
Al-Udeid Air Base
Riyadh
Medina
Muscat
UAE
Red Sea
Jeddah
SUDAN
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Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
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Sana'a
YEMEN
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Aden
Gulf of Aden
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Middle East:
THE GULF TO THE LEVANT

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Despite the nearly total defeat of IS in Iraq and Syria, Islamist terrorism continues in the Middle East. Structural political, societal and economic issues drive the region's continued instability, encouraging violent extremism. Many IS affiliates remain potent forces, particularly Wilayat Sinai in Egypt, and returning foreign fighters retain the undercurrent of threat. The continued operations of al-Qaeda also testify to the resiliency of the jihadist ideology.

Many Sunni Arab countries have taken strong stands against terrorism and Islamism, leading to bilateral and regional CT alliances such as the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (also known as the Islamic Military Alliance). But the many legitimate grievances among the region's people and the many unresolved systemic political issues, mean that terrorism will remain a factor in the Middle East for years to come.

JORDAN

Although Jordan experienced no large-scale terrorist attacks in 2017, homegrown radicalisation is on the rise, as is the threat from extremists creeping in from neighbouring conflict zones.

Economic stagnation and disenfranchisement are key drivers of homegrown radicalisation. Huge numbers of refugees are straining the country's resources, contributing to social dislocation, unemployment and security problems.

Though Jordan has one of the region's most effective CT apparatuses, Jordan's militaristic approach to CT hasn't adequately addressed these push factors.[1] The government has put too little emphasis on the socio-economic drivers and the critical need for political, educational and economic reform in the country.

In April 2017, IS released a video urging its supporters to commit attacks against the kingdom and threatened large attacks like the 2016 Karak attack as a result of Jordan's increased involvement in the anti-IS coalition.[2] The video showed the execution of five people who IS claimed had received military training by Jordanian forces, and threatened Jordanian tribes who have discouraged their sons from fighting with jihadists in Syria.[3] Significantly, the video featured four Jordanian IS members who come from tribes loyal to the Jordanian monarchy.[4]

The UN has officially registered around 650,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, but government figures are much higher, at 1.3 million. Following a June 2016 car bombing in the Rukban refugee camp, Jordan closed its borders to new refugees and has been quietly returning many others. The camp, in a demilitarised zone along the Syria–Iraq–Jordan border, has become difficult to control.[5] It's been the site of a number of other car bomb attacks by IS affiliates, including one in April that killed three people, including a child,[6] and two in May that killed six and wounded many others.[7] Clashes between militants and the Jordanian military along the border became common in 2017.[8] There's a concern that, as IS militants flee, they'll head for Jordanian refugee camps, particularly Rukban.[9] Authorities estimate that there are around 4,000 militants in Rukban with access to heavy weaponry.[10]

In August 2017, Jordan announced that it would reopen its main border crossing with Iraq at Tureibil. This signals confidence that Iraqi forces had secured the area, as the post had been closed due to security concerns. However, while the highway is secure, the threat of attacks by militants in Iraqi towns near the border remains.[11] Soon after the announcement, an attack was claimed by the IS-affiliated Khalid bin al-Walid Army,[12] and there are fears of heightened conflict as IS disperses from former strongholds, such as Mosul.[13]

In 2017, Jordan intensified its domestic CT efforts, particularly by stepping up executions of convicted terrorists and by toughening its refugee policy. Early in the year, Jordanian security arrested 700 suspects in the aftermath of the Karak attack,[14] and the year involved the largest round of executions in recent memory. Of the 15 men who were executed, 10 were convicted of terrorism offences, including deadly attacks on tourists, Jordanian security forces and a local writer.[15] Jordanian authorities also handed down multiple jail sentences for terrorism-related offences, including border attacks, promoting extremist ideology[16] and plotting attacks on behalf of IS. In March, six people were sentenced for three separate plots, all linked to IS, targeting the Jordanian intelligence service, police and religious minorities.[17] In July, two others were tried for similar IS-affiliated attacks targeting a church in Amman and Jordanian security.[18] Five IS-affiliated jihadists were tried for planning an earlier attack in the Rukban border area that killed seven Jordanian soldiers at a military checkpoint.

Jordan continued its robust relationship with the US during the year. It maintained its strong commitment to the US-led coalition against IS as well as cooperating on other intelligence, security and CT matters. King Abdullah II twice travelled to Washington.[19]

Jordan's role in the military defeat of IS has been critical. In addition to Jordanian F-16s and other aircraft deployed as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Centre remained the centrepiece of US–Jordanian CT and intelligence cooperation.[20] Jordan also hosts the Joint Monitoring Centre to oversee the ceasefire and de-escalation in southern Syria, after a deal was brokered in July 2017 by the US and Russia.[21]

SAUDI ARABIA

For Saudi Arabia, 2017 was a year of assertive domestic reform and risky national security and foreign policy decisions, led by Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman.

Saudi Arabia's national security and CT policy is guided by its regional rivalry with Iran. Bin Salman has reignited the Saudi–US alliance by developing a very strong relationship with President Trump and his administration. Both men have similar views on the Iranian threat and want to challenge growing Iranian influence in the region. Trump's support for bin Salman has undoubtedly bolstered the crown prince's foreign policy and CT decisions and emboldened his efforts to consolidate power in his hands through a recent purge of the royal family.[22]

Saudi Arabia's CT and counterextremism efforts are tied to bin Salman's broader reform plan. The country's economic woes, youth unemployment, corruption, harsh cultural climate and large subsidies to the royal family have all contributed to the country's stagnation and fostered radicalisation.

Bin Salman has taken a much stronger and clearer stance against radical ideologies and has begun to push back against the Wahhabi religious establishment that has been the base of the al-Saud dynasty's support. The political reforms he enacted in 2016 and 2017—such as allowing women to drive, easing male guardianship laws, taking considerable powers away from the religious police, and beginning anticorruption and economic diversification plans—have removed the constraints that hampered previous rulers' attempts at reforms.[23] In effect, he's challenging the alliance between Wahabi clerical establishment and the house of Saud that has defined the kingdom since its founding.[24]

In November 2017, on the advice of the crown prince, King Salman announced a complete overhaul of the CT and domestic intelligence departments. Prince Mohamed bin Nayaf, the long-serving and respected Interior Minister, was removed from his position and the line of royal succession. The king also announced the break-up of the Interior Ministry and placed CT and domestic intelligence responsibilities in a new Homeland Security Ministry. Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al-Howairini was appointed head of the new agency and was made a cabinet-level minister.[25] Prince Khalid Al Muqren was appointed as the new head of the Royal Guard, which is one of the most senior national security posts.[26]

In 2017, Saudi Arabia enacted a new CT law, which was heavily criticised. Human Rights Watch has argued that the law 'criminalizes a wide range of peaceful acts that bear no relation to terrorism'.[27] The definition of terrorism has been expanded to include 'disturbing public order', 'exposing the national unity to danger' and 'suspending the basic laws of governance'—all of which are ill-defined concepts. The new law also includes penalties of 5–10 years in prison for portraying the king or crown prince, directly or indirectly.[28]

Blowback from Saudi Arabia's operations in Yemen damaged the country's domestic security in 2017. Houthi rebels launched numerous missile strikes against Saudi Arabia during the year. The latest was on 20 December, but the missile was shot down over Riyadh. The Saudis claimed that the target of the missile was the King's official residence and called the strike an act of war by Iran, which they believe has used the Houthis as proxies against Saudi Arabia, and intensified the blockade against Yemen.

At the end of 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the formation of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition. In November 2017, Saudi Arabia launched the first coalition summit to begin to clarify what a coordinated Islamic approach to CT would mean. No country with a Shia government (such as Iraq, Syria or Iran) was involved in the alliance. As of 2017, there were 41 member countries.

YEMEN

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) retains a strong presence in Yemen, where the Saudi-backed, internationally recognised government is largely impotent. Saudi Arabia's aerial bombardments and naval blockade—Operation Decisive Storm—have turned Yemen into a humanitarian disaster and have failed to achieve its major objectives.[29] Saudi Arabia's involvement appears to be doing exactly what it was trying to prevent, pushing the Houthi rebels closer to Iran and turning them into a proto-state force like Hezbollah, but closer to its doorstep.

On 4 December 2017, the former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had recently switched sides from allying with the Houthis to supporting the Saudi-led coalition, was assassinated by his former allies. It was a fitting dénouement to Saudi Arabia's efforts in 2017.

Instability in Yemen continues to give AQAP space to operate, even though UAE forces operating under the Saudi-led coalition evicted it from Mukalla in 2016. Although it no longer governs territory, AQAP has remained as a network and ideology. It manages over $100 million in assets, retains heavy weaponry, has sleeper cells in major cities, can exploit the wartime economy for additional gains, and has grudging acknowledgement from some that it was less corrupt and more even-handed during its time governing Mukalla.[30] In fact, a 2017 International Crisis Group report said that AQAP was as strong as it's ever been in Yemen, 'thriving in an environment of state collapse, growing sectarianism, shifting alliances, security vacuums and a burgeoning war economy'.[31]

KUWAIT

There were no major terrorist attacks in Kuwait in 2017, but there were several terrorism-related arrests.

The Ministry of Interior suffered a setback by mishandling the Abdali terror cell case. The case of the Abdali terror cell has been a complicated and troubling one for the Kuwaiti Government. This was not only the largest weapons cache ever discovered in Kuwait, but all those involved were Shia with alleged ties to Iran.[32] In 2017, sixteen convicted members of the cell fled the country in the wake of their convictions. Twelve have been captured, but authorities are still searching for the other four.[33] The incident prompted calls for an investigation into the ministry and led to a diplomatic crisis with Iran and Lebanon.

There were a handful of other terrorism-related arrests in 2017. In February, Kuwait sentenced a senior government official for joining and fighting alongside IS in Iraq and Syria. The penalty was 10 years in jail and a US$30,000 fine.[34]

In April, a Kuwaiti and Syrian husband and wife were arrested in Kuwait and the Philippines for supporting IS and planning terrorist attacks in the two countries. The arrests prompted arrests of other members of a purported terrorist cell in Kuwait.[35]

In 2015, Kuwait's parliament passed a controversial CT law mandating that all Kuwaiti citizens, foreign residents and temporary visitors submit DNA samples to a database to be maintained and operated by the Interior Ministry. However, after considerable backlash against the law on privacy grounds, plans to implement it were scrapped in October 2017.[36]

The US remains Kuwait's main strategic partner and CT ally, hosting more than 15,000 US military personnel at a joint headquarters for Operation Inherent Resolve—the largest US overseas deployment. Kuwait doesn't participate militarily in the Syrian conflict but provides basing and significant humanitarian assistance. Over 2017, the US increased its troop presence and its CT training exercises with Kuwaiti security forces.

The US and Kuwait also maintain strategic ties through the US–Kuwait Strategic Dialogue launched by the Obama administration in 2016. In 2017, the dialogue announced a number of new initiatives, including a CT information sharing agreement between the FBI and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior, as well as a separate agreement between US Customs and Border Patrol and the Kuwaiti Director General of Customs.[37] In addition, the Interior Ministry and National Guard are training with the US to increase Kuwait's CT capacity.[38]

Kuwait has historically maintained good relations with Iran and been an honest broker in the region, but in 2017 was pulled more closely into Saudi Arabia's orbit and its confrontational posture against Iran. For example, the Kuwaiti parliament proposed draft legislation in July to officially designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, calling for up to 20 years in prison for those found to be Hezbollah supporters (including by displaying flags or symbols).[39]

While the Kuwaiti Government has taken several recent steps to combat terrorism financing, there remain individual Kuwaiti citizens who have been identified as funding militant organisations and Kuwaiti banks that have allowed funding through their institutions. However, observers have noted that, while Kuwait participates in organisations and efforts to combat terrorism financing on the regional and international levels, it lacks the appropriate domestic legal framework to prosecute Kuwaiti citizens, and that better integration is needed between CT financing intelligence and law enforcement.[40]

However, Kuwait has established a cabinet-level committee on countering terrorism financing and empowering the Public Prosecution Office to handle terrorism financing cases and more closely monitor charitable giving through the Ministry of Social Affairs. Nonetheless, UN-designated terrorism financiers still operate in Kuwait.[41]

In May 2017, Kuwait joined with Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and the US to create the new Terrorist Financing Targeting Center to identify, track and share information on terrorism financing. The group is in addition to many other existing bilateral agreements and information-sharing structures. It isn't yet clear how it will affect the effort to combat terrorism financing. Authorities hope that it will be a mechanism for coordinating sanctions and other disruptive joint actions in addition to information sharing.[42]

LEBANON

Like many countries in the Middle East in 2017, Lebanon was caught up in the interventionist manoeuvres of the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, and its domestic concerns were wrapped up in the regional rivalry between Sunni Arab powers and Iran.

Prime Minister Saad Hariri's bizarre (but short-lived) resignation was emblematic of Saudi Arabia's urgent need to find a way to drive Hezbollah influence from Lebanon. Speaking from Riyadh, Hariri included in his resignation comments that Iran and Hezbollah were sowing strife through the region.[43] Saudi Arabia has been a long-time patron of the Hariri family, but has become increasingly frustrated with Saad Hariri's inability to curb Hezbollah in Lebanon and in the region. By attempting to force his resignation, the Saudis sought to reduce Hezbollah's power by forcing the collapse of Hariri's political coalition.[44]

In the US, there was a bipartisan movement in Congress to update the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act in 2017.[45] The measure not only targets Hezbollah but the Lebanese Government as a whole, as it sanctions anyone affiliated or working with the group, which would include anyone in the governing coalition.[46] Officials in Lebanon have been lobbying

hard against the proposed legislation, making repeated high-level trips to Washington during the year.[47] The proposed sanctions could have a major impact on the financial sector, and they could threaten the remittances on which the Lebanese economy depends.[48]

Throughout 2017, Lebanese and EU officials worked to help establish a new CT law. They discussed steps to coordinate the interests of all key actors in Lebanon and to ensure that a single coordinating state body can oversee the implementation of a broad CT law and strategy.[49] At present, Lebanon continues to use other criminal legislation to prosecute terrorism cases.

Despite Lebanon's lack of a fully functioning government and its competing and cooperating paramilitary organisations, many institutions of the state, such as the Lebanese Armed Forces, the Internal Security Force, the Directorate General Service and the Central Bank, continue to function and cooperate with international efforts to counter terrorism—particularly alongside the US anti-IS coalition—and have had notable successes doing so.[50]

Lebanese authorities also helped foil IS attacks abroad. Using intelligence shared with Australian officials in July 2017, Australian authorities thwarted plans to blow up an airliner with improvised explosives on a flight from the UAE to Australia. The plot involved four Lebanese–Australian men. Lebanese authorities provided intelligence to Australian authorities about the plot and arrested one of the main plotters, Amer Khayyat, when he landed in Lebanon from Sydney.[51]

Events in Syria have affected neighbouring Lebanon and have resulted in terrorist violence bleeding over the border. Both IS militants and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Ha'ia Tahrir al-Sham have mounted attacks inside Lebanon. In June 2017, suicide bombers attacked two refugee settlements in Arsal, killing a child and injuring three soldiers. In August, the Lebanese Government completed its largest CT operation in recent years, pushing out IS fighters along the Syrian–Lebanese border. The Lebanese Army completed its border sweep along the mountains of Ras Baalbek, and Hezbollah was widely praised in Lebanon for an operation to oust jihadists from another border area near Arsal. The operation received some criticism, as some detainees died in custody, but was praised by government and Hezbollah leaders, as there were serious concerns in Lebanon that refugee camps along the border were turning into terrorist havens.

As fighting in Syria winds down, Lebanese authorities have expanded their presence and operations along the eastern border to prevent the infiltration of fleeing fighters. Lebanese forces have concentrated in the Shebaa region, where they've seized weapons and arrested Jabhat Fatah al-Sham members.[52] Cells of the group have carried out attacks in Lebanon, and the Lebanese military has mounted many counter-operations against it and arrested many members, including the group that was responsible for the 2015 Tripoli bombing, although its leader remains at large.[53] In September, Lebanese authorities arrested 19 people associated with an IS cell for plotting an attack.[54]

Thus far, Lebanese Army and Hezbollah militia operations have been working in concert, although the Lebanese Government officially denies cooperating. The operations around Lebanon's northeast border by both army and Hezbollah fighters have been characterised as concurrent and simultaneous, but separate.[55] Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has made statements praising army operations, calling the army a 'partner' and a 'pillar' in Lebanon's security, and highlighted cooperation with the army during its Arsal operations.[56]

In August, both sides declared a ceasefire and negotiated a swap of captured IS fighters for the bodies of eight Lebanese service members who were captured and eventually killed in 2014.[57] The Lebanese Army termed it a ceasefire, but Hezbollah characterised it as a surrender by jihadist forces. The August agreement called for the IS fighters, who were allowed to retain light arms, to be escorted out of Deir Ezzor to eastern Syria. The deal was an example of accommodations that the Assad regime and its allies are making with weakened jihadist fighters in order to consolidate Assad's hold on territory.[58]

Although Hezbollah has experienced heavy losses in the Syrian conflict, including of senior commanders, by the end of 2017 it had come out of the conflict in a stronger strategic position, with more battle experience, able to carry out coordinated operations, and with access to better weaponry.

This has given it new capabilities to challenge Israel's naval and air superiority. Its presence in Syria is part of its renewed focus on positioning itself for a potential conflict with Israel. The recent ceasefire agreements have also allowed Hezbollah to return fighters to Lebanon and refocus efforts there.[59] By the end of 2017, the possibility of confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah had never been higher.

Even the Lebanese Army has raised the spectre of conflict, and Israeli officials have also consistently talked up the possibility of war with Hezbollah. In March, the Israeli Army conducted a series of drills along the border.[60] Hezbollah, too, has begun shifting forces out of Syria towards the southern Lebanese border with Israel in preparation for what may come.

OMAN

Oman retains its reputation as a country immune from terrorism and other political violence.[61] The enlightened rule of Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said, tough and comprehensive anti-terrorism laws, and the practice of Ibadi Islam—a strain of Islam that emphasises peace and justice—are the reasons for its tranquillity in a chaotic region. Education, access to social services, religious tolerance and a lack of perceived corruption among its leaders go a long way to explaining its immunity to terrorism. However, observers have begun to ask how long this oasis of stability will last, mainly because Sultan Qaboos is an old man with no direct descendants or heirs.

Oman faces a CT and border security balancing act with Yemen. It needs to maintain a good relationship with Iran and maintain its role of regional mediator, but it also can't afford to ignore the threat emanating from al-Qaeda safe havens in Yemen or anger Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC, who are fighting a proxy war with Iran in Yemen.[62] Border security must remain tight in order to prevent a spillover of jihadists from Yemen as well as any potential influx of refugees, which would quickly overtake its service capacity and disrupt its societal balance.

In 2017, Oman maintained its commitment to the global CT effort. Although nominally part of the international coalition against IS, it hasn't been directly involved in military operations. It has offered its air bases to coalition aircraft, closed off ties with Assad and shut its embassy in Damascus, but has neither supported nor undermined Assad or any element of the Syrian opposition.[63]

Oman continued to provide military and logistical support for US forces based in the region. In 2017, it helped the US negotiate the release of Western hostages in Yemen,[64] as well as accommodating an additional 10 detainees released from US military detention in Guantanamo Bay.[65]

After facing a great deal of pressure from Saudi Arabia to join its anti-terror coalition, in 2017 Oman managed to return to its position of impartiality in the regional kerfuffle over Qatar. It didn't participate in the Saudi-led effort to isolate Qatar over policy disagreements and its alleged support of jihadist groups, but instead supported Kuwait's mediation efforts.

Oman's approximately 45,000-person armed forces are the third largest among the GCC states and widely considered to be some of the best trained. However, in large part because of Oman's limited funds, it's one of the least well-equipped of the GCC countries. For 2017, Oman budgeted US$8.6 billion for defence and security from a total government expenditure of US$30 billion.[66]

QATAR

2017 was a difficult year for Qatar. On 2 June, Bahrain, the UAE, Jordan, Yemen and Egypt all abruptly cut diplomatic ties with Qatar, with Saudi Arabia leading the isolation effort. They cited Qatar's support of terrorism through funding Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood and its support of Iran's regional interventions.

The diplomatic isolation and blockade were a long time coming. Saudi Arabia has been frustrated by Qatar's independent foreign policy and lack of commitment to the Riyadh Agreement, and has stepped up its broader regional strategy to stamp out Iranian influence.

On 22 June, the Saudi-led group presented Qatar with 13 demands, including shuttering the Al Jazeera media network, severing relations with 'terrorist' groups (namely, the Muslim Brotherhood), scaling back relations with Iran, closing a Turkish military base in Qatar, and paying reparations to the Saudi-led bloc, and gave Qatar a 10-day timeline to begin implementing the demands.[67] Qatar's embrace of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas has been a long-term source of friction, as other countries view those organisations as existential threats to their regimes.[68]

After some negotiations led by Kuwait, on 5 July, the Saudi-led group reframed its demands as six broad principles for Qatar to address. They included countering extremism and terrorism, countering terrorism financing, suspending 'all acts of provocation', and complying with the commitments that Qatar made in the Riyadh Agreement.[69] However, the blockade continues, and diplomatic relations haven't been fully restored.

The regional row has had implications for international and regional cooperation and joint operations against IS. The Pentagon, which is leading the anti-ISIL coalition, said in a press statement, 'While current operations from Al Udeid Air Base have not been interrupted or curtailed, the evolving situation is hindering our ability to plan for longer-term military operations.' Egypt, a member of the anti-ISIL coalition, has said that the coalition shouldn't include Qatar, a country it accuses of supporting terrorism.[70] Qatar is no longer listed as a participant in the coalition.

As part of the mediation effort and to allow Qatar to demonstrate that it's attempting to meet some of the demands, it signed another CT agreement, focusing on countering terrorism financing, with the US on 11 July 2017. The agreement was greeted conditionally by the other Arab states, which said they would continue to monitor Qatar's actions.[71]

Qatar has the legal and institutional capacities to address terrorism and terrorism financing and has expanded them under international pressure. Yet,

despite many CT partnerships and agreements signed by Qatar, terrorist financiers and facilitators still operate within the country. What's lacking is the political will to apply those capabilities, and although there's been considerable pressure on Qatar to curb terrorist financing since the Riyadh Agreement, its disruption efforts have been inconsistent at best.

For example, there have been many cases of private funders out of Qatar sending monetary and logistical support to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham while Qatar has looked the other way.[72] It's also alleged that AQAP, al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in India, al-Qaeda operatives in Iran, Hamas, Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Taliban and IS have all received financial and logistical support from Qatar-based facilitators and financiers.[73]

Qatar has also been accused of financing terrorism 'through the back door', via ransom payments. In April 2017, it reportedly paid ransom to obtain the release of 26 Qatari ruling family members abducted by Iraqi Shia militias while on a hunting trip in southern Iraq in 2015. Separately, the government paid jihadists in Syria to release 50 Qataris being held captive. The ransom payments reportedly totalled around US$1 billion dollars: US$700 million to Iranian figures and the Iraqi Shia militias, and US$200–300 million to Tahrir al-Sham, a *jihadi* group linked to al-Qaeda, in Syria. The payments were another precipitating factor in the Gulf crisis in 2017.[74]

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE experienced no terrorist attacks in 2016 and 2017, despite the Emirates' participation in the counter-IS coalition and the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. The UAE has a well-trained, well-resourced and well-mentored security force and strong intelligence cooperation with the UK and the US. Its major cities, such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, are cosmopolitan and diverse and are a source of remittances to the homelands of the many expatriate workers who live there.

The UAE–Saudi relationship grew even stronger in 2017, and the two countries were aligned on many regional security and political issues, driven particularly by the close relationship between the two crown princes—Mohamed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi and Mohamed bin Salman in Riyadh. The UAE shares Saudi Arabia's aversion to Iran and the belief that Iran and its regional proxies, particularly Hezbollah, are the most significant security threat to the region. The desire to weaken Iran has driven UAE national security and CT strategy at home and abroad. The UAE also shares Saudi Arabia's view of Qatar, worked closely with the Saudis to sideline the Qataris, and was a key member of the coalition that imposed the diplomatic and economic blockade on Qatar. Both also have a deep-seated aversion to the Muslim Brotherhood and associated Islamist political parties, which they view as a threat to their monarchies. They have both cultivated a strong relationship with the Trump administration and have come out strongly on CT.

Although Saudi Arabia appears to be the dominant player and the UAE its loyal sidekick in the game of regional dominance and security, there's an argument to be made that the opposite is true. The UAE's crown prince has cultivated a mentor–mentee relationship with the younger Saudi crown prince.[75] The UAE has become much more assertive militarily and diplomatically in the region over recent years, both individually and through its closer partnership with Saudi Arabia, becoming one of the most interventionist national security players in the region.

It continues its membership of the US-led anti-IS coalition. In previous years, it was very active member, conducting more air strikes in Syria than any other Arab country. But as IS's territory has been taken and the US-led operation has begun winding down, so too has the UAE's involvement.

The UAE has been a key player in the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. In 2017, operations by UAE forces against AQAP continued. In May, they took control of Aden's airport, which created friction with Hadi loyalists, who had been occupying part of the airport. The Hadi loyalists have accused the UAE of using its military operations in Southern Yemen to promote its own interests and influence in the south at the expense of unifying Yemen. There's a perception in Yemen that the UAE's aim is to take control of strategic regions and ports and to be amenable to the succession in Yemen as long as southern Yemen is stable and cooperative with the UAE.[76] In June, the UAE was also accused by human rights organisations of running a secret network of prisons in Yemen, in which detainees were abused.[77]

Globally, the UAE has supported UN CT efforts, donating $350,000 in support of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, which is tasked with implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[78] However, the UAE was in conflict with the UN during the year over its review of human rights, as the UN consistently questioned the UAE on its use of security and CT laws to jail political dissidents and generally political dissent.[79] The UAE has also stepped up its relationship with NATO. It has observer status, but in early 2017 NATO established a liaison office in Abu Dhabi.[80]

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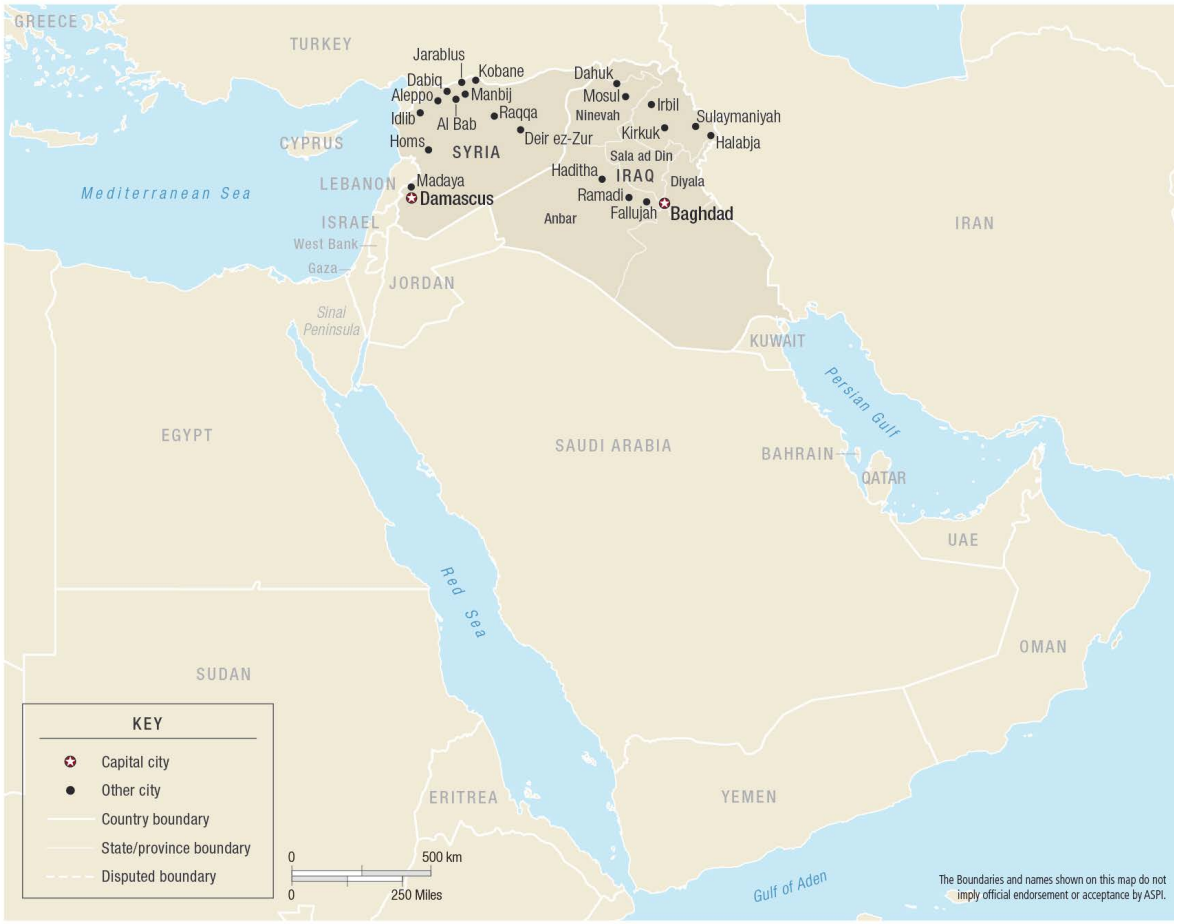
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The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

Iraq and Syria

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There were some considerable CT gains during 2017 in Iraq and Syria, which mostly reflected the successful military campaign to dismantle the IS's caliphate and reduce its territorial footprint. In 2016, IS lost 45% of its territory in Iraq and 10% in Syria,[1] and in 2017 lost Mosul and Raqqa. By all accounts, it has ceased to exist as a 'state'. By the end of 2017, fewer than 1,000 IS militants were thought to remain in pockets around Iraq and Syria (reports suggest that the remainder have been either killed or captured, but numbers are unconfirmed).[2] In January 2018, the US-led coalition against IS said that 98% of territory once claimed by the jihadist group across Iraq and Syria had been recaptured.[3] The fall of Raqqa was greeted with great jubilation: Brett McGurk, the US special presidential envoy for coalition forces, tweeted, 'Once purported as fierce, now pathetic and a lost cause'.[4] Other evidence of IS's weakened position is a claim by American officials of a substantial decline in the number of people seeking to travel to its territory, down to as low as 200, whereas a year or two before the number was in the thousands.[5] IS has also lost key members, including Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the IS spokesman, Abu Omar al-Shishani and others.

However, these developments don't mean that IS has ceased to pose a threat to Iraq, Syria and rest of the world, as was made patently obvious by the foiled Sydney Airport plot, allegedly hatched by a senior IS fighter in Syria.[6]

The challenge faced by the West is therefore twofold: how to limit the threat posed by IS, and how to work with Syria and Iraq to do so.

In the case of Iraq, the West has limited influence, as it increasingly appears that the key actor in Iraq is Iran, which wields enormous influence through the Shia militias that it helped to establish. The militias have turned the tide against IS, and many are now seeking to establish a political identity.

As tough as Iraq is for the West, Syria poses an even greater challenge because the West has no real power or influence there, where the key stakeholders are the Assad regime (the opposition is far too fragmented), Iran and Russia. Moreover, the West can't work with the Assad regime due to its alleged human rights violations, and many of the opposition actors have ties with radical Islamists.

The remaining IS fighters who have been absorbed back into communities or who have gone into hiding present several concerns. First, many of them will seek to go underground and launch guerrilla warfare in Syria and Iraq. That means that neither Iraq nor Syria can afford to reduce its CT activities. For Iraq, this would mean empowering the various actors who have fought IS, and many of those entities suffered heavy casualties. For example, its Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) lost 40% of its men in the battle for Mosul; in November 2016, the service lost 2,000 men.[7] Second, there are concerns that IS fighters will seek to infiltrate Europe by pretending that they're refugees or wounded anti-IS fighters.[8] Third, there are concerns that IS will seek new spaces for its activities, such as the southern Philippines, especially as foreign fighters return to their countries of origin.

While Syria and Iraq are linked from a CT perspective, it's also important to view each state and its approach to CT on its merits, as the challenges that each faces are different.

IRAQ

The Iraqi state faced a huge CT challenge due to its chequered history in combating IS and its predecessors. In 2014, two divisions of Iraqi soldiers (30,000 men) abandoned Mosul's 500,000 inhabitants when 800 IS fighters launched an attack on the city. IS captured almost US$500 million in banknotes from the city's banks and a huge arms cache.[9] It used those resources to attract recruits and build its 'state' infrastructure, as well as to fight the Iraqi security services and coalition forces.

The battle to recapture Mosul begun in October 2016 and involved Iraqi soldiers, Sunni Arab tribesmen, Kurdish fighters and Shia militiamen, supported by a US-led coalition of warplanes and more than 3,500 US military personnel to advise and train the Iraqi Security Forces, the Kurdish Peshmerga militia and Sunni tribal fighters. Iraq has relied on a confluence of actors, regular troops, CTS forces, Shia militias (such as the Hashed al-Shaabi, a Shia-dominated paramilitary force) and Kurdish militias to fight IS. After initially heavy losses, this hodgepodge coalition effectively undermined the enemy.

On 10 July 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi formally declared victory. Notably, Iraqi special forces entered the city in November 2016, but it took several months of intense fighting before the city was liberated, mainly because IS employed snipers, suicide bombers and shellfire to defend it.[10] By mid-2017, the Iraqi Government was also able to claim that it had managed to wrest back control of around one-third of the country that had been under IS control, including the full length of the border between Iraq and Syria.

The two main issues for Iraq in 2018 are preparing for parliamentary elections at some point and dealing with the coalition that fought against IS. It seems likely that the Shia militias, the Kurdish militia and the CTS members will demand their pound of flesh for their sacrifices. Interfused within these issues is the question of how to deal with growing Iranian influence in Iraq and the perception among many Sunni Iraqis that the political elites are beholden to Iran.

In 2018, many of the Shia militias appear to be seeking a political role. Their presence is an increasing security concern as they're establishing political offices, including in primarily Sunni areas, leading some Iraqi Sunni politicians to accuse them of trying to subvert Sunni identity.[11] This apprehension is shared by Iraq's Western coalition partners, which seem to see the militias as an extension of Iran.[12] The budding fear is

that as these actors vie for position in the political arena, that could lead to violence (political assassinations, bombings and the like) and open up a space for the remaining IS fighters to institute a guerrilla campaign.

SYRIA

Writing in 2017, Lydia Khalil noted that Syria had become the battleground for various conflicts: the Assad regime, fighting a fractured group of rebel forces, some of which had ties to *Salafi-jihadi* groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda and IS; and ethnic Kurds, fighting the Assad regime and IS. Each had its own external supporters, be they the Russians, the Iranians, the US-led coalition, Turkey, or the Gulf states.[13]

Three factors are likely to affect Syria in 2018.

The first is that the Assad regime remains secure, and it's unlikely that it can be toppled by the opposition. That means that the regime's focus is on consolidating the territory that it controls while also ensuring that territories that it doesn't control, such as Kobane or Idlib, don't threaten its security. The regime's likely to capitalise on the massive population displacements that have taken place, which are likely to create more homogeneous areas in Syria. Assad's Alawite regime and its sectarian allies will seek to exploit this phenomenon so that they can ensure that other sects or groups can't launch another assault on the regime.

The second factor is that Turkey's determined to ensure that Kurdish forces in Syria aren't a threat. This may explain why, in January 2018, Turkish forces backed by the Free Syrian Army, which is a Syrian rebel group supported by Turkey, launched an offensive against Syrian Kurdish positions in the enclave of Afrin. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan defended the action by claiming that such an operation is needed because of the ties between the Syrian Kurdish Workers' Party and its military wing, the People's Protection Units, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party. In response to a US proposal to create a border security force composed of 30,000 Arab and Kurdish forces, the Turkish presidential spokesman, Ibrahim Kalın, emphasised that Turkey will do whatever's necessary to protect its national interests.[14] Both Erdogan and Assad will need to figure out a way to work together, as Moscow and Tehran need them to cooperate. This reality places a heavy burden on Erdogan, who will need to accept Assad, even though he has called for the Syrian leader's removal. What's likely to get the Turkish president to work with his Syrian counterpart is their shared concern over Kurdish nationalist claims. Assad is likely to accept this because the Kurds proved themselves to be exceptionally able fighters against IS.

The third key factor to affect Syria is reconstruction and the roles of the various foreign actors that have aided the regime. The defeat of IS has come at a huge cost to civilians, who have borne the brunt of the group's brutal tactics and the consequences of living in war zones subject to air strikes. Investigations by non-government sources indicate that civilian deaths from air-launched explosives during the campaigns in the Middle East rose by 82% in the past two years, from 4,902 in 2016 to 8,932 in 2017 (coalition forces tend to underestimate the number of civilian casualties). The countries most affected were Syria, where civilian deaths rose by 55% to 8,051, and Iraq, where there was a 50% increase from 2,016 to 3,271.[15] The destruction of ancient cities such as Aleppo and Palmyra is almost unparalleled in post-World War II history.[16] The cost of reconstruction in Syria has been estimated to be over US$220 billon. The challenge will be substantial for a government with a national budget of US$5 billion in 2017, a depleted foreign currency reserve and no way to raise revenue from a population devastated by seven years of brutal war.[17] With so many weapons in Syria and with people's greater propensity to take matters into their hands, it's likely that failure to reconstruct will fuel further violence. First, the regime's likely to rebuild first in areas that it controls, or that are strategically important to it, further alienating those who didn't support the regime. Second, if there's no reconstruction, people will try to provide security for themselves, which may mean establishing their own militias. There's also concern about increased crime, especially as Syria is currently ranked 173 out of 176 on the global corruption scale.

WHAT TO EXPECT FOR 2018

It's safe to assume that 2018 and 2019 will difficult for ordinary Syrians and Iraqis. It's likely that the violence will continue, with civilians bearing much of the brunt. The continued inability of the Iraqi and Syrian governments, as well as of foreign powers, to aid in resolving deep political and societal differences is likely to mean that terrorism will continue to threaten stability in both counties and the rest of the region.

IS's territorial losses don't mean that it's a spent force. It will change its *modus operandi*, relying more on the internet and on exporting its brand beyond the region, while also seeking local allies to support its militancy.

In Iraq, it will probably revert to the Zarqawi model of presenting itself as an anti-Shia force, drawing support from disillusioned Sunni Iraqis and former military personnel of the Saddam regime. That transformation will ensure that

the crime–terrorism nexus that's been integral to the IS model (the group made a fortune from 'blood antiquities'[18]) will continue and grow, especially as IS isn't averse to embracing criminals.

In Syria, there's every indication that Russia, Iran and Turkey will continue to push their collective interests and reinforce the Assad regime, while the US's ability to influence policy in the region will continue to decline, as it's seen as too close to the Netanyahu government in Israel. This means that the solution to the Syrian conflict will occur in Sochi, not Geneva.

Finally, the vast ungoverned territories across Syria and Iraq remain vulnerable to exploitation by IS or other organisations. Competing *jihadi* groups may attempt to establish bases by buying influence or marrying into local tribes, which is what groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have been doing in North Africa and the Sahel. Controlling those territories requires an ongoing military and financial commitment, which the West is unlikely to provide, ensuring that the region will continue to remain attractive to terrorists.

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FIGHTING VIOLENT EXTREMISTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY:

Observations from Iraq

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> Do you think, oh America, that the loss of a city or of territory means defeat? Were we defeated when we lost the cities in Iraq and had to live in the desert with no city and no territory at all? Will we be defeated and you victorious if you capture Mosul, Sirte, al-Raqqah, or all the cities, and we have to go back to where we were at first? No. Defeat is when one loses one's resolve and fighting spirit.
> —ISIS, 2016[1]

This statement by ISIS spokesman, chief propagandist and strategist Abu Muhammad al-Adnani in May 2016 arguably captured a critical point in the brutal fight against ISIS in Iraq. On the release of this statement, senior Iraqi security representatives eagerly pointed out the fundamental shift in the enemy's messaging: ISIS was now acknowledging that it might not hold the ground that had been so central to its 'caliphate' narrative. This one statement highlights the key characteristics of conflict against violent extremist organisations in the 21st century. The fight is simultaneously local, regional and global. The contest is at once physical, intellectual and moral. It's now fought within a largely unconstrained, unbounded, unregulated, 24/7, multimedia information environment where multiple audiences, actors and organisations are all relentlessly active. Success fundamentally depends on recognising this reality and adopting a comprehensive approach that deals with and exploits this modern operating environment.

The chapter highlights key observations drawn from fighting ISIS (Daesh[2]) in Iraq in 2016. During 2016, I operated as the Deputy Coalition Land Force Commander within Combined Joint Force Land Component Command (CJFLCC or Land Component)—the senior Coalition Land Force headquarters in Iraq as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. As a combined joint land component, it was the lead agency for a 19-nation coalition that supported combat operations across the entire country, and it was the principal interlocutor and liaison with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) leadership.[3] The CJFLCC mission was focused on the military defeat of Daesh. The CJFLCC operated in all domains and, to some extent, functioned as a key integrator across all Iraq. We were actively engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders (military and non-military) as we worked with and for the Iraqi senior leadership to effectively execute the fight against Daesh simultaneously across all domains[4] and in depth. The four observations presented below are my own; they aren't exhaustive and are drawn from my personal experience in 2016.

OBSERVATION 1: KNOW YOUR ENEMY; DON'T ASSUME THAT YOU DO

The fight in Iraq in 2016 strongly reinforced the old adage that you must know your enemy. The 2016 Daesh organisation was innovative, organised and capable of defensive manoeuvre using a mix of conventional and unconventional weapons.[5] It also operated across most domains and highly valued the importance of winning the narrative fight. Any useful, meaningful understanding of Daesh cannot be limited to or focused solely on the physical order of battle, dispositions and capabilities. In 2016, a far more holistic appreciation of the organisation proved essential. An understanding of what it thought and why, how it communicated, what its symbols and beliefs were, what its methods and means were, what its appeal to others was and who and what mattered to it was essential. Adopting this approach enabled us to identify critical vulnerabilities in the enemy narrative and the intellectual and emotional appeal of its world view and actions. The systematic dismantling of the Daesh image and message could only be achieved through targeting the many untruths, gaps, vulnerabilities and fissures within the Daesh organisation. Such an understanding enabled the enemy to be attacked in *all* domains and in depth. Key audiences—globally, regionally and locally—can be engaged and influenced using the evidence and the legitimacy of a coherent Iraqi and coalition narrative supported by the physical campaign's success and progress.

OBSERVATION 2: INVEST IN UNDERSTANDING THE SPECIFIC OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT (INFORMATION AND HUMAN)

To fight and win against Daesh in Iraq required a comprehensive understanding of the information and human environment in which the contest was played out.[6] The salutary lesson of 2016 was that this is no easy task in the 21st century, and that it requires a disciplined, systematic, organisational approach.

For example, the contemporary Iraqi information environment[7] was complex, highly active and closely reflected the wider global and regional trends that are so evident in everyday 21st-century life.[8] Iraq's physical information infrastructure was highly developed, diverse and growing quickly. Society retained a heavy preference for television as a medium to receive news but had rapidly increased in its capacity and desire to access information through the internet via multiple devices, especially mobile phones (48% of the population access information via cell phones weekly).[9] In a conflict-wracked nation, the mobile phone was so important that it was recognised as almost as important to displaced Iraqi people as food, water and shelter.[10] Critically, face-to-face communications continued, as they traditionally have in Iraq, to be the primary means by which people passed news information to family and friends.[11] The information architecture wasn't homogeneous and varied from province to province.

Inside Daesh-held areas of Iraq, access to media was often deliberately reduced and restricted as a measure through which the enemy would seek to control messaging to the population in those areas. The net result was a diverse Iraqi information environment drawing data, images and content from the occupied areas to the combat zone and out in an open engagement with the global environment. This was enabled by an ever-growing network of connective infrastructure founded on multiple means and media.

The information environment directly influences and connects the most critical aspect of the operating environment: the people. The human landscape in Iraq is complex. The multiple actors involved in this conflict remain diverse, and the relationships between them complex and dynamic. The enemy and its many pieces and guises, the leaders, organisations and domestic audiences of the Coalition, the multiple US agencies and services, the full ISF set of units, leaders and services, the complex set of Kurdish actors and groups, the influence of key neighbouring states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, the Popular Mobilisation Force and the patchwork of hundreds of armed militia groups (Shia and Sunni), the web of vocal and active Iraqi political parties and figures, Iraqi local leaders and community organisations, the non-government sector, international agencies such as the UN and its many sub-elements, plus the diverse range of humanitarian representatives are just some of the actors operating in and shaping the cognitive space. All of them mattered and none could be ignored. All of them needed to be understood and their influence and agendas followed because they directly affected the achievement of our mission. During the ongoing offensive on Fallujah, Iraqi political leaders and Shia militia were sitting down with Iranian generals while the Coalition was simultaneously supporting ISF troops in parallel combat operations. As complex as this situation was, it's likely to be illustrative of any 21st century battlespace environment.

The fundamental requirement of the 2016 fight was to understand that any action (or perceived action) in the physical world could and would probably rapidly influence multiple global, regional and local audiences via the instant connectivity enabled by the contemporary information environment. For example, throughout 2016, Daesh would regularly seek to exploit cyberspace by recording and immediately uploading footage of Daesh small-team attacks on the ISF. The purpose was to undermine the credibility and reputation of the ISF and counter the momentum gained through repeated major ISF tactical successes and advances. Understanding the nexus between physical (or perceived) action and the information environment led to a recognition that a comprehensive, all-domain approach to fighting Daesh was essential. Making that happen in practice was the hard part.

OBSERVATION 3: ADOPT A SYSTEMATIC, DISCIPLINED, COMPREHENSIVE, ALL-DOMAIN APPROACH

Over a nine-month period, the CJFLCC developed, refined and adapted our approach to the delivery of synchronised manoeuvre, inform and influence operations executed in support of the ISF campaign plan. This relied on knowing the Iraqi leaders well, listening to them and cooperating as genuine supporting partners in the day-to-day 'good, bad and ugly' aspects of campaign planning and execution. In a complex operating environment, it's difficult to understand the relationships between the actors and even harder at times to predict the outcomes and second- and third-order effects of any action. Therefore, a disciplined approach that understands that you must develop your understanding and learn as you go is central to success.

Central to our method was a focus on the mission. This was unsurprising but particularly important in such a complex environment. It was potentially easy to get lost in the maze of issues, actors, messages, events, actions, stories and means, so a relentless focus on purpose was a vital organising principle. In our case, this was the military defeat of Daesh in Iraq, and all actions and efforts were prioritised and linked to that specific purpose.

A campaign assessment method, based on multiple inputs, was developed and regularly applied to systematically test and adjust our plan. Assessment[12] is difficult and often confronting work, as it requires critical review and introspection by those deeply committed to executing the plan and the current course of action. The better assessment models invite and encourage external and independent comment and carefully select measures of effectiveness[13] and performance[14] that drive the organisation towards the mission objective, rather than simply serving to selectively reinforce the validity of current or preferred assumptions and actions. In US parlance, you must work to avoid 'marking your own homework' and you should relentlessly focus on the achievement of mission objectives and the continual testing of your underlying assumptions. This is a key to learning, and the rigor of systematic assessment, combined with a culture that embraced it (or at least required it), proved essential to successful and timely adaptation.

A critical part of the Land Component's method was the approach it adopted to targeting and influence operations. Targeting and influence were always considered holistically, with the

aim of systematically applying the many kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities in concert with and cognisant of the many other actors operating in the same space. All available capabilities in all domains were applied to each target or operational problem set; for example, the use of offensive fire such as artillery and air strikes could aid a deception or cognitive objective as much as an information capability might support the achievement of a manoeuvre or ground force outcome. The ISF would often use manoeuvre operations to achieve a deliberate information effect; for example, the ISF attack into Fallujah was conducted as a narrow penetration with a view to 'liberating' the city and signalling Daesh's defeat locally and nationally, rather than 'clearing' it of enemy block by block, outside in. The CJFLCC Fires Chief, supported by the multinational Inform and Influence staff, combined to develop an all-available-means approach to targeting that was always cognisant of the prevailing operational and informational environment and actors of the day. Great care was taken to align and integrate our efforts with those of the Iraqis and to nest our efforts inside the larger regional and global counter-ISIS fight.

In the 21st century and the era of 'fake' news, the role of public affairs is worthy of specific mention. As Thomas Hobbes astutely remarked a long time ago; 'Fact be virtuous, or vicious, as Fortune pleaseth.'[15] A strong effort was made to ensure that the facts were communicated effectively to visibly undermine Daesh propaganda by a concerted effort to use real-time, highly credible information on the ground. This allowed us to undercut Daesh's claims of success and unequivocally demonstrate ISF achievements and progress. Through close collaboration with the ISF, the Coalition was able to coach and support the ISF public affairs team and combat leadership to source real-time images and ground truth from the combat zone and post and disseminate them more quickly and widely, just as Daesh had done during its early days. The ISF increasingly improved its capacity to show ISF victory and Daesh defeat by better reporting of the work of their soldiers in combat. Our CJFLCC assessment indicated that, over time, this had a growing net positive impact on the reputation of the ISF and on building Iraqi community confidence while simultaneously undermining Daesh's credibility and its 'invincibility' narrative.

OBSERVATION 4: THE ABILITY TO CLOSE WITH AND DESTROY THE ENEMY IN CLOSE COMBAT REMAINS A FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENT

There's no avoiding the key fact that you must be able to fight and win—face to face. The most basic question asked in Iraq in 2016 was 'Can the ISF really beat Daesh in a fight?' While offensive fires, air power, cyber, intelligence, surveillance, logistic support, excellent training and superior equipment were all significant enablers, the ultimate arbiter proved to be Iraqi leadership, belief and commitment. Following the fall of Ramadi in late 2015, the ISF continued to build on this initial major success and grow a force that *knew* it could and would win in face-to-face battle with Daesh. Throughout 2016, the ISF conducted large-scale offensive manoeuvre-and-hold operations to clear the Euphrates and Tigris river valleys, with an emphasis on the principal urban areas, including Fallujah and Mosul. Ordinary Iraqi infantrymen, tank crewmen and special forces operators proved, time and again, they could defeat Daesh on any ground when well led and enabled. Their tactical success correlated strongly with the growing confidence in the ISF and the fall in support for ISIS. It's critical that we acknowledge that the Coalition-supported Iraqi ground combat force was decisive in countering an adversary who lived, fought and operated among the people and inside the towns and cities of Iraq. A professional joint combined arms combat force takes time and resources to build, grow and sustain, and success against such an enemy will be a bloody and expensive business.

CONCLUSION

The fight against Daesh in Iraq in 2016 reinforced many of the enduring lessons of war and conflict. You must understand yourself and your purpose. You must know your enemy and understand them comprehensively. You must understand the environment in which the contest occurs, especially the information and human environment. Investment in developing and tracking the enemy and the environment remains essential to success, especially when you confront a threat embedded in the local population, operating with a transnational agenda and multiple linkages, that seeks political and social outcomes based on a distinct, competitive ideology and belief system.

The key lessons from Iraq in 2016 are that operating in the early 21st century requires you to accept and deal with the nature of our modern world and the complexity that brings. Connectivity means that our conflict is now simultaneously local, regional and global. The contest is at once physical, intellectual and moral. It is now fought out within a largely unconstrained, unbounded, unregulated, 24/7, multimedia information environment in which multiple audiences, actors and organisations are all relentlessly active. While the truth still matters greatly, perceptions have reach and power like never before.

My personal 2016 experience reinforced the essential need to adopt a systematic, disciplined, holistic approach to the execution of such a fight. This threatens to take some individuals and organisations well outside their comfort zones and challenges traditional 'lanes' in which we might operate. This arguably equally applies at the level of strategy and policy. The vast range of 21st-century tools and capabilities, kinetic

and non-kinetic, military and non-military, must all be considered and applied together to optimise impact and effect. Physical manoeuvre, information and influence operations are now irreversibly intertwined and must be planned and executed together. Finally, the world continues to evolve and change quickly and there's a priority need for people and organisations who can think critically and be agile, versatile and adaptable. These observations and lessons may already be out of date, so a culture of continuous assessment and review will certainly be a key component of any future success. Enemies such as Daesh are regularly clever, ruthless, innovative and unconstrained; defeating them requires a systematic, disciplined, holistic and considered response.

NOTES

1 'ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani calls on supporters to carry out terror attacks in Europe, US', *Middle East Media Research Institute*, 21 May 2016, online.

2 Daesh is a derogatory Arabic acronym for the Islamic State. It's the Iraqis' preferred name for ISIS, as they view ISIS as neither Islamic nor a state. In the information contest, this was considered a significant point by many senior Iraqis.

3 The ISF consisted of a combination of Iraqi army, air force, special operations forces and police, who together provided the essential and decisive ground-manoeuvre and security component.

4 The US doctrinal domains are; 'land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace, and across the electromagnetic spectrum'. US Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Multi-domain battle: frequently asked questions*, online.

5 Daesh combat units used a mix of conventional and improvised weapons and capabilities to achieve a conventional defensive effect. For example, a combination of massive armoured vehicle improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and multiple IED obstacle belts created channelling and destruction that's traditionally achieved by conventional forces through the careful employment of tanks and the use of mines and military obstacles. Daesh would employ off-the-shelf commercial systems and technology, such as commercially available drones, and also modify existing systems to achieve contemporary effects, such as accurate long-range rocket fire.

6 An operational environment is a composite of the conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander (joint publication 3–0). It encompasses physical areas and factors of the air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains, and the information environment, which includes cyberspace. FM 3–13 Headquarters Department of the US Army, Washington DC, 6 December 2016.

7 The *information environment* is the aggregate of individuals, organisations and systems that collect, process, disseminate or act on information (joint publication 3–13). FM 3–13 Headquarters Department of the US Army, Washington DC, 6 December 2016.

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10 'Refugees view access to a mobile phone and internet as being critical to their safety and security and essential for keeping in touch with loved ones. Many refugees regard a connected device as being as vital to them as food, water or shelter.' 'UNHCR, Accenture study finds internet, mobile connectivity a lifeline for refugees', media release, UNHCR, 14 September 2016, online.

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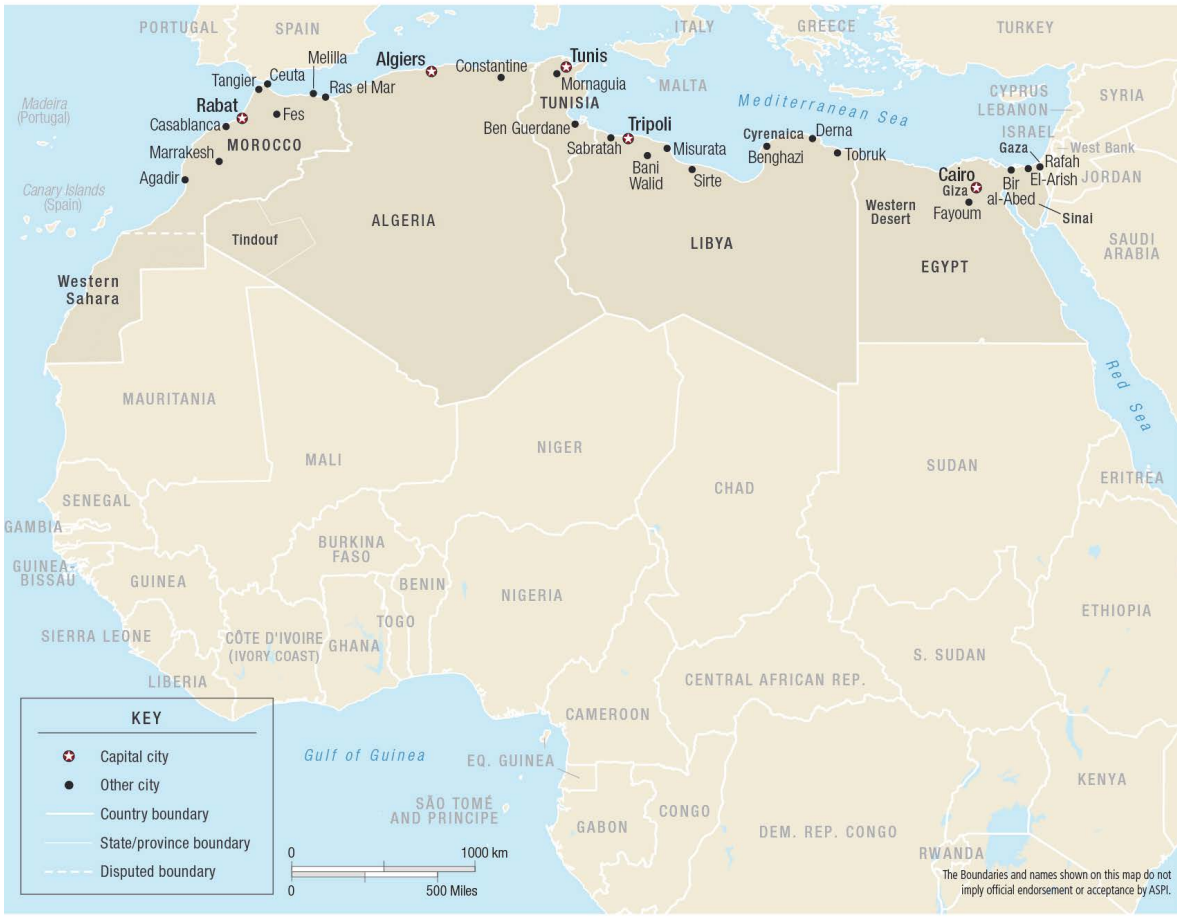
12 'Commanders, assisted by their staffs and subordinate commanders, along with interagency and multinational partners and other stakeholders, will continuously assess the operational environment and the progress of the operation toward the desired end state in the time frame desired. Based on their assessment, commanders direct adjustments, thus ensuring the operation remains focused on accomplishing the mission.' US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Commander's handbook for assessment planning and execution*, J7, version 1.0, Joint and Coalition Warfighting, Suffolk, Virginia, 9 September 2011. US Department of Defense assessment definitions: A continuous process that measures the overall effectiveness of employing joint force capabilities during military operations. Determination of the progress toward accomplishing a task, creating a condition or achieving an objective. Captain Tom Westphal, Captain Jason Guffey, *Measures of effectiveness in army doctrine*, joint publication 3–0, Joint Operations, online.

13 *Measure of effectiveness:* a criterion used to assess changes in system behaviour, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Commander's handbook for assessment planning and execution*, J7, version 1.0, Joint and Coalition Warfighting, Suffolk, Virginia, 9 September 2011.

14 *Measure of performance:* a criterion used to assess friendly actions that is tied to measuring task accomplishment. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Commander's handbook for assessment planning and execution*.

15 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: of the matter, forme and power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civil*, 1651, Simon and Schuster edition, 2013, p. 299.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BURKINA FASO
GUINEA-BISSAU
GUINEA
BENIN
NIGERIA
ETHIOPIA
TOGO
SIERRA LEONE
CÔTE D'IVOIRE (IVORY COAST)
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LIBERIA
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.
CAMEROON
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Other city
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North Africa

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Challenges to peace and security across North Africa remain affected by the threat of *Salafi-jihadi* terrorism, armed conflict, poor governance and porous borders.

Despite IS losing control of territory in Libya, and harsh security crackdowns on IS hotspots in Egypt, these two countries remain the most volatile in the region with sustained impact of terrorism throughout the year. Indeed, the attack in Bir al-Abd on the Sinai Peninsula in November 2017 was the most lethal experienced in Egypt in modern history with over 300 fatalities.

Libyans and Moroccans were involved in attacks in the UK and Spain in 2017, demonstrating the need for closer international cooperation and information sharing processes to counter terrorism effectively. Additionally, a Tunisian national was arrested in Germany on suspicion of planning an attack. Across the region, though there have been sporadic attempts to facilitate greater cooperation between nations – such as military training programs and intelligence cooperation – these remain limited and there have been no comprehensive initiatives implemented region-wide as yet.

In-country counterterrorism remains driven by hard security measures and military crackdowns on civilians, although Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria appear committed to implementing a softer legislative and policy-centred approach.

EGYPT

SECURITY CONTEXT

Terrorism continues to plague national security in Egypt, which suffered the second highest number of attacks[1] in the Maghreb region in 2017, coming in just behind Libya.

The dissolution of IS's caliphate in Iraq and Syria may lead to a movement of militants towards less hostile locations, such as the Sinai peninsula, which has provided a safe haven and acted as an operational base for IS-affiliated militants. Although *Wilayah Sinai* has been particularly active since late 2014, Islamic State Sinai (IS–Sinai) hasn't politically or militarily seized or controlled any territory, despite operating there for more than five years.[2]

MILITANT GROUPS

Active militant groups operate in hotspots across northern Sinai and in mainland Egypt. Militants also operate on the borders with Libya to the west and with the Gaza Strip to the east, which remain sources of instability and insecurity because of longstanding sociopolitical grievances, low levels of governance and established crime–terror nexuses.

The militants comprise members of well-established organisations with international connections such as IS–Sinai (formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis), as well as the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates. Emerging organisations such as Hasm[3] ('Determination') and Ansar al-Islam (which is potentially connected to al-Qaeda), plus localised insurgency operations such as the Egyptian branch of al-Qaeda, al-Mourabitoun, the Giza-based Ajnad Misr ('Soldiers of Egypt'), the Popular Resistance Movement, Revolutionary Punishment and Lewa al-Thawra ('Revolution's Flag').[4]

Militant groups choose targets in accordance with their aims and objectives: IS is known to indiscriminately kill civilians as well as security personnel, whereas al-Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood affiliates usually refrain from seeking out civilian targets. For example, Lewa al-Thawra and Hasm have published statements denying their involvement in the attack on Christian civilians in the Cairo church bombing in December 2016.[5] Lewa al-Thawra claimed responsibility for attacks on security personnel, including the assassination of Lieutenant-General Adel Rajaei in October 2016 in Cairo, perhaps in retaliation for the dismantling of a network of smuggling tunnels between Sinai and the Gaza Strip.[6] Hasm targets have included the Grand Mufti, other public figures, army officers, embassies and security forces, such as in the small explosion that was detonated at the Myanmar Embassy in Cairo in October 2017 in retaliation for the treatment of Muslim Rohingya.[7] That was the first time Hasm claimed an attack on non-security personnel, indicating a possible shift towards a wider range of government targets. Hasm also claimed the attack on security personnel in Giza Province in the western desert in October, but its claim was discounted.[8] In early November, an emerging group named Ansar al-Islam—with likely links to al-Qaeda[9]—claimed responsibility for the attack in a brief statement, and announced that Emad Eddin Abdel Hamid, former Egyptian military officer turned militant, had been killed in a retaliatory strike by security forces on 31 October.[10]

ATTACKS

Some relatively highly sophisticated and coordinated attacks took place in 2017 against government, military and civilian targets, including pilgrims and places of worship. Notably, attacks on Coptic Christians increased; two churches were attacked by suicide bombers in Tanta and Alexandria on Palm Sunday,[11] killing 45 people, and an armed gunman ambushed a busload of Christian pilgrims in Minya, killing 28. Due to the sectarian focus, IS was thought to be behind all the attacks, despite claiming the only Palm Sunday attacks. The attacks on the Copts and on the al-Rawda mosque in the town of Bir al-Abed, North Sinai, on 24 November were thus unusual for Egypt, where the police have been the main targets of terrorism in the recent past; in 2016, nearly half of terrorist attacks were directed at the police.[12]

The al-Rawda mosque attack was the deadliest in Egypt's modern history. More than 300 people were killed during Friday prayers, and militants affiliated to IS are thought to be responsible.

According to reports in November, there had been more than 100 terrorist attacks in northern Sinai so far in 2017.[13] Attack hotspots remained largely within the Sinai Peninsula, particularly at the port town of El-Arish and at Rafah, on the Gaza border, but there had been increased activity in the western desert, towards the border with Libya.

In October 2017, the Egyptian armed forces suffered their worst defeat in years at the hands of insurgents in Giza Province in the western desert. Government security forces headed into the western desert, allegedly responding to a tip-off locating an insurgent cell. The operation was a disaster that demonstrated the failure of security personnel to do adequate reconnaissance, resulting the government forces being ambushed. Key operational failings included a lack of air support and inadequate situational awareness, which is surprising, as the area is only 135 kilometres from Cairo. The insurgents had sound knowledge of the terrain[14] and detailed knowledge of the security forces' plan of attack, which may indicate an information breach.

This was the latest in a series of embarrassing defeats for the Egyptian security forces, leading President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to initiate a reshuffle of security posts and an unprecedented sacking of top security officials. General Mahmoud Hegazy was replaced as Chief of Defence Staff by Mohamed Farid Hegazy.[15] In November, Hegazy toured checkpoints in Sinai to check on the preparedness and training of police and armed forces stationed there. In addition, the head of the National Security Agency's Giza sector, General Ibrahim el-Masry, and his deputy, General Hisham el-Iraqi, who were both in charge at the time of the ambush, were fired.[16]

COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS

President el-Sisi retaliated for the Palm Sunday attack on the Copts, authorising the military to conduct air raids on Islamist camps in eastern Libya, hitting the town of Derna.[17] In response to the ambush of security personnel in the desert, he deployed the air force and special forces on 1 November to carry out air strikes on terrorist targets in southern Fayoum and afterwards released a video showing images of those killed in the strikes.[18] After the November Sinai mosque attack, el-Sisi similarly and predictably responded with brute force,[19] deploying the air force to attack targets in mountainous areas around Bir al-Abed, Sinai.[20] While the strikes demonstrated his no-tolerance approach to terrorism, they were also sustaining the cycle of violence, and did little to address the root causes of terrorism.

BORDER SECURITY

Weak and porous borders have facilitated transfers of weapons and movements of militants, which has contributed to the spread of terrorism across borders between Libya and the Gaza Strip. In February, Egypt eased restrictions at the Rafah border crossing with Gaza in an apparent reconciliation with Hamas, in return for reinforced borders to 'prevent the movement of militants in and out of Sinai'.[21] In June, the Hamas Interior Ministry started constructing a 'buffer zone' along the Gaza Strip border with Egypt, which had been under discussion since 2014.[22] The latest phase of the buffer zone project began in October 2017, increasing its size on the Egyptian side, which displaced hundreds of Rafah residents.

POLICY

The president declared a state of emergency for three months from 19 April 2017,[23] which remains in place at the time of writing.[24] Although extended state-of-emergency periods in Egypt aren't unusual, this policy allows the authorities to exercise 'de facto emergency powers which greatly reduces individual human rights and freedoms'.[25]

In July 2017, el-Sisi issued a presidential decree to establish the National Council for Countering Terrorism and Extremism.[26] He'll chair the council, the membership of which includes the highest Sunni authority in Egypt (Sheikh al-Azhar), the Coptic Pope and a selection of high-level government speakers and ministers. A principal task for the council is to 'develop job opportunities in the regions hit by extremism, examine prospects for industrial zones and of amendments to existing legislation'.[27] Its first meeting was held in August 2017, but meaningful developments are yet to be seen.

In November, the UN's Third Committee approved Egypt's draft resolution titled 'Effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights'.[28] The resolution called on states to uphold and comply with human rights and international law when addressing terrorist-related challenges—something that Egypt has been criticised for failing to do. Earlier in 2017, the US withheld over US$290 million in aid to Egypt because of Cairo's deficient policy on human rights.[29]

The Egyptian Government has strict regulations on freedom of expression and the distribution of content. It regularly issues statements that inflate CT successes and gains, which are rarely disputed or questioned by the local media,[30] making it hard for international media to verify information coming out of the country. For example, international media reported that up to 59 security personnel were killed as a result of the October ambush,[31] but official Egyptian state narrative claimed that government losses weren't more than 16.[32] In May, Egypt banned Al Jazeera and 20 other websites, including the local independent organisation Mada Masr,

accusing them of 'supporting terrorism and spreading false news'.[33] Despite claims by el-Sisi that 'Egypt has unprecedented freedom of expression,'[34] actions such as those exemplify Egypt's consistent state crackdown on media and political dissenters.

PROSECUTIONS

On 8 January 2017, Egypt's High State Security Prosecution referred 304 people for military prosecution for Hasm membership.[35]

In September, Egypt's cabinet passed an amendment to legislation (Law 26/1975)[36] that strips citizenship from those convicted of crimes against state security.[37] The new article would 'add a provision that could revoke the nationality of Egyptians convicted of a crime harming state security'[38] in Egypt or abroad. A key concern is that the amended law may allow the regime to unfairly target any opponent and justify decisions under the premise of national security.

On 22 October, 11 people were sentenced to death for joining a terrorist organisation and attempting to kill police officers; a further 14 were sentenced to life in prison for participating in terrorist operations.[39]

On 15 November, the High Court upheld a sentence of life imprisonment for Muslim Brotherhood chief Mohamed Badie and 35 others convicted of involvement in violence in Ismailia, which left three dead, following the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in 2013. The defendants were charged with murder, attempted murder, inciting terrorism, and raiding and vandalising government facilities.[40] Others have been arrested and charged, also in connection with the post-Morsi political upheaval, including a leader from Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya.[41]

TRIBES

Some local Bedouin in the Sinai region have profited from engaging with militant actors after suffering from discriminatory policies that have left them out of legal government employment.[42] Working with Bedouin tribes could be mutually beneficial to the government and to the tribes, if incentives don't securitise or demonise communities. For example, the Tarabin—the biggest tribe on the peninsula—is known to have cooperated with government in the past, and has been described as 'a major participant in the Sinai battle against extremists'.[43] According to a Tarabin spokesperson, the tribe is 'cooperating with the armed forces at all levels'.[44] In addition, the Sawarka tribe is said to have responded to the Sinai mosque massacre in November by releasing a statement in full support of President el-Sisi's planned offensive, and expressed its willingness to fight alongside the armed forces against terrorist groups.[45] Given the tight control over information about CT operations, it's possible that these statements aren't entirely reliable. Nevertheless, it remains crucial for the government to make a genuine effort to liaise with and work comprehensively—and sustainably—with these communities, but until now this relationship hasn't been meaningfully addressed, and many Bedouin youth in Sinai continue to feel disenfranchised and targeted by security personnel.[46]

INTERNATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

Egypt's multilateral engagements included a UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee meeting with Sri Lanka in February 2017 to help develop 'a comprehensive technical assistance programme to counter terrorism'.[47] Egypt is the current chair of the committee.

The Executive Directorate of the committee visited Egypt in October 2008 and again in July 2017 to discuss Egypt's implementation of various Security Council resolutions on CT (resolutions 1272, 2242, 2309, 2322, 2331, 2341 and 2354).[48] The 2017 delegation discussed Egypt's approach to CT and countering violent extremism (CVE) from operational, policy and legislative angles, and consulted religious, law enforcement and political authorities.[49] It concluded that further efforts were needed to enhance the effectiveness of Egypt's international cooperation on terrorism-related matters.[50]

In June, following a speech by el-Sisi in Riyadh, in which he accused certain Arab countries of supporting terrorism,[51] and a visit by the Saudi Foreign Minister to Cairo, Egypt joined six other Arab nations that cut diplomatic ties with Qatar, banned Al Jazeera access,[52] blocked businesses and restricted air space and maritime borders. This followed Saudi's decision to sever all ties with Qatar in May because of Doha's growing relationship with Iran and longstanding support of the Muslim Brotherhood[53] (which was designated as a terrorist organisation by President el-Sisi in 2016).[54]

Egypt's current stance on Qatar may indicate shifting dynamics in Saudi–Egyptian relations and, more broadly, Egypt's shifting stance on Iranian regional influence. For example, following the attack on the Saudi Embassy in Tehran in June 2016, Egypt did not break diplomatic ties with Iran,[55] unlike Bahrain, Sudan and Kuwait.[56] In the light of King Salman's US$1.5 billion investment in development in the Sinai in January 2016 and the two countries' mutual interests vis-a-vis the Muslim Brotherhood, it seems that Egypt's alliances might no longer be ambiguous.

The former Egyptian defence force Chief of Staff, Mahmoud Hegazy, engaged the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian air forces to conduct joint Exercise Faisal 11 in September 2017 to boost Egyptian–Saudi military cooperation.[57] Hegazy also organised exercises with Bahrain, Kuwait, Russia and the UAE.[58]

Egypt signed a partnership agreement with the EU to develop further strategic areas of bilateral cooperation in July 2017, with a special focus on youth and women.[59] In October 2017, President el-Sisi made his first trip to France since Emmanuel Macron won

office. Aside from the broadly related mutual security challenges of dealing with IS and countering terrorism, Egypt remains a loyal client of the French defence industry and continues to purchase weaponry to bolster its defence capabilities.[60]

CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

President el-Sisi announced early in 2018 that he will run for re-election in March.[61] Before the announcement was official, campaigns to mobilise support for him had collected more than 3 million signatures in favour of el-Sisi's candidacy in one month.[62] Having undermined his potential opponents, it's clear that el-Sisi intends to continue on a path of silencing dissent or alternative voices through force. Interestingly, his main challengers were two former military men—both of whom were arrested and banned from participating in the process.[63] This highlights internal tensions within the army, sparking questions about whether el-Sisi will be able to keep a hold on the army and, if not, how will that play out.

Egypt has three main CT priorities to address:

- reduce the number of terrorist attacks
- implement a strategic approach to countering radical ideology and sustainably address socio-economic grievances that could be exploited by terrorists for recruitment
- find alternative approaches to CT, other than expanding the powers of police and security agencies without appropriately safeguarding human rights.[64]

President el-Sisi's government must change its tactics to employ both hard and soft approaches to dealing with terrorism. Since the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, there hasn't been a concerted effort to address the sociopolitical grievances that have created the conditions for radical ideologies to take root. Not only is unemployment rife, but freedom of expression has been severely repressed, unfair arrests and prolonged detentions are routine and unfulfilled promises of economic development have created space for informal criminal and terrorist networks to step in. Instead, the President has opted to focus on the symptoms of terrorism rather than the problems driving radicalisation, which has not enabled true reform. For example, since 2015 the government has spent US$11.9 billion on heavy weapons,[65] which have been used in government CT operations and crackdowns on dissenters. A concerted effort needs to be made to address these challenges. The Central Bank of Egypt has promoted an initiative encouraging small and medium-sized businesses to invest in youth employment to assist in combating terrorism.[66] This is an example of a tangible solution that should be developed and supported with necessary resources. If Egypt is to demonstrate a committed and sustained approach to CT, the government will have to rethink its strategy.

LIBYA

SECURITY CONTEXT

In Libya, in the absence of coherent governance, IS and other *Salafi-jihadis* have maintained an active presence. Since the fall of the Gadaffi regime, weak or non-existent governance has led to a political vacuum that non-state actors such as *jihadi* groups have filled. The main factions competing for authority are the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Fayez Seraj, and the House of Representatives in Tobruk. General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) is the official armed force of the House of Representatives. A range of militias operate in various regions. Internal political conflicts are inherently destabilising. Poorly managed and porous borders between Libya and its neighbours, longstanding organised crime and smuggling networks, an arsenal of around 20 million weapons[67] that often change hands, declining socio-economic standards and a young, frustrated population contribute to national and regional instability, making way for *jihadi* influences (Table 6).

TABLE 6: Salafi-jihadi groups currently operating in Libya

Name	Affiliation	Membership	Comments
Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin	An umbrella organisation of allied Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) factions (Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, Macina Liberation Front, Saharan AQIM)	5,000+	Active in Libya since March 2017 Led by Iyad Ag Ghali
Ansar al-Shariah a-Benghazi	AQIM; anti-Haftar/LNA and GNA	Unknown at present; in 2012 (at its height) 5000+	Abu Khalid al-Madani (since January 2015) Benghazi branch was formally dissolved in May 2017
Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council	Has cooperated with Ansar al-Sharia, 17 Brigade and Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade[68] Anti-Haftar, but aligned to AQIM to some degree. Has also cooperated with IS but doesn't broadly align with it.	4,000–5,000 (2014)	Leaders: Ismail Sallabi and Mohamed el-Dresi
Derna Mujahideen Shura Council	Coalition of militias. Anti-Haftar, anti-IS, aligned with AQIM. Also pledged allegiance to hardline Islamist Grand Mufti Sadiq el-Ghariani.	1,000–3,000	Leaders: Salim Derby (deceased) and Abdul Hakim el-Hasidi
ISIS in Libya		Several hundred fighters still left after territory seized in December 2016. Numbers are vague. Although 1,700 IS militants' bodies were recovered in Sirte, there could have been up to 6,000 fighters in Libya. Many must have fled and retreated into the mountains.	Leaders: Jalal el-Dine el-Tunisi, Abu Hadhifa al-Muhajir, Abu Talaha el-Tunisi Driven out of strongholds Controls no land since 2016.

Source: Lydia Sizer, *Libya's terrorism challenge: assessing the Salafi-jihadi threat*, policy paper 2017–1, Middle East Institute, October 2017, online.

The tension between the 'governing' factions has stunted the development and implementation of any working CT system. The GNA's limited CT apparatus and weak combat power have undermined its ability to gain authority and control over territory and institutions. This has also affected regional cooperation with Libya's neighbours, which can't count on Libya to provide coherent security assistance.

COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS

GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL ACCORD

The expulsion of IS from its stronghold in Sirte in December 2016 was carried out by the internationally recognised, UN-backed GNA forces, supported by the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) and aligned armed groups in Operation Odyssey Lightning. The Bunyan Marsous—a coalition of militias from Misrata—played a supporting role. According to AFRICOM, the seven-month campaign against IS in Sirte included 495 precision air strikes.[69] More than 700 GNA fighters were killed and 3,200 were wounded.[70] Since then, IS operations have been relatively muted, which indicates that IS has suffered a severe loss of manpower and operational capacity or that it has dispersed and is biding its time to regroup and attack at a later stage.[71] The GNA reportedly recovered the bodies of around 1,700 IS militants in Sirte, but many others are thought to have escaped into the desert, especially near Sabha and Bani Walid, as well as to Derna.[72]

LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY

The offensive against IS in Benghazi was carried out mainly by the LNA's Operation Dignity, with some external support, and culminated in October 2017.[73] Ansar al-Sharia and the coalition of the IS-allied Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries was allegedly dissolved in Benghazi in May 2017 by the LNA.[74] LNA special operations forces posted pictures of a captured Ansar al-Sharia leader, Ibrahim Abu Nawwara, on 26 July. In the al-Khribish district of Benghazi, LNA fighters engaged in conflict with *jihadis* who were armed with explosive vests.[75]

On 22 and 23 July, the LNA conducted airstrikes against the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council. In response, the Shura Council's forces shot down an LNA MiG-23 fighter jet and took the pilot and co-pilot prisoner, which sparked a total shutdown of Derna and an intensive siege of the city by the LNA. The escalation in violence resulted in five LNA deaths and one Shura Council death. On 26 July, LNA CT forces arrested former IS member Anis Abdul Qader al-Sharkasi on Karsah beach, west of Derna.[76] During the offensive, Haftar's forces made no distinction between Islamist militants—effectively grouping all those who opposed him under the same IS banner—which resulted in a contentious campaign and a great loss of civilian life.[77]

These military gains demonstrate some short-term achievements in rolling back IS's influence and control,[78] but the sustainability of the success is questionable. IS may be undergoing a phase of reorganisation; for example, IS fighters who were expelled from Sirte in 2016 regrouped just south of the city in 2017.[79] In September 2017, IS made a statement from Cyrenaica, endorsing attacks against the US and Italy, much like its core affiliates have been doing since the demise of the caliphate began. Despite being weakened and dispersed, IS, along with other militants (such as the non-*jihadi* Misratan militias and the coalition groups, including Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries), remain resilient, active and operational in various pockets across the country. The governments should be prepared for the likely prospect of a continued IS insurgency carrying out sustained low-scale guerrilla attacks, but should also be conscious of an al-Qaeda resurgence, which might benefit from the falling out of foreign fighters disillusioned by the collapse of the caliphate.

POLICY AND LEGISLATION

According to a US State Department report, no comprehensive CT legislation has been developed or implemented in Libya since the fall of the Gadaffi regime.[80] The fractured political and military landscape doesn't allow for effective governance, and the growing tension between the GNA and the LNA is a key factor inhibiting progress and hindering development. Law enforcement personnel lack the capacity to 'detect, deter, respond to or investigate terrorist incidents'.[81] Rampant corruption and criminality play large parts in delaying progress; for example, prosecutors and security personnel have been kidnapped or murdered.

However, on 29 July the Sabratah Municipal Council in western Libya nominated a newly created security force: the Anti-Islamic State Operation Room, headed by Colonel Omar Abdul Jalil. Priorities for the force include policing the areas around Sabratah and Mellitah. Reports have stated that the council is focusing on building up and strengthening local governance and delivering robust security, policy and services.[82]

BORDER SECURITY

Libya's porous and thinly policed land and maritime borders remain vulnerable to organised crime, people trafficking and other forms of criminality. Border force personnel are poorly trained and susceptible to participation in informal criminal border economies, which could benefit IS. It's become increasingly hard to distinguish between criminal activities and terrorist enterprises, especially because the informal economies that sustain both overlap considerably. For example, it's thought that the Italian mafia was involved in an organised crime deal with IS militants in Libya in early 2017, when Italian police confiscated more than 24 million Tramadol tablets (opioids) at the port of Gioia Tauro, *en route* from Libya to India.[83]

Libyans were involved in terrorist attacks in Europe in 2017. The Manchester bombing and the Borough Markets attacks in the UK both involved Libyans. Salman Abedi, a British national of Libyan descent, was well connected to militant circles in Libya, having travelled there many times, and having allegedly met with members of Katiba al-Battar, an affiliate of IS in Libya.[84] One of the three Borough Market attackers in London in June, Rachid Redouane, might or might not have been a Libyan national, as there were disparities in his identification documents.

Mustafa al-Imam, the second Libyan militant charged with involvement in the 2012 attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi, was flown to the US after being caught in Misrata, Libya, in a Navy SEAL raid in October. Al-Imam was put on trial in Washington DC in November. He's thought to be an accomplice of Ahmed Abu Khattala, who was arrested in 2013 for the attacks[85] and who was convicted of terrorism offences on 29 November.[86]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

According to AFRICOM, in September 2017 the US conducted its first attack in Libya since President Trump took office, in coordination with the LNA. The air strikes hit an IS desert camp 240 kilometres southeast of Sirte and allegedly killed 17 fighters while destroying three vehicles.[87] The only other air strike conducted by the US during the year was on 19 January, when more than 80 IS fighters were killed.[88]

European nations, particularly Italy and France, remain key international partners conducting CT operations in Libya. In May 2017, for the first time, France called for a united national army that incorporates the rival GNA and LNA to work together against terrorist militants. In July, GNA Prime Minister Fayes al-Sarraj and LNA leader Khalifa Haftar met in Paris, agreeing to hold elections in early 2018.[89] The objective of unifying Libyan governance seemed positive and productive, but it may also reflect France's broader strategic aim to consolidate its regional influence as part of its reoriented, security-focused, ideological approach to countering terrorism.[90]

The UK also continued military operations in the NATO-led counter-IS coalition, which was the key to defeating IS militarily and limiting its territorial control in Libya. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson became the first Western politician to meet Haftar on the ground, near Benghazi.[91] The UK pledged a £9 million aid package to Libya to help fight terrorism and deal with illegal migration security challenges, such as people trafficking.[92] Of the total, £4 million is to pay for removing landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Sirte, £1 million will be for critical infrastructure, £2.75 million will support women's roles in peacekeeping, and £1.3 million will be for food and healthcare support for refugees.93

LOOKING FORWARD

Following the appointment of a new UN special envoy, Ghassan Salamé, in November 2017, the House of Representatives in Tobruk voted in favour of a new 12-month UN action plan to restart political progress by amending aspects of the LPA.[94] Salamé's appointment was supposed to inject renewed vigour into the process of repairing some of the deep political cleavages across the country.[95] However, negotiations over the terms and conditions of the plan have not been as smooth as expected and an agreement had not yet been reached by the end of 2017.[96] While political instability continues, state institutions will remain fragile and it will be impossible to create and implement a coherent CT campaign.

IS fighters who escaped from Sirte are thought to have been absorbed back into communities and are likely to form decentralised cells able to launch small-scale attacks elsewhere. According to the International Crisis Group, they appear unlikely to seek refuge in host nations due to difficulties they may face such as inter-jihadist group rivalries, stronger security presence and a lack of situational awareness of localised grievances elsewhere. The International Crisis Group indicated that very few IS fighters have headed towards Niger and Mali due to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) rivalries and a strong French security presence, respectively.[97]

IS's presence has been significantly curbed in Libya, but military gains against it in the Levant could have a destabilising effect on foreign fighters across the region. The impact of returnees looking to establish a new haven in the Maghreb, especially within conflict zones where governance is weak, is a key concern. According to experts, there are strong ties between IS fighters in Libya and Tunisia at the organisational and personal levels, which could be further destabilising.[98] The attack on the Tunisian town of Ben Guerdane in March 2016 highlights the linkage between militant networks in Tunisia and Libya, as many of the assailants appeared to have come from Libya.[99] In addition, IS had a training camp near the city of Sabratha in western Libya, 60 miles from the Tunisian border, in which one of the fighters who attacked the Sousse beach resort in 2015 allegedly trained.[100] Foreign fighters who have returned to the region from Iraq and Syria, as well as those who didn't make it all the way across to the Levant, may find a hospitable environment in Libya if proactive steps to unify its fragmented governments are not taken urgently.[101]

TUNISIA

SECURITY CONTEXT

Tunisia is known to have sent the highest per capita numbers of foreign fighters to fight for IS in Syria and Iraq (6,000 individuals[102]), and IS perpetrated a series of attacks Tunisia in 2014 and 2015. Other groups operating in Tunisia include AQIM, Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia[103] and the Okba Ibn Brigade (which is linked to al-Qaeda). In January 2018, Bilel Kobi, affiliated to a local branch of AQIM (Okba Ibn Nafaa branch), and known to be Abdelmalek Droukdel's special envoy, was shot dead by Tunisian special forces.[104]

IS hasn't perpetrated any major attack in Tunisia since the offensive on the town of Ben Guerdan in March 2016.[105] There were sporadic attacks during 2017, such as an IED blast in Kasserine that wounded two soldiers and was claimed by IS.[106] There was a lone-wolf attack on two traffic police at Bardo Square in Tunis on 1 November 2017. Both officers were stabbed by the attacker, who killed one and wounded the other. The 25-year-old assailant had allegedly been radicalised and was trying to go to Libya to join a terrorist group.[107] The attack was perpetrated as the government was about to vote on a new bill that gave more powers to police and ensured their protection from criminal liability.[108]

The intermittent and low-level attacks demonstrate that, despite the government's aggressive CT campaign targeting Islamist militants, there's a lingering threat fuelled by government responses to terrorism that infringe civil liberties and potentially allow the authorities (mainly the police) to abuse their powers.

The November 2015 state of emergency continues, having been extended three times in 2017. As in other countries, it grants extended powers to police to clamp down on opponents and prohibits strikes or confrontational meetings. Opposition activists have said that the extensions are a government tool for suppressing dissent and legitimising prolonged periods and poor conditions of detention. Often, executive orders have been used to 'restrict freedom of movement [and] impose house arrest without proper judicial review, and there have also been allegations of ill-treatment and torture'.[109]

COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM EFFORTS

Tunisia remains committed to hard security measures to counter the domestic jihadist threat, such as increased intelligence operations, reinforced border security and the training and deployment of security personnel across the country.[110]

The government says that, since the 2015 Bardo attack, it has arrested 694 terror suspects, dismantled 94 terror cells and detained 64 people suspected of the recruitment and movement of people to fight overseas.[111]

In addition, the government is trying to implement softer, more holistic measures rooted in education reform that aim tackle the sociopolitical and economic drivers fuelling radicalisation. It's also trying to improve prison conditions.[112] However, conditions in jails still fall far below international standards of human rights. During his visit to Tunisia in February, UN Special Rapporteur Ben Emmerson commented on the dreadful conditions in Mornaguia Prison, which is '150% over capacity, with groups of more than 90 prisoners crammed into cells'.[113]

The Commission Nationale de la Lutte contre le Terrorisme (CNLT) was created in 2016 to coordinate efforts across ministries and the security sector and engage international partners to help tackle violent extremism and terrorism. Its initiatives have included multilateral training and research workshops with a focus on CVE. In March 2017, Hedayah, a think tank based in Abu Dhabi, facilitated a workshop with the CNLT in Tunis. The focus was on community-based reintegration for returnees as part of the government's Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighter program.[114] The CNLT collaborated with relevant media, civil society groups and ministries to run the workshop.

In July, the UN's Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate facilitated a workshop on 'Strengthening community engagement in implementing Security Council resolutions 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014) and the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy' in Tunis.[115] The CNLT met with representatives of Tunisian ministries, civil society groups and the private sector.

OPERATIONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

According to a report from the UN Special Rapporteur to Tunisia, more than 1,500 people in Tunisia have been accused of terrorism and are the subjects of investigations and prosecutions.[116] Fewer than 10% have been sentenced, and the rest continue to be deprived of their liberty for prolonged periods. To address this, the Special Rapporteur recommended that authorities speed up judicial proceedings by providing the Counter Terrorism Judiciary Entity (Pôle Judiciaire de lutte contre le terrorisme) with more resources and by simplifying the criminal justice system.[117]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In February 2017, a Tunisian asylum seeker was arrested in Germany on suspicion of planning an attack. He was also wanted in relation to the 2015 assault on the Bardo Museum in Tunis, in which 22 people were killed.[118]

According to an unconfirmed report in October, the Canadian Army was considering deploying five soldiers to Tunisia to deliver CT training to the army,[119] including counter-IED training.[120] Foreign training assistance isn't unusual—in 2016, the British Army deployed around 40 personnel to Tunis for similar purposes,[121] and the US increased security assistance in 2017.[122]

A pilot project carried out by Dutch and Tunisian delegations to address radicalisation in Tunisian prisons completed its first phase in September 2017. The project was initiated in 2015 to equip prison staff with the necessary training and expertise to better address emerging conflicts and to counter violent extremism in prisons. The approach taken aims to build the 'foundation of a management, rehabilitation and reintegration system, that addresses the primary drivers of violence and the appeal of violent extremism'.[123] The delegations discussed experiences and good practices in a Dutch prison holding prisoners convicted of violent extremism and terrorism. Activities included roundtable discussions and workshops with prison staff. The second phase of the project, which centres on child detention and the rehabilitation and reintegration of detainees, will extend over 2018 and 2019.

CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

As elsewhere in the region, the challenge of returning foreign fighters remains high, but the robust security apparatus implemented since 2015 and the 2016 CT Strategy have enabled Tunisia to avoid mass-casualty attacks for two years.

However, border security is a critical vulnerability. The Defence Minister suggests that around 100 militants are hiding along the Algeria–Tunisia border,[124] and radicalised Tunisians are allegedly passing across the porous border with Libya because they can't regroup to mount attacks in their own country. Although cooperation between Tunisia and Algeria to share information, training and resources has been relatively successful,[125] it's much harder to cooperate with conflict-ridden Libya.

Tunisia should concentrate on continuing its transition to democracy, which means implementing policies and operations that comply with international standards of human rights and law. Right now, kneejerk reactions to the jihadist threat, such as extended states of emergency, curbing dissent and prolonged periods of detention in the name of security, are likely to exacerbate discontent. More people are radicalised by a poor relationship with police, real and perceived corruption, and most importantly, having a very bleak economic outlook. The Tunisian Government must work out how to implement sustainable economic reform that harnesses the skills of young people, particularly in the marginalised interior of the country, who would greatly benefit from improved economic opportunities. Getting young people politically and economically involved at the local level will go a long way towards stopping their radicalisation.

ALGERIA

SECURITY CONTEXT

Algeria's long history of fighting terrorism goes back to the civil war during the 1990s. Active militant groups include AQIM, IS and their affiliates (Table 7). AQIM has demonstrated considerable durability, having been in operation in the region since 2007. It members have detailed knowledge of the country's terrain, governance structures and tribes,[126] which gives them an advantage over jihadists from elsewhere. IS has struggled to maintain its presence in Algeria, unlike in Libya or northern Sinai. Although Gouri Abdelmalek (a.k.a. Khaled Abu Suleimane) broke away from AQIM and formed Jund al-Khilafah in allegiance with IS in 2014, the group gained very little traction. According to security sources, IS's *Wilayah al-Djazair*[127] has failed to garner much support or recruit substantial membership.[128] Instead, active *jihadis* tend to be dispersed in the hills or in small urban cells. IS's current manpower is estimated to be around 80 men, spread across three groups: el-Ghoraba; al-Itissam, under the banner of Ansar al-Khalifa; and Jund al-Khilafa.[129]

El-Ghoraba, based in Constantine, pledged allegiance to IS in 2015 after splintering from AQIM.[130] The group's online popularity didn't translate into on-the-ground influence or capability; reports suggested that el-Ghoraba consisted of no more than 10 fighters at the end of 2015.[131] El-Ghoraba was thought to have been behind the fatal shooting of policeman Amar Boukaabaour in October 2016, as well as a thwarted attack on the Constantine police station in February 2017. Ansar al-Khilafa is thought to still be in operation, but Jund al-Khilafa's whereabouts have been largely unknown since its second leader, Othman al-Acimi, was killed in 2015. In June 2016, Algerian security forces claimed to have dismantled the group altogether.[132]

AQIM central, led by Abdelmalik Droukdel, is thought to have retained about 500 members. In 2016, it launched a rehabilitation campaign (*munasahah*) to build a unified support base against government by persuading IS fighters to join its ranks.[133] AQIM has also intervened to undermine IS's presence in Algeria by publicly discrediting the group and by thwarting its propaganda operations since 2015.[134] However, in January 2018, Tunisian special forces killed two senior leaders of the AQIM-affiliated group Okba Ibn Nafaa—Bilel Kobi and Bechir Ben Neji.[135] In February, AQIM confirmed that Adel Seghiri a.k.a. Abu Rauaha al-Qasantini—a top AQIM media mastermind, running their Al-Andalus propaganda operations—was killed in strikes perpetrated by the Algerian army. This would have been a severe blow to AQIM, which had been capitalising on depleting IS influence and propaganda outputs of late.[136]

In March 2017, a merger of AQIM-affiliated groups operating in the Sahel and the Maghreb was led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a Malian national and former leader of Ansar Dine. Al-Mourabitoun merged with Ansar Dine, AQIM and AQIM–Sahara to form an extremist coalition known as Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (GSIM).[137] The group claimed responsibility for a series of attacks in quick succession around Mali and Burkina Faso soon afterwards.

Analysts are predicting that IS is likely to be defeated in Algeria due to a combination of factors, including its sparse membership and lack of structured leadership in a region where AQIM has enjoyed longstanding and solid support and influence. AQIM could further capitalise on IS's difficulties after the structural dismantling of IS's caliphate, which is likely bring IS fighters back to Algeria. The GSIM could provide safe havens for wavering militants and run coordinated logistical operations, which IS can't do.

TABLE 7: AQIM and IS affiliated groups operating in Algeria

Name	Affiliation	Leadership (if known)	Comments
El-Ghoraba	Islamic State	Noureddine Laouira, a.k.a. Abou al-Hammam	Based in Constantine. Originally affiliated to AQIM but pledged allegiance to IS in 2015. According to sources, it's unlikely that he was the ringleader of IS in Algeria due to his overall lack of experience during his time with AQIM.[a]
Okba Ibn Nafaa	Al-Qaeda (local branch of AQIM)	Formerly Mourad Chaieb (2017 killed). Subsequently Bechir Ben Neji and Bilel Kobi	Okba Ibn Nafaa was known to be based in the Semmama and Chaambi mountains, between the Algeria–Tunisia border. Top two leaders killed in January 2018 by Tunisian special forces.
Al-Itissam Militia, a.k.a. Ansar al-Khilafa	Islamic State	Amar Lemloum, a.k.a. Zakaria al-Djidjeli	Formerly AQIM, but changed allegiance in 2015.
Jund al-Khilafa	Islamic State	Othman al-Acimi	Current status unknown.
AQIM	Al-Qaeda	Abdelmalek Droukdel a.k.a. Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud	Emir of AQIM since 2007. Currently in the mountains of Kabylie.
AQIM Sahara emirate	Al-Qaeda	Yahia Abou al-Hammam, a.k.a. Djamel Okacha	Emir of AQIM's Sahara branch since 2012.[b]
Al-Mourabitoun	Al-Qaeda	Mokhtar Belmokhtar	Led the group from 2013 until March 2017, when it merged with two other factions to form Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (GSIM).
Ansar Dine	Al-Qaeda	Iyad ag-Ghali	Malian national who joined forces with regional groups in March. Now leads GSIM.
Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (GSIM)	Al-Qaeda	Iyad ag-Ghali	Coalition of aligned AQIM groups—Al Mourabitoun, Ansar Dine and AQIM Sahel.

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COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS

Algeria operates a CT strategy that relies on intelligence and military operations to dismantle jihadist networks. According to a US State Department country report on Algeria, the government pursues an 'aggressive counterterrorism campaign to eliminate all terrorist activity within its borders, and sustained its policing efforts to thwart terrorist activity in urban centres'.[138] That approach seems to have largely dismantled the main IS-affiliated group, Jund al-Khalifah. The security forces continue to coordinate to deliver strong CT campaigns across the country by a 500,000-member military, a national police force of 210,000 and 140,000 members of the National Gendarmerie.[139]

Reports suggest that, between January and March 2017, 35 terrorists were killed and 18 were arrested by Algeria's National People's Army. The authorities claim that two high-profile terrorists, including Noureddine Laouira, the leader of the el-Ghoraba militia based in Constantine,[140] were among those dead. Armed forces also recovered hoards of weaponry and ammunition, as well as 242 vehicles and trucks used by designated terrorist groups.[141]

LEGISLATIO140N AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In June 2016, the President issued new legislation that expanded Algeria's penal code to extend criminal liability to foreign terrorist fighters, such as 'those who support or finance foreign terrorist fighters' or use information technology in terrorist recruiting, and to internet service providers.[142] Algerian law enforcement agencies participated in the Antiterrorism Assistance Program, run by the US State Department. The program differs in its implementation according to the country and includes exercises such as first responses to attacks and enhancing technical skills and evidence-gathering techniques. The Algerian participants attended and hosted numerous workshops conducted under the Global Counterterrorism Forum.[142]

COUNTERTERRORISM FINANCING

Algeria is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force. Since 2016, Algeria has been working to improve capabilities to comply with the taskforce's anti-money-laundering and countering terrorist financing standards, but still requires tight monitoring and regulation by authorities.[144]

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The government has taken significant steps to integrate soft approaches to address the drivers of radicalisation into its broad CT strategy. In recent years, in accordance with international norms, a concerted effort has been made to improve education, training, employment and paid internship opportunities for young adults.[145] Similarly to its neighbour, Morocco, Algeria imposes a strict policy on the dissemination of religious content; for example, Radio Quran plays lectures and sermons that align with the government's standards of moderate Islam as a means to counter violent *Salafi* propaganda.[146] The government also supports an imam training program that tries to promote social stability and values of integration and tolerance.

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

Border security is a challenging issue for Algeria; securing the 4,000 miles of porous borders with six different countries and the disputed territories of the western Sahara is inevitably very difficult. Furthermore, security personnel are often found to be colluding with smugglers or criminal traffickers. The Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, which house more than 50,000 refugees, mainly under the age of 30, remain a source of instability. With growing regional instability, the camps could provide ideal recruitment pools for either the Sahrawi Polisario Front to start a new resistance movement, or for terrorist organisations and criminal enterprises. These people have valuable qualities: 'they're educated, they're adapted to the desert climate and they know the terrain.'[147]

Although po146litical disagreement over the status of the western Sahara continues to undermine progress in Algeria's bilateral and regional CT cooperation with Morocco, collaboration with Tunisia has been more successful. Algeria has provided Tunisia with military training, resources and intelligence, especially along their shared mountain border.[148]

Algeria continues to participate in the US-supported Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership,[149] along with 10 other nations in the Maghreb and Sahel. In 2016, Algeria offered to provide counter-IED training to neighbouring states and signed a memorandum to strengthen security cooperation with Chad.[150] Niger and Algeria also stepped up their joint patrol operations.

MOROCCO

SECURITY CONTEXT

There have been no terrorist attacks on Moroccan soil since 2011, when a bomb killed 17 people at a tourist restaurant in Marrakesh. The government has widely deployed security personnel and ensured tight border controls as the front line of defence against terrorism. The empirical data suggests that the kingdom has been successful in controlling the spread of violent extremist ideology at home, and the 2017 Global Terrorism Index names Morocco among countries least affected by terrorism (coming in at second to bottom in the Middle East and North Africa.[151] The government remains concerned about the influence of IS and AQIM in radicalising Moroccans at home and abroad. According to the International Crisis Group, IS may be cropping up in new, unexpected areas: some of the cells dismantled in 2016 and 2017 were in southern Agadir, which hasn't happened before.[152]

Morocco's close proximity and easy transport links to mainland Europe have meant that radical networks have developed links across the Mediterranean with diaspora communities in Europe, particularly in France and Spain. Moroccan militants have been implicated in at least three high-profile terrorist attacks in Europe in the past three years, including the November 2015 attack in Paris, the March 2016 attack in Brussels, and the failed attack at the Brussels Central Station in May 2017. The perpetrators of the attacks in Barcelona and in the Finnish city of Turku in 2017 were also of Moroccan or Spanish Moroccan origin,[153] and one of the London Bridge and Borough Market terrorists was of Moroccan–Italian origin.[154] The Barcelona and Cambrils attacks in August 2017, carried out by a cell of 12 jihadists, all of whom are thought to have been Moroccan-born or Spanish citizens of Moroccan descent,[155] were the latest examples of extremist networks functioning across borders.

COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY

Morocco employs both hard and soft CT measures to tackle short- and long-term challenges related to terrorism and violent extremism.[156] Anti-terrorism laws, the surveillance and monitoring of returnees, and imprisonment are the hard elements; reintegration, education, religious policing, community participation, psychological support and job training are among the softer measures.

Short-term responses include tighter national security control and increased intelligence sharing between regional (North African and European) countries as elements of CT policy. Long-term measures focus on political, economic, social and cultural reforms to assuage grievances that create conditions conducive to radicalisation. This includes focusing on education, critical thinking, employment opportunities, political representation and participation, especially among youths. According to Abdelhak el Khiam, the Counter Terror Chief and Head of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCJI), 'The Kingdom is driven by a strong desire to strengthen the foundations of a multidimensional approach that combines the religious and security aspect and the development effort, in order to combat the dangers of violent extremism and terrorism.'[157]

The General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration has partnered with the National Council for Human Rights and Moroccan *ulema* (scholars) to create a reintegration program using a 'consecrating citizenship' approach.[158] Workshops will be led by former *Salafi-jihadis* and are intended to serve as an opportunity for repentant prisoners to engage in dialogue with those convicted of similar charges to demonstrate how radicalised individuals are able to reform their views. The effectiveness of the initiative will be tested in a series of practical exercises after the program, although details of this are vague at present. The prisons involved include Al Arjat 1 and Ras El Ma.[159]

COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS

The Director General of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Moufakir, has stated that Morocco's BCJI has dismantled 168 terrorist cells since 2001, including 60 cells linked to groups in Syria and Iraq.[160] Other figures suggest that, since 2014, Moroccan authorities have dismantled between 42 and 53 terrorist cells associated with IS.[161] Numbers vary, as the sources aren't 100% verifiable, but the information suggests that Morocco's security and intelligence apparatus has been relatively successful in implementing coordinated CT operations.

Some large-scale raids have led to substantial arrests. The BCJI arrested 11 people with suspected links to IS in Fes in October 2017. A safe house was raided, and guns, bullets, nails and wires were seized. The dismantled cell was allegedly active in eight towns and cities.[162] An additional four-person cell in the neighbourhood of Sidi Boujida in Fes was also dismantled. The BCIJ conducted the raid, seizing electronic devices and knives from the property.[163] In the aftermath of the 2017 Barcelona attacks, Morocco security services arrested 85 recruits who returned from Syria and Iraq, including 14 women.[164]

EDUCATION

The government has invested in reforms to the education system to present a moderate vision of Islam sanctioned by the state in schools, prisons, mosques and other public spaces. The goal is to promote tolerance and critical thinking skills and to implement progressive reforms that 'balance modernity and tradition'.[165] Mosques are regularly scrutinised to ensure that extremist or violent discourse isn't disseminated, and all public religious discourse is closely monitored and controlled by the state in line with tight government guidelines.[166]

Morocco's well-established training organisation for certified imams[167]—the Mohammed VI Institute in Rabat—reflects the country's approach to implementing religious tolerance through government-controlled religious education.[168] Male and female preachers or guides (*morchidines* and *morchidates*) from North Africa, the Sahel and Europe are trained at the facility. In Ramadan 2017, a group of 49 Moroccan imams and *morchidates* went to Spain to officiate at various mosques as part of an initiative of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs and the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Living Abroad.[169]

In October 2017, the Mohammed VI Institute extended its campus to meet growing demands for imam training; the program is said to enrol more than 1,200 each year.[170] Morocco's CT chief, Abdelhak El Khiam, confirmed Morocco's intention to train imams in Europe to help prevent extremism. Notably, El Khiam's statement was made in the aftermath of the Barcelona terror attacks. A Moroccan imam in Spain, Abdelbaki al Satti, had radicalised the perpetrators and had planned the attacks.[171]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The eighth Global Counterterrorism Forum Ministerial Plenary Meeting was co-chaired by Morocco and the Netherlands in September 2017, and both countries confirmed their intention to extend the chairmanship for two further years.[172] In November, as part of the forum's activities, Morocco and the US launched a joint initiative to address homegrown terrorism, bringing

together a multidisciplinary group of international representatives to review 'ways to improve information sharing, both within and among governments'.[173]

Bilateral cross-border cooperation between Moroccan and Spanish security led to the arrest of 175 jihadists in September, according to Spanish Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido.[174] In the aftermath of the August attacks in Catalonia, Spain and Morocco increased cooperation and information and intelligence sharing, which resulted in further arrests in both countries. Morocco was a guest participant at the G6 Summit in Seville in October 2017, discussing organised crime, human trafficking, jihad and mass migration. Zoido commended the joint efforts and bilateral policies of southern EU countries and Mediterranean African nations in tackling mutual security challenges. In particular, he commented that procedures set up between Spain and Morocco 'are giving very satisfactory results.'[175]

Abdelhak el Khiam has stated that Moroccan intelligence shared with European countries has helped to prevent attacks in France, Spain, Italy, Holland and Denmark.[176] The BCJI is also scheduled to launch a new strategy to monitor people of Moroccan origin living in Europe who have been radicalised.[177]

Relations between Algeria and Morocco remain tense due to border disputes over western Sahara borders, which has undermined CT cooperation. According to el Khiame, 100 members of Polisario (a Sahrawi separatist/liberation movement) have joined IS ranks,[178] but that hasn't been verified. Currently, there are around 165,000[179] Sahrawi refugees in camps in Tindouf in Algeria, 90,000 of whom the UN declares to be vulnerable.[180] The camps remain a concern, as they could be ideal environments for radicalisation.

On 31 January, Morocco rejoined the African Union after a 33-year absence,[181] and in June was admitted as a member of ECOWAS, the economic group of West African nations.[182] These changes may be indicative of a renewed focus towards sub-Saharan Africa in building up economic investment and socioeconomic development.[183] This shift may have wider regional implications, such as advancing CT cooperation in the light of the operations of the newly created UN-backed G5 Sahel Force.

CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Out of the 1,600[184] Moroccan men, women and children who migrated to IS territories, 221 returned home, including 15 children;[185] 596 are reported to have been killed. Morocco appears to have a strong security network already in place and a dual hard–soft response to CT that incorporates CVE and religious education at the centre. It seems unlikely that returnees from Iraq and Syria will pose as great a threat in Morocco as in other nations in the region that are struggling with internal conflicts and weak governance. Nevertheless, the government must comprehensively address the sociopolitical and economic drivers of radicalisation among youth. At this stage, the softer approach seems to be focusing largely on controlling religious discourse, which can only go so far. This is most evident in the Moroccan diaspora in Europe, where youth who are poorly educated and are from low socio-economic backgrounds have become interested in radical extremist ideology. They need direction, education and employment. Their grievances won't be addressed by focusing on religion. This may become a regional issue, requiring the development of a joint approach by the Moroccan and European governments.

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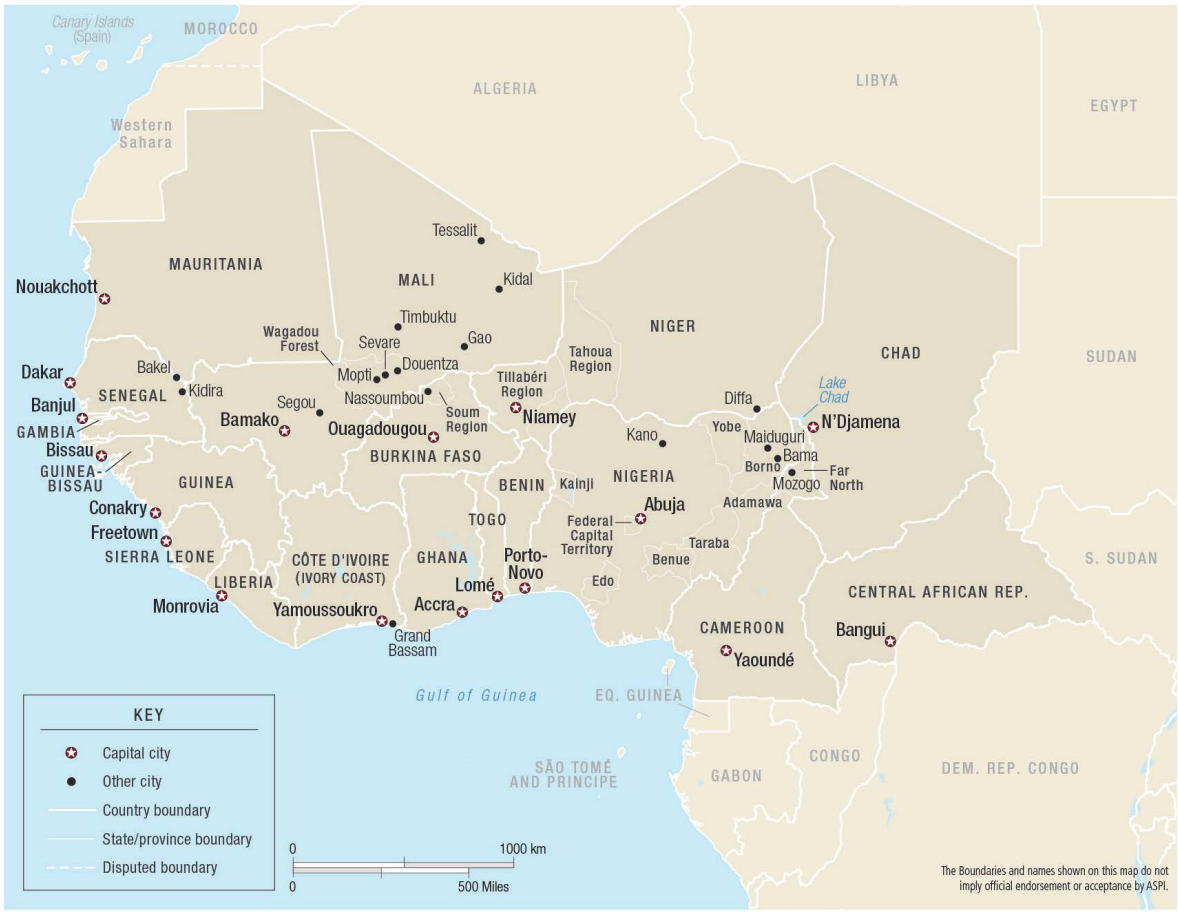
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Sevare
Gao
NIGER
Tahoua Region
CHAD
SUDAN
Dakar
Bakel
Mopti
Douentza
Tillabéri Region
Lake Chad
SENEGAL
Kidira
Nassoumbou
Diffa
Banjul
Segou
Soum Region
Niamey
N'Djamena
Bamako
Ouagadougou
Kano
Yobe
Maiduguri
GAMBIA
Bissau
BURKINA FASO
Borno
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Far North
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NIGERIA
Mozogo
Conakry
Abuja
Adamawa
TOGO
Federal Capital Territory
Freetown
Taraba
SIERRA LEONE
CÔTE D'IVOIRE (IVORY COAST)
GHANA
Porto-Novo
Benue
S. SUDAN
LIBERIA
Lomé
Edo
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.
Monrovia
Yamoussoukro
Accra
CAMEROON
Bangui
Grand Bassam
Yaoundé
Gulf of Guinea
EQ. GUINEA
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRINCIPE
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West Africa and the Sahel

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SECURITY CONTEXT

In 2017, insecurity in the Western Sahel region was dominated by developments related to Mali and an increased tempo of attacks in Burkina Faso throughout the year.

The security situation in Mali remained volatile. Besides continued incidents in the north, there was an upsurge of attacks in central Mali, particularly in the Mopti region. Towns and military camps throughout the country, including in the south, suffered several sophisticated attacks. The absence of adequate security led to the formation of vigilante groups in central and northern Mali. In October, the UN reported a more than 100% increase in Islamist attacks since June and identified the newly formed Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM, 'Group to Support Islam and Muslims', also known as GSIM) as the prime culprit.[1]

The country is still dealing with the aftermath of the conflict in the north and the implementation of the Algiers Accord, the signatories to which include several non-jihadist armed groups, which have often breached the ceasefire agreement. The implementation was further hampered by the presence of several jihadist groups that have shown growing ambition and have been responsible for several attacks against the UN Multinational Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Malian forces and civilians.

An 18 January suicide attack on an army garrison in Gao, housing government soldiers and members of the signatory armed groups, resulted in at least 80 casualties and more than 100 wounded. It was the most high-profile terrorist operation in Mali since al-Mourabitoun's 2015 assault on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako. Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility, before merging on 2 March with Ansar Dine and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to form the JNIM extremist coalition. JNIM carried out its first major attack on 5 March, killing 11 Malian soldiers at a military base in Douentza, Mopti. In June, it targeted a tourist resort near Bamako, and between April and August it mounted several attacks against French soldiers in Kidal. International troops, including the UN headquarters in Timbuktu, continued to be its target of choice. MINUSMA officials believe that jihadists had been closely studying UN operations and adapting their tactics accordingly. JNIM also began issuing high-quality videos, including a proof-of-life clip featuring six foreign hostages. Recruitment and propaganda videos were often narrated in English to increase their circulation.

There was an upsurge in jihadist preaching and recruitment for the Macina Liberation Front in central Mali, possibly to replenish the group's ranks following some desertions. Communities often fell prey to jihadists who took control of water canals and restricted access to villages through blockades. Christian villages were attacked. In May, unidentified extremists attacked a primary school in Mopti. It was the first attack against a school providing education in French in central Mali.

Jihadist activity continued to spread across national borders. Nigerien soldiers were attacked in the Nigerien region of Tillabéri in February; another attack close to the Mali – Burkina Faso border resulted in the death of five soldiers. A state of emergency was declared in Tillaberi and Tahoua in March, extending the powers of security forces to conduct house searches at will and making available more resources for CT operations. Unidentified militants were responsible for the death of four American and four Nigerien soldiers and the wounding of several others on a joint patrol near the Malian border in southwest Niger in October 2017. The American Green Berets were the first US servicemen to die in Niger as part of US AFRICOM CT assistance to the Sahelian country.[2] The Pentagon suspected that IS was responsible and considered that local villagers might have provided support for the ambush. The Nigerien Prime Minister identified Islamic State in the Greater Sahara as the main security threat to his country.

Burkina Faso has changed from a country essentially free from terrorism to one that, since late 2015, is increasingly targeted by jihadists. In 2016, it was rocked by an attack on Café Cappuccino and Hotel Splendid in Ouagadougou that left 28 people dead and more than 50 injured, many of them Westerners. The attack was carried out by AQIM, and at least two of the attackers were women.[3]

Soum Province, in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, is the birthplace of Ansarul Islam ('Combat for Islam'), a group led by Malam Ibrahim Dicko, who is known as *Malam* or teacher. Together with Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, the group attacked a military base in Nassoumbou, about 30 kilometres from the border with Mali, on 16 December. Dicko, who was married to a daughter of the head of Djibo's main mosque, had been known to the authorities and had spent time in jail in Bamako following his arrest during Operation Serval in 2013. In Mali, he built ties to the Macina Liberation Front, an Ansar Dine proxy, and then returned to Burkina Faso after two years in prison. In December 2016, he claimed responsibility for the Nassoumbou attack. In January, the group began assassinating government officials, and its members visited schools to tell teachers to change the language of instruction to Arabic.[4] By June 2017, Dicko may have died and been succeeded by his younger brother, Jafar.

Aside from its claim that it promotes pure Islam, Ansarul Islam's ideology is rooted in strongly anti-establishment sentiments that build on the economic and political marginalisation of Fulani and Remaibe communities in northern Burkina Faso (although it has members from other Fulfulde-speaking ethnic groups), as well as mistrust of security and other government authorities that are perceived as corrupt and criminal. Using an approach similar to that of Boko Haram founder Mohamed Yusuf, Dicko styled himself as the protector of the poor and appealed to youth by challenging the status quo, advocating social equality and promoting anti-Western sentiment. His ability to operate was greatly enhanced by the limitations of Burkinabe security forces and the fact that he could rely on local support.

Ansarul Islam's ties to JNIM are unclear. There might have been some distancing owing to disagreements between the two leaders. Through a Facebook statement, the group condemned the killing of Muslims during the 13 August attack in Ouagadougou, which was attributed to JNIM. Ansarul Islam's relationship with the local IS branch, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, to which Dicko appeared to have drawn closer in early 2017, also remains unclear.[5]

Despite an escalation of attacks in September 2017, including ambushes, assassinations and attacks on security forces, and the first local use of IEDs in August 2017,[6] developments in northern Burkina Faso were considered to be at low intensity, and Soum Province is unlikely to take up arms.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM DEVELOPMENTS

REGIONAL INITIATIVES

CT Operation Barkhane, which started as a predominantly French mission, has been consolidated into a permanent coordinated effort involving France and Mali, Chad, Niger, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso—countries in which France has deployed some 4,000 troops and from which it operates across the Sahel in coordination with MINUSMA. In September 2017, France upgraded its military efforts by arming five Reaper reconnaissance drones based in Niamey, Niger.

Those efforts were complemented and supported by the 5,000 strong G5 Sahel Force, the deployment of which was authorised by the African Union Peace and Security Council in April and was later welcomed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2359. France was one of its strongest advocates. The troops, who were first deployed for an initial 12-month period, are tasked with fighting terrorism, drug-running and human trafficking; supporting the restoration of state authority and the return of displaced people; helping humanitarian and aid delivery operations; and contributing to the implementation of development efforts. Their initial focus is on border regions such as Liptako–Gourma (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) and the Wagadou forest (Mali, Mauritania).

The force was announced in July, Headquartered in Sevare, central Mali, it's estimated to cost around €423 million in the first year.[7] It's expected to receive €50 million from the EU, €8 million from France and €10 million from each of the G5 countries.[8] In October, the US pledged €60 million to the force, subject to approval by Congress. The US is reducing its support for the UN and peacekeeping operations and has been sceptical of the G5 force's mandate and strategy. Washington thought it unnecessary to pass a UN Security Council resolution on UN funding for the force, preferring to offer support bilaterally. There was to be a further donors conference in Brussels in December. The force's first mission, 'Haw Bi' (Black Cow), to regain control over the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger at the centre of the recent surge of jihadist activity, was launched on 28 October.

In 2017, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) began working on a plan of action to ensure that the G5 Sahel joint force complies with international norms and standards. UNODC delivered training on jihadist doctrine and interagency cooperation in terrorism cases in Mali. With the support of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, the training was tailored to two newly established specialised law enforcement and judicial units handling terrorism cases in Mali.

UNODC organised a national training workshop in Ouagadougou for law enforcement agents, prosecutors and judges handling terrorism cases. Similar training was delivered in Nouakchott. It also ran courses on investigating the financing of terrorism in Senegal and Chad.

The governments of Niger, Chad and Mali signed a judicial cooperation agreement in May as part of their common fight against terrorism and cross-border crime.[9] The agreement provides for the establishment of rotating international commissions; the exchange of judicial acts between the three states; appearances by experts, witnesses and accused; cooperation on extradition; joint investigations; and the transfer of prosecutions.

Mali's President, Ibrahim Boubakar Keïta, and Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé (who's currently ECOWAS President) inaugurated the West African Coordination Center in Bamako. The centre was created to give ECOWAS countries early, real-time warning on security threats in the region. The facility, which will operate first in Mali, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, is financed with €3 million from the US.

Several CVE conferences and training sessions were organised in 2017. The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre and the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism hosted PVE/CVE training for UN, African Union, regional and national institutions' personnel. G5 Sahel countries organised a regional conference on the role of parliamentarians in promoting women's leadership in PVE/CVE. The UN and Switzerland supported a regional seminar on the role of the media in CVE. UN agencies also ran CVE capacity-building workshops on education and women's participation.

EXERCISES

More than 2,000 military personnel from 24 African and Western nations participated in the 10th Flintlock exercise in February.[10] Chad was the main host for the exercise, which also involved activities in Cameroon, Niger, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The training simulated the aftermath of a terrorist bombing and the chase and apprehension of hostage-taking terrorist suspects and was designed to improve the coordination of military efforts to protect borders and guard against cross-border attacks. A month later, 1,300 American, Moroccan, Canadian, French, German, British, Malian, Mauritanian, Senegalese, Spanish and Tunisian military personnel participated in Exercise African Lion to help build a strong regional and global defence partnership against instability. Morocco and the US hosted the exercise.

Although it's difficult to assess the direct impact of the annual Flintlock exercises, they have fostered cooperation and trust and, possibly, joint initiatives such as a joint intelligence cell in the Lake Chad Basin.[11]

THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU strengthened its CT presence in West Africa during the year. In January, the European Council extended the mandate of the EU's Civilian Mission in Support of the Malian International Security Forces (EUCAP Sahel Mali) until January 2019 and allocated a budget of €29.7 million to the mission for the year. Launched in 2014, the mission helps Mali's internal security forces to implement government reforms in the security sector, providing training and strategic advice to the Malian police, gendarmerie and national guard.

In August, in response to an invitation from the Malian authorities, the EU agreed to deploy a team of experts to support Malian national plans and policies, to counter growing insecurity and to re-establish and expand civilian administration in the central regions of Mopti and Segou. The stabilisation team will consist of 10 people and will have a budget of €3.25 million for an initial operating phase of one year. It will be based in the EU delegation in Mali and will operate in Bamako, Mopti and Segou. This action will complement those of the EU delegation in Mali and the Common Security and Defence Policy missions deployed there—EUCAP Sahel Mali and the EU Training Mission to Mali. It will also work closely with MINUSMA.

Shortly after presenting its new resilience strategy in June, the European Commission approved new projects worth €88 million to boost security and resilience in West Africa, including €25 million for the West African police information system, WAPIS.[12] The European Council also adopted a decision allowing for the establishment of a regional coordination cell based in one of the EU civilian missions, EUCAP Sahel Mali. The cell will include internal security and defence experts in G5 Sahel countries, deployed in Mali but also in EU delegations in other G5 Sahel countries.

BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso still lacks a comprehensive CT strategy but stepped up its efforts in the light of increased jihadist activity. In early 2017, the Council of Ministers established the National Operational Committee for the Management of Terrorist Crises under the office of the Prime Minister. This is part of a broader CT plan that will eventually include a national crisis committee, a permanent secretariat, a unified crisis management centre and intervention units.[13] In addition, legislators passed laws to create and institutionalise judicial units specialising in the repression of terrorist acts. This is intended to strengthen the country's fight against transnational organised crime, terrorism and the financing of terrorism.

In September, the authorities announced that new security measures had been implemented in the capital, following terrorist attacks the previous month that killed 19 people. The measures included the deployment of police patrols in the streets of Ouagadougou and more regular identity checks. It was also announced that Germany would train Burkinabe soldiers to strengthen CT capacity.[14]

In the wake of increased violence in Soum Province, French troops from Operation Barkhane were involved in joint CT operations against Ansar al-Islam in border areas.

Burkina Faso has also worked on development initiatives as a way of preventing radicalisation and terrorism. The government announced the investment of 415 billion CFA francs over three years to develop northern Burkina Faso, one of the poorest regions and the one that was under constant threat during 2017.[15] *Le programme d'urgence pour le Sahel* was aimed at improving infrastructure and access to drinking water. Together with the EU, the government also launched *le programme d'appui à la gestion intégrée des frontières* in Ouagadougou. Budgeted at €30 million and running until the end of 2020, it aims to improve living conditions for border populations and prevent radicalisation in the Burkinabe, Malian and Nigerien border areas.

The Burkinabe and Ghanaian national security ministers signed a memorandum of understanding in July, pledging to boost their security cooperation, with particular emphasis on the fight against terrorism and serious crime.[16] Burkina Faso also announced the strengthening of strategic cooperation against security threats with Ivory Coast.[17]

Burkina Faso hosted the 4th regional symposium on radicalisation and extremism, which was initiated by the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel to detail an efficient regional strategy to prevent and fight against radicalisation and violent extremism through the establishment of a framework document. The document will be a comprehensive guide and reference during the preparation of national strategies for combating radicalisation and violent extremism in Sahel countries.

GUINEA

In April, Guinea inaugurated the Operational Support Division to support the fight against terrorism and organised crime. It comprises the Central Service for Criminal Information, the Service of Identification of Offenders, and the Research and Intervention Brigade. It was expected that the judicial and military authorities would complete the drafting of a Terrorism Act to be voted on by the National Assembly before the end of 2017.

IVORY COAST

The Ivorian President vowed to strengthen cooperation with France on military and intelligence matters to fight Islamic extremism. The French became closely involved in the restructuring of Ivorian military intelligence.[18] Overall, there was a marked increase in cooperation (particularly with France, Burkina Faso and Morocco) compared to previous years, including several joint military exercises. Ivory Coast acquired new military hardware, including three EH-101 helicopters manufactured by AgustaWestland in Italy, to secure its borders against terrorist infiltration and introduced new measures to reinforce the control of mobile phone subscribers and verify users' identity to prevent misuse by terrorists and criminals.

MALI

Malian and French forces increased their operations in 2017. Parts of the country remain outside government control, and the state's inability to enforce its presence became particularly evident in the central and border areas during the year. In October, a state of emergency first declared in November 2015 was extended by a further year, primarily in response heightened insecurity in the central regions.

Several joint operations were launched in addition to some transborder operations in Burkina Faso and Niger. A rapid intervention force of Senegalese troops was deployed in central Mali in mid-2017 to help address growing insecurity.[19] Ivory Coast sent its first combat unit of 150 soldiers to northern Mali, alongside 850 troops from Guinea.[20] Germany deployed eight helicopters and 650 additional personnel to Gao in support of MINUSMA.

Several arrests were made (including of a man in Gao suspected of involvement in the March 2016 Grand-Bassam attack in Ivory Coast), senior jihadist leaders were killed, and JNIM camps were destroyed.

The Malian Government has been implementing the Governmental Actions Program 2013–2018 for CT and CVE based on preventive and collaborative policing.[21] In August, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Worship presided over a ratification workshop for CT and CVE action plans. MINUSMA's Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion and Security Sector Reform Unit funded a vocational training project for 50 young people from Tessalit in the northeast as part of a bigger effort aimed at reducing communal violence and integrating young people at risk of radicalisation.

SENEGAL

In May, the Senegal Government and the EU inaugurated new border offices in Kidira and Bakel, near the Malian and Mauritanian borders. The offices are part of an EU-funded effort to improve the capacities of the police, gendarmerie and customs services to impede illegal crossings of criminals and jihadists and facilitate legal crossings of residents from border communities. In total, nine border offices will be built or renovated.

Several suspected terrorists were arrested, including Moroccan and Nigerian nationals suspected of ties with IS and the Islamic State West African Province, respectively. Two men suspected to have been in contact with one of the Grand-Bassam attack planners were apprehended in Dakar. Three people arrested near the capital confessed of being among 23 Senegalese in Boko Haram's ranks. Suspected Algerian IS members were also apprehended near the Mauritanian border.

In February, Senegal and Gambia discussed mixed border patrols.[22] Subsequent meetings of their heads of state reaffirmed the need to increase information sharing in the wake of the heightened terrorism threat. Strengthening military and security relations with Mauritania was also Dakar's priority. Both countries multiplied patrols along their borders in mid-February after increased insecurity. Dakar also intensified CT cooperation with Spain, which had traditionally focused on illegal migration, and promoted greater intelligence sharing through a collaboration protocol between the Spanish Centre for Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime Intelligence and the Senegalese National Intelligence Office.[23]

With UN support, Senegal hosted a national consultation on prisons to improve conditions, social integration and PVE efforts through education. Overpopulation and dilapidated facilities are a great concern in Senegalese prisons, especially after the 2015 UN Plan of Action for PVE highlighted the risk of poor conditions potentially resulting in inmates' recruitment into violent extremist groups.[24]

LAKE CHAD BASIN

SECURITY CONTEXT

Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon continue to face the threat of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in northern Nigeria in 2009 and 2010, has gradually expanded into neighbouring countries. It has prompted a regional military response, the Multinational Joint Task Force, the operations of which have significantly weakened the insurgents and forced them to operate in a much smaller area (mainly in Borno state). The military continued to be supported by Civilian Joint Task Force vigilantes. In August, the Nigerian Chief of Army staff insisted that Boko Haram had been 'technically defeated'. Yet, from October 2017, a resurgence of attacks in the Nigerian states of Yobe and Adamawa and in northern Cameroon threw into question the effectiveness of the CT and counterinsurgency missions. Attacks expanded to until then virtually untouched states, such as Taraba and Edo. Female and child suicide attacks (especially in Nigeria and Cameroon's Far North region), IEDs, village raids and ambushes against the military were recurrent features. Convoys and helicopters delivering aid to thousands of internally displaced people were frequently attacked by Boko Haram, especially in Borno and the state capital, Maiduguri.

Chadian troops have occasionally been targeted by Boko Haram, and Niger suffered attacks close to the border with Burkina Faso and Mali, probably by the JNIM.[25] More frequently, Boko Haram and ISWAP targeted Diffa, which is close to the Nigerian border. In June and July, there was a surge in suicide missions, lootings and kidnappings. In September, the US embassy issued a warning against the risk of kidnapping of Westerners in Diffa. Similar warnings had been issued by the US and the UK for the Bama area in Borno. Dwindling resources might prompt Boko Haram to resort to kidnapping for ransom. In July, hundreds of insurgents ambushed an oil-exploration team from the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Company in Magumeri, Borno. The 11-vehicle convoy included a group of geological surveyors from the University of Maiduguri, three of whom were kidnapped.

Unlike the more indiscriminate Boko Haram, ISWAP militants preferred to target authorities rather than civilians, although ISWAP has been involved in the abduction of girls in border areas. The group raided villages to steal food supplies, but without harming civilians. In August, ISWAP's leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, released a video in which he accused Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau of betraying the teachings of the group's founder, Mohammed Yusuf, and predicted that Shekau's faction would soon be defeated by the Nigerian Army. Boko Haram has also issued videos to confirm that Shekau is still alive, take responsibility for some attacks, show executions, and mock and threaten troops.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM DEVELOPMENTS

The sharp increase in attacks in Borno in early 2017 resulted in the establishment of new guard locations to interdict the movements of Boko Haram, increases in deployments of security personnel to various locations, and the provision of additional patrol vehicles to security agencies. The domestic intelligence agency was able to disrupt plans to attack the US and UK embassies in Abuja by arresting suspected ISWAP members in Yobe, Benue and the Federal Capital Territory.[26] A number of joint clearance operations with Cameroonian forces were mounted in border areas. Thousands of civilians were rescued on the Nigeria–Cameroon border. Several arrests were made, including of a large number in Kano suspected of planning attacks in cities in central and northeastern Nigeria.

In August, Nigerian military service chiefs relocated back to Borno state following an executive order in response to increasing insecurity. The air force adopted a new strategy involving the deployment of a new set of combat aircraft to Maiduguri.

There's been a strong drive to acquire foreign military hardware for CT and counterinsurgency purposes. Following the delivery of two Russian Mi-35M attack helicopters in January 2017, eight additional Mi-35Ms are expected in 2018.[27] The US approved the sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano fighter planes, along with parts, training, facilities and weapons.[28] The air force is also expecting five Super Mushshak aircraft from Pakistan and Yabhon Flash 20 remotely piloted aircraft from the UAE. The Jordanian Air Force pledged to assist with training, logistics and the provision of parts. The Nigerian Army announced a collaboration with the US, the UK, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Jordan to build CT capacity, alongside the acquisition of new military technologies. President Muhammadu Buhari announced a new economic, defence and security partnership with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and future CT collaboration against IS and ISWAP.

In addition to jihadists, Nigeria controversially declared the separatist Indigenous People of Biafra to be a terrorist organisation. According to the authorities, the group had formed a secret service and 'national guard'.

Chad's involvement in regional CT efforts was marred by controversy throughout 2017. In June, President Idriss Déby threatened to withdraw its nearly 4,000 troops from MINUSMA and 2,000 from the Multinational Joint Task Force unless the country was sufficiently financially supported. The message came shortly after the G5 Sahel Force was approved. In October, Chad withdrew hundreds of troops deployed in Niger as part of the Multinational Joint Task Force. It's possible that the decision was taken in retaliation for the US travel ban on Chadian nationals and accusations that the country had failed to share terrorism-related information.

Earlier in the year, Chadian special forces received nearly 90 vehicles from the US to strengthen the patrolling capabilities of two CT and one logistics companies

along the border with Libya, which Chad had closed in January to curtail terrorist infiltration.

Domestically, Chad tightened identity checks. In July alone, it arrested more than 260 people, including Senegalese, Cameroonian, Central African, Nigerian and Burkinabe nationals, in a drive to identify foreigners.

In March, Khalid al-Barnawi, the leader of Boko Haram's offshoot, Ansaru, was charged with the abduction and murder of 10 foreigners in one of the highest profile cases yet brought against Islamist militants. He was one of the three Nigerians listed by the US Government as 'specially designated global terrorists'.

In October, Nigeria's Ministry of Justice begun the first in a series of mass trials of 1,669 Boko Haram suspects. The trials took place behind closed doors in civilian courts at a military base in Kainji in Niger state. Forty-five people were sentenced to between three and 31 years in prison. A further 468 detainees were released without charge but were placed into court-ordered deradicalisation programs. State justice officials also reported their inability to try some key cases due to a lack of witnesses, and that those cases would be adjourned until January 2018 for trial in Abuja.

Amnesty International expressed concern about the ban on press and public attendance at the trials, calling on the authorities to be more transparent and to respect the human and legal rights of suspects by providing defendants with access to lawyers and translators and ensuring that witnesses were protected from reprisals.

Nigeria made progress in its deradicalisation efforts. Responding to a call by the UN, in August 2016 the government began working on the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism.[29] In March, the working group tasked with designing the plan met to validate a new draft framework.

Through the engagement of Islamic scholars and expert psychologists and counsellors, Nigeria developed a specialised rehabilitation and deradicalisation program for convicted Boko Haram members. The program, announced by the army in 2016, involves the profiling, rehabilitation and reintegration into society of former fighters. A strong component is re-education and training to give reformed *jihadis* vocational skills, allowing them to seek employment and become self-sufficient.[30]

In July, under the banner of Operation Safe Corridor, the Nigerian Army began the deradicalisation of 43 insurgents who had recently surrendered. While total numbers remain unconfirmed, several Boko Haram members, including some senior figures with their families, surrendered to the security forces during the year. More are likely to follow suit. Their motivations vary from hardship resulting from growing military pressure, diminishing food and general war fatigue to disillusion with the group's conduct and the possibility of taking advantage of the Safe Corridor program. Some who had been coerced into joining the group surrendered as a way out.

Nigerian civil society has been active on the CVE front. For example, the Association of Nigerian Authors' Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Program was created to promote a cultural approach to CVE/PVE. The Nigeria Youth 4 Peace Initiative held a national summit on youth participation in CVE.

Nigeria's neighbours lack national action plans on CVE, so efforts were channelled through faith-based organisations and civil society groups, often supported by foreign donors. While coordination among the many civil society initiatives is limited, the benefits of their work arise from their reliance on grassroots organisations that, by and large, appear to have a better grasp of local dynamics. Examples include initiatives by the Local Youth Corner Cameroon, a youth-led peace building and CVE organisation that runs national training on the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent offenders. The Association of Dynamic Young People held dialogue sessions in 47 northern Cameroonian municipalities affected by Boko Haram to build confidence among local government representatives, security forces, religious leaders and other youth organisations, promote inclusive responses, and raise awareness about the risk of recruitment.

In early 2017, the UN Population Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the UN Development Programme launched a pilot CVE program in Cameroon's Far North region. It aims to enhance social cohesion in displaced communities and host areas by reaching out to 500 vulnerable youth and spreading messages about peace and tolerance. Importantly, the program aims to offer psychological support for rehabilitation to assist more than 100 young people who have been targeted for recruitment or have suffered because of violence.[31]

In December 2016, Niger launched an amnesty and reintegration program.[32] Around 150 former Boko Haram militants underwent psychological and behavioural rehabilitation and religious education as part of the deradicalisation process. The government also signed a UN protocol that recognised the obligation to ensure appropriate protection for all children associated with armed and terrorist groups and agreed to refer those children to child protection services.

In August, Chad began a series of consultations with state and civil society stakeholders under the aegis of the UN Development Programme to formulate a national PVE program. The authorities are currently drafting a national plan.

Building on the recommendations of the Abuja Declaration on Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism in October 2016, 65 Muslim scholars from West and Central Africa committed to transparent mosque management (which is inclusive and doesn't serve as a recruitment ground for extreme factions), the participation of women and youth in decision-making, and the training of religious leaders and institutions to deliver content more effectively.[33]

CONCLUSIONS, CHALLENGES AND THE WAY AHEAD

Continued jihadist activity across the region in 2017 followed some established patterns: *jihadi* groups' propensity for fragmentation, geographical scattering and ad hoc mergers; and the overlap between broader jihadist agendas linked to al-Qaeda or IS and local drivers and grievances that group leaders exploited for recruitment purposes.

In operational CT, progress was made by capturing militants, retaking control of villages that had fallen prey to jihadists and introducing a host of new measures, including judicial agreements to facilitate the prosecution of suspected terrorists. The start of terrorist trials in Nigeria and the opening of deradicalisation programs for Boko Haram members indicated a shift into the next phase of the fight against violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin.

However, progress can be undermined by gross mistakes on the part of security forces and governments that need to regain the trust of their citizens, which would facilitate exchanges of information about terrorist activities and would reduce popular support for the groups. For example, more than 200 internally displaced people died because of an accidental strike by the Nigerian Air Force in Rann, Borno state, in January.[34] Cameroon has been accused of abusing its 2014 anti-terror legislation to suppress dissent in its English-speaking regions. That tendency might increase ahead of the 2018 elections. The country has already been criticised for forcibly deporting thousands of Nigerian refugees in one of the largest recent cases of illegal forced repatriation.[35] Some of those refugees had been tortured. Suspected Boko Haram members had also been subjected to torture, according to Amnesty International. Similar allegations have been made against Malian and Burkinabe troops.

Once again, the transnational nature of the threat and the inability of many individual nation-states to fight it required collaboration with regional and international partners. That, in itself, presents current and future challenges.

For example, Burkinabe troops see MINUSMA's mandate as inadequate, and the introduction of the new G5 Sahel Force—and the overlapping remits of the various missions—brings coordination challenges and could undermine their chances of success. Many officials see the new joint regional force as too bureaucratic and consisting of countries with different priorities. More targeted approaches and groupings such as the Mali – Burkina Faso – Niger joint endeavour in the Liptako–Gourba border areas might be more effective. Funding of a large, multi-year force such as G5 Sahel could also pose a sustainability challenge in the short (funding for the full deployment is still being sought) and long terms.

In addition, as the issue of Chad's partial military withdrawal exemplified, it has become apparent that troop deployments can be instrumentalised and politicised. As a result, political tit-for-tats have an impact on the effectiveness of CT operations on the ground. Indeed, Diffa residents reported an increase in attacks following Chadian troops' departure.

Finally, in October, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis announced the US's intention to deepen its CT footprint in Africa. There's a risk that greater involvement of American partners will feed jihadists' anti-Western rhetoric in West Africa, the Sahel and elsewhere on the continent, such as in East and North Africa.

The importance of regional cooperation shouldn't overshadow the need to understand local dimensions. Whereas early jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso were a spillover from Mali, local dynamics in the Burkinabe region of Sahel, and Soum Province in particular, have been driving insecurity and shouldn't be conflated with broader dynamics. Local ethnic, linguistic and social dimensions should be considered through practical measures to increase popular support for the government and its CT missions. One step in this direction would be to deploy Fulfulde-speaking forces to the north of the country.

It's encouraging that countries such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso are releasing funds to promote the economic development of regions at risk. Such initiatives are much needed to build lasting stability and to address the socio-economic drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism. In fact, all *jihadi* groups active in the region have exploited, to varying but substantial degrees, people's discontent about poverty, the lack of employment and education, and political marginalisation.

Reports in October indicated that local communities had blocked the passage of some 400 former Boko Haram hostages and surrendered fighters queuing for food outside Mozogo, in the far north of Cameroon. Village leaders feared that some of those freed may pose a security threat. Such events make it clear that local communities require government assurances. Short of that, tensions seem inevitable, particularly as residents in many host communities are short of food and water. At around the same time, the Norwegian Refugee Council estimated that 86% of Nigerian refugees were not ready to return home in the immediate future owing to continued insecurity. Similar problems and communal tensions can be expected to damage many communities in the region.

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NIGER
CHAD
SUDAN
ERITREA
Asmara
Red Sea
SAUDI ARABIA
OMAN
YEMEN
Gulf of Aden
DJIBOUTI
Djibouti
Berbera
Somaliland
Hargeisa
Puntland State
Addis Ababa
ETHIOPIA
S. SUDAN
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.
Juba
SOMALIA
South West State
Baardhere
Mogadishu
Jubaland State
UGANDA
KENYA
Kampala
Indian Ocean
CONGO
DEM. REP. CONGO
RWANDA
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East Africa
AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

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TERRORISM THREAT ASSESSMENT

The East Africa / Horn of Africa region continues to be one of the world's worst hotspots for terrorist violence.[1] Terrorism in the region is part of a wider mosaic of communal clashes, insurgencies, political violence, state fragility and state predation. The group that's most prominently linked to terrorism in this region is al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate. Al-Shabaab's main area of operation is southern Somalia, and most of its leadership, fighters, and operatives are ethnic Somalis. But the group has a region-wide network and has engaged in major terrorist attacks in Kenya, Uganda and Djibouti. It draws recruits from the wider region and has cells as far afield as Tanzania.[2] It launches daily small-scale attacks and assassinations in Somalia and executes major terrorist attacks, usually using vehicle-borne IEDs, once or twice per month.

In addition to al-Shabaab, IS has made modest inroads in Somalia and could expand its presence.[3] A number of other armed groups in the region, including ethnic paramilitaries and state-affiliated security forces, employ tactics that could be categorised as acts of terrorism as well. The Ethiopian Government has designated five groups in the country as terrorist organisations.[4]

The capacity of regional states and global actors to respond effectively to terrorist threats and the underlying drivers of terrorism in the Horn of Africa has been weakened in recent years. Some governments, such as those of Ethiopia and Kenya, have been preoccupied with domestic political unrest, contested elections, or both. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has begun to withdraw its 22,000 peacekeepers from Somalia, where it's been the principal armed force opposing al-Shabaab. The Federal Government of Somalia has been beset by corruption and infighting, and the Somali National Army (SNA) remains largely dysfunctional. The weak federal government also faces challenges from restive federal member states.

External actors haven't fared well either. Important regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey, which should be united in opposition to terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa, are instead embroiled in bitter rivalries that are played out there through proxies. And the US, the main global CT actor in the region, has increased its advisers and use of lethal force against al-Shabaab in Somalia but faces mounting questions about civilian casualties, the effectiveness of drone strikes on the al-Shabaab leadership and the reliability of its local government and non-state partners.[5]

Given these developments, the threat of terrorism is likely to expand in Somalia in the short and medium terms. Most of al-Shabaab's energies are likely to be focused on attacks inside Somalia and on recapturing and holding territory there, so spillover into the wider East Africa region will be minimal. But if al-Shabaab consolidates control over southern Somalia, it will almost certainly redirect its *jihadi* violence into the wider region, targeting the northern regions of Somalia (Puntland and Somaliland), Djibouti, and neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya.

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

East Africa and the Horn constitute an extraordinarily diverse political and security terrain. Much of this vast region consists of remote peripheries that are largely ungoverned by formal state authority. In those areas, a variety of informal systems of governance provide variable levels of security to local populations and sometimes serve as useful partners in CT operations. These poorly governed portions of the region are easily exploited by terrorist, criminal and insurgent networks. Governments are beset by corruption, ethnic tensions and weak or uneven capacity. In the two most extreme cases—South Sudan and Somalia—the formal state is extremely weak even in the main cities, and is arguably less powerful and authoritative than some of the armed non-state actors operating within its borders. Global CT actors encounter serious problems in finding reliable local partners in these zones.

In other parts of the region, strong authoritarian states possess security sectors with very effective counterinsurgency and CT capacities and an ability to police much or most of the country. Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti fall into this category. These governments have a strong track record of restricting the ability of terrorist groups to operate within their borders. However, their heavy-handed treatment of their own populations also contributes to grievances that armed insurgencies and terrorist groups exploit.[6] Eritrea has been accused of state sponsorship of terrorism, mainly through its alleged support to al-Shabaab in Somalia, but the most recent UN Monitoring Group report on Eritrea and Somalia in 2017 was unable to find conclusive evidence of ongoing Eritrean support to al-Shabaab and recommended lifting the 8-year-old arms embargo imposed on Eritrea.[7] Ethiopia and Djibouti are critical regional allies of the US and other global actors on CT. Djibouti leases land to the US Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa, from which the US military provides training and support to regional militaries, engages in routine reconnaissance and periodically launches direct attacks on al-Shabaab targets.[8] Ethiopia possesses by far the most robust security forces and intelligence network in the region and, despite some tensions and mistrust, is a valued CT partner of Western states.

High levels of corruption and deep ethnic divides have been major impediments to effective global CT partnerships with governments in East Africa and the Horn. Corruption has undermined training and support to the security sectors of those states, and ethnic divides have worked against community policing and trust in the security apparatus.

East Africa and the Horn have been the sites of extensive external military interventions in the name of peacekeeping, counterinsurgency and CT. Much of this interventionism involves neighbouring states in the region. Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia have all contributed troops or police advisers to the large UN Mission in South Sudan. Uganda, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya are the main sources of peacekeeping forces in the AMISOM mission in Somalia. Ethiopia has also engaged in unilateral military occupations and operations in southern Somalia and Sudan. Both Kenya and Ethiopia are expected to maintain an informal military presence in border areas of Somalia after the AMISOM withdrawal. Despite these joint operations, regional cooperation on security matters remains disappointing due to chronic rivalries and in some cases open hostilities. The regional grouping IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority for Development) has a mandate to promote regional peace and security but has enjoyed little success.

Global actors are also deeply engaged in humanitarian, development and security partnerships and interventions in the region. The US is a major CT and security partner with most regional governments. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are expanding their development and security sector support across the region. The EU is a major source of development and security sector support as well. And China is the largest trade partner in the region and is increasingly the largest source of development contracts. China has also opened a new base in Djibouti as part of its 'string of pearls' strategy in the Indian Ocean region.

TERRORISM TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Since 2015, al-Shabaab's energies have been redirected back into southern Somalia, where it has focused mainly on hard targets—AMISOM bases, government buildings, Somali security sector bases, heavily fortified positions where international offices and embassies are located, and hotels frequented by government officials. The group regularly launches complex terror attacks at such sites, typically using a car or truck bomb to blow open a gate and then a vehicle of armed gunmen to penetrate the site and kill as many people as they can. Some of the attacks fail, but most result in from 10 to 40 deaths and many more injuries. From 2015 to 2017, al-Shabaab succeeded in launching several devastating attacks on remote AMISOM forward bases, resulting in hundreds of AMISOM casualties.[9] In October 2017, the group detonated a large truck bomb in the centre of a crowded commercial centre, destroying most of a city block and killing more than 500 people. It was the largest and most lethal attack that the group had conducted. The bomb is believed to have been detonated prematurely, and that the intended target was a newly established Turkish military base.[10]

Although its calling card is the complex terror attack, al-Shabaab is most effective in its daily use of small-scale ambushes, IEDs and assassinations. It targets government officials, security forces and police, civilians suspected of cooperating with the government or AMISOM, and anyone who refuses to pay 'taxes' to the group. The group's intelligence and operational network, the Amniyat, maintains a strong presence in cities and zones nominally under the control of the government and gives the group an ability to extort protection money at a level akin to a mafia. Al-Shabaab exploits the grievances of marginalised clans and is believed to accept payment for 'outsourced' attacks by rival businessmen and politicians against one another. The group's greatest source of power and resilience has been its ability to penetrate and collude with local actors, including some government officials and security forces. It has even colluded at times with AMISOM forces for short-term economic gain, which has been exceptionally challenging for external CT operations in the country.

Al-Shabaab's objectives in the short to medium term are to accelerate the withdrawal of the AMISOM forces and to demoralise and block progress in the Federal Government of Somalia. Once AMISOM forces withdraw, al-Shabaab will have little difficulty retaking towns and cities that it lost in 2011 and 2012. In October 2017, the group retook the strategic town of Bardhere in Somalia without firing a shot after Kenyan forces pulled out of the city. The key factor determining how much territory the group will be able to recapture will be the strength and commitment of the SNA. At present, the SNA isn't seen as ready for the task. Its troops are largely unpaid due to corruption, are poorly motivated and are prone to desertion or defection to al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab has faced a small but persistent threat from IS, which has sought to expand into Somalia. The al-Shabaab leadership has maintained its loyalty to al-Qaeda and has sought to smash breakaway groups that have defected to IS. For the moment, IS is a very small in Somalia and not a serious threat, but fears have been raised that foreign fighters from IS could relocate from Iraq and Syria to Somalia.[11]

COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGIES POLICIES, AND OPERATIONS

Various external actors are pursuing somewhat distinct and sometimes incongruent CT policies in Somalia.

REGIONAL ACTORS

Ethiopia and Kenya, the two regional neighbours with long borders with Somalia, are strengthening their ties to regional states sharing borders with those countries. Ethiopia maintains strong relations with the unrecognised secessionist state of Somaliland, Puntland, Southwest Regional State and the Jubbaland State of Somalia, as well as with local clans and militias in its border areas. While Ethiopia continues to closely support the federal government in Mogadishu, it's also maintaining a buffer zone along its long border with Somalia as a means of containing negative spillover into Ethiopia. Kenya has attempted the same policy, with somewhat less success, along its border with Somalia. Kenyan and Ethiopian forces in AMISOM were expected to take part in a major military offensive in 2017 to oust al-Shabaab from its stronghold area in the Jubba valley, but that offensive never took place and is now viewed as increasingly unlikely.

Key states in the Islamic world, especially Turkey and the UAE, have adopted a strategy focused on shoring up the strength of the SNA. In September 2017, Turkey completed the construction of a $50 million military training base in Mogadishu, where it intends to train 1,500 Somali soldiers at a time.[12] The UAE also has a military base in Mogadishu and provides training and support to the SNA. In 2017, however, the UAE shifted its strategy somewhat and began to expand its support to regional state militaries as well. It also forged a controversial deal with the secessionist state of Somaliland in February 2017 to build a military base there, in part to guard the Berbera seaport, which Dubai World Port has a 30-year contract to manage.[13]

INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The US CT strategy in Somalia has evolved in recent years. For most of the Obama administration, US military advisers were sharply limited in their number and role, and kinetic operations such as drone strikes or special operations strikes were subject to approval at the level of the National Security Council. In the last year of the Obama administration, those rules of engagement were relaxed and the number of military advisers was increased. The result was an increase in 2016 of US drone and missile strikes mainly aimed at the al-Shabaab leadership but also at an al-Shabaab training camp.[14] That attack resulted in 150 deaths and marked a major escalation in US kinetic operations against al-Shabaab. Some observers believe that the more aggressive US aerial attacks were in response to demands from AMISOM forces, which had been hard-hit by al-Shabaab ambushes. Under the Trump administration, US military strikes were expanded further, including an airstrike on an IS site in Somalia.[15] US CT policy in Somalia has been described as a 'light footprint' strategy involving a small number of military advisers and special forces engaging in limited, 'tailored engagement' involving quick strikes and missile attacks on high-value terrorist targets.[16]

The US CT strategy in Somalia is not, however, built around direct military strikes. Instead, it's focused on building local counterinsurgency capacity. The US, along with other Western states, has poured over a billion dollars a year into military assistance to the SNA, with limited results. Frustration over corruption led the US to a temporary suspension of military aid to the SNA in December 2017.[17] The US has also devoted considerable energies to building up the capacity of the Somali special forces, known as Danaab. Danaab is highly regarded in Somalia and is viewed as the most dedicated and professional fighting force in the country. The group isn't large and doesn't defend or hold territory; rather, it deploys for quick strike operations.[18]

US Government officials, as well as those of other Western governments providing support to the Somali security sector, have been engaged in a prolonged debate over how best to continue supporting the weak and corrupt central government and the SNA while also aiding regional state militias, some of which are more effective than the SNA. Efforts to build a security sector architecture that would deconflict the flow of aid to both regional member state militias and the SNA were made at a conference on Somalia in London in May 2017.[19] That initiative was still the subject of debate by the end of 2017.

Regionally, US CT strategy is designed mainly to strengthen local government institutional capacity to prevent and respond to terrorist threats and to routinise regional cooperation on CT. This is embodied in a 2009 initiative, the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counter-Terrorism (PREACT).[20] PREACT is an interagency initiative that aims to address gaps in criminal justice, defence and financial sector reform.[21]

After growing international dissatisfaction with paralysis and corruption in the SNA, and with concerns mounting over the imminent redeployment of AMISOM forces, external actors are likely to redouble efforts to strengthen the security sectors of regional states such as Puntland and Jubbaland State of Somalia in the hope of shoring up areas of the country that can be protected from an al-Shabaab advances.

COUNTERTERRORISM LEGISLATION

Most regional governments have passed new CT legislation in recent years in response to the spike in terrorist activity in the region. Countries that are partners in PREACT have been most likely to pass CT legislation, in part due to the support and encouragement of the US Government. Some of those laws have been the source of controversy, either because of expansive powers given to the government in the name of combating terrorism or because of the selective or inappropriate application of the laws.

No new CT legislation was passed in the region in 2017. The most notable related development was in Ethiopia, where a state of emergency, which had been proclaimed in October 2016 in response to widespread political unrest and protests, was lifted in August 2017.

CONCLUSION: THE YEAR AHEAD

Terrorist activity is very likely to continue to be concentrated in southern Somalia in 2018, and will intensify as al-Shabaab seizes the initiative in the face of initial AMISOM troop withdrawals. Its use of terrorist tactics will aim to put pressure on the Somali Government and demoralise the public. External CT efforts will focus on shoring up the strength and morale of the SNA to stave off al-Shabaab advances. This will almost certainly raise pressures for the US military to take more direct roles in combating al-Shabaab and will provoke a debate over whether that's an advisable course of action. Neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya will concentrate on a containment strategy by forging local alliances along their borders and maintaining military or intelligence operations in the Somali border area.

NOTES

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ROMANIA
Crimea
RUSSIA
Black Sea
BULGARIA
GEORGIA
Bosphorus
Istanbul
Sea of Marmara
Bursa
Ankara
ARMENIA
TURKEY
Eastern Anatolia
AZ.
Izmir
GREECE
Konya
IRAN
Southeastern Anatolia
Incirlik
Killis
Aleppo
Hatay-Yayladag Border Crossing
Cilvegozu
Mediterranean Sea
SYRIA
CYPRUS
IRAQ
LEBANON
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
Disputed boundary
0
500 km
0
250 Miles
The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

Turkey

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Since 2015, Turkey has been rocked by repeated terror attacks that have claimed more than 3,500 lives, primarily of security service personnel and terrorists, although more than 750 non-combatants have also been killed. The attacks have been brutal, as exemplified by the June 2015 Istanbul Ataturk Airport attack in which 45 people died. It proved to be a defining moment, as until then 'nobody in Turkey paid much attention to what an Uzbek or a Chechen was doing in Turkey, as long as he was fighting against [the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad] or the YPG [People's Protection Units] in Syria. We were actually looking the other way. Not anymore.'[1]

Turkey's current CT agenda is predicated on three key issues: addressing Kurdish separatism; dealing with IS; and dealing with the Gülen Movement, which the government officially define as the Fetullahist Terrorist Organisation. Because Turkey shares a border with Syria, it has become the home of more than 2 million Syrian refugees, and it's a transit country for those who seek to join IS. Turkey has had to deal with Kurdish demands for independence, especially as the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) has been carrying on a terror campaign for over four decades. In June 2016, Turkey was rocked by an attempted military coup, which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's colourful president, has used to attack the Gülen Movement, an Islamic social movement led by a Turkish preacher, Fethullah Gülen.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Turkey faces three CT challenges.

First, it must address the threat from Kurdish separatists, and specifically the PKK—a US, EU and Turkish designated terror group, which in 2015 opted to return to using political violence to advance the cause of Kurdish independence. The government is also concerned about the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, which it sees as an extension of the PKK, even though the relationship between the two remains unclear.[2]

The second threat comes from IS and its various affiliates, be they the Al-Nusra Front or the Syrian-based Kurdish YPG. It's estimated that since 2011 around 2,000 Turks have joined IS or the Al-Nusra Front, although it's difficult to make a proper determination because individuals can and do cross the border in the Gaziantep and Kilis provinces, which is where Turkish security officials position their border patrols.

IS's first attack on Turkish soil, in which three lives were lost, took place in 2014. A year later, Turkey experienced four IS attacks, which claimed 144 lives.[3] By 2016, the number of attacks increased to 10, with 120 casualties.[4] If we include clashes between the military and the PKK during the attempted coup, 2016 was a very bloody year for Turks. 2017 began with a vicious IS attack on a packed nightclub in Istanbul in which 39 people lost their lives.[5] The attack has been regarded as a 'declaration of war' by IS against Turkey, which has been conducting military operations against it in Syria. IS sees Turkey 'as the worst of enemies' because it's a Muslim country that has turned against the organisation.[6]

The third concern emanates from the Gülen Movement. During his early years in power, Erdogan formed an alliance with the followers of Fethullah Gülen, who has been living in exile in the US since 1999 (Turkey has since sought his extradition on claims that he helped organise or at least inspire the 2016 attempted coup). In exchange for their support, Erdogan allowed Gülen's followers to establish a substantial presence in the judiciary and the police, particularly in intelligence collection, an area they came to dominate. When the alliance collapsed in December 2013, Erdoğan begun to purge many of the Gülenists from the intelligence-gathering branches of the police. That meant the loss not only of personnel and expertise but also of networks of informants. He also purged the judiciary, the civil service and the education sector, substantially weakening those institutions, as many experienced professionals have been drummed out.[7]

COUNTERTERRORISM ARCHITECTURE

The main Turkish CT authorities are the Turkish National Police and the gendarmerie, which are responsible for security in urban and rural areas, respectively. The military is used to launch large-scale military operations, primarily against the PKK and IS, where the Turks have sought to create safe zones so that they can encourage Syrian refugees to return to Syria. The CT architecture is structured mainly along two lines: anti-criminal operations and combating terror acts. This therefore means that Ankara is actively hunting down *Salafi* and PKK terrorists.

According to official figures, Turkey conducted 37,000 'anti-terrorist operations' in 2016, of which 31,000—almost all against the PKK— were in rural areas and 6,000 were in urban areas. However, urban areas in Turkey have long been the most productive places for gathering intelligence, particularly human intelligence.[8] Military operations have been primarily against targets in northern Syria, with the claim that the army is seeking to challenge IS. However in Operation Euphrates Shield, in addition to attacking IS, the military also engaged with Kurdish forces in Syria, because Ankara identifies the YPG, which the US supports, as linked to the PKK and therefore as posing a threat to Turkey's security.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (OR LACK OF IT)

In 2007, Australia and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding on CT cooperation and organised crime, which has proven vital in combating the foreign fighter phenomenon, even though at the time foreign fighters weren't much of a problem. Through the memorandum, Australia and Turkey have cooperated on anti-terrorism financing, border and transport security, defence, intelligence, and countering chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism. In 2015, Prime Minister Abbott and his counterpart, Ahmet Davutoglu, signed a further agreement that recognised Turkey as a frontline state in the campaign against IS and that it needed help from countries around the world to 'prevent young people from using Turkey's border as the entry point to joining Daesh and other terrorist organisations through tougher border controls and increased information sharing'.[9]

In 2017, Turkey had to address the phenomenon of many IS fighters deserting and returning home. Before the fall of the caliphate, its focus was on preventing people from crossing the border into Syria and Iraq; now it was on capturing those crossing into Turkey from Syria and Iraq and assessing whether they were foreign fighters. Turkish authorities were in contact with the EU, among others, as it attempted to determine what to do with returning foreign fighters.[10] Between 2011 and 2016, Turkey deported around 4,000 people for having links to terrorism, and it has banned about 49,000 people from a hundred or so countries from entering.[11] This is indicative of the government's broad definition of terrorism, which was expanded in 2016 to include 'supporters of terrorism'. That definition has been applied to political opponents, activists, journalists and politicians who do not toe the official line.

By 2017, Turkey had the names of around 420 suspected Australian jihadists on a watch list, which meant that those people could not be permitted to enter Turkey for fear that they would try to cross over to Syria or Iraq.[12] It is also prosecuting Australian national and IS fighter Neil Prakash on terrorism charges, even though Australia has requested his extradition.[13] Clearly, Turkey's role in the campaign against IS continues because of the fear of IS infiltration to Europe and beyond as the group collapses and reinvents itself.

Turkey's CT architecture has suffered over the past few years, as Western democracies have found it hard to work with Erdoğan, who uses threats to Turkey's security to expand his authority and weaken opponents. Germany has been one of his targets: Turkish authorities lodged a complaint with Interpol that 681 German companies operating in Turkey, including Daimler and BASF, may be financing terrorism. Turkey has since withdrawn the accusations, claiming that they came about because of a 'communication problem'.[14]

The most notable development in 2017 was in Turkish–Russian cooperation. Back in 2015, relations were at their lowest following the shooting down of a Russian plane near the Syrian border. In 2017, relations improved to such an extent that the Turks purchased Russian S-400 surface-to-air missiles, to be delivered in 2019. Turkish–Russian cooperation on Syria is most notable: having shifted its alliances over the past two years, Turkey appears to be following Russia's and Iran's lead in the Syrian peace talks in Astana.

CONCLUSION

The Erdoğan regime has used the 2016 attempted coup to clamp down on dissent within Turkey, which has contributed towards the sustained threat of terrorism in the country. Erdoğan, who in the early 2010s appeared willing to engage with the Turkish Kurds, seems to have walked away from any form of discussion on Kurdish issues, which may explain the PKK's growing terrorist activity and its particular targeting of security forces. In additional, Erdoğan is having to deal with the changing situation in Syria, where it looks like IS has been defeated and Assad has survived by cosying up to Moscow and Tehran and embracing the Astana peace process. Clearly, the Syrian conflict and Turkey's economic transformation have turned the country, as in earlier times, into a hub between east and west, transferring millions of travellers every year. A key issue for the security services is the lack of a clear, precise system to regulate domestic travel: many people travel with misspelled or incomplete names on tickets, and landlords are willing to rent homes to undocumented people.

Erdoğan's policies have caused tensions between Turkey and its Western allies, especially as he often claims that they're trying to undermine the 'new Turkey', which is why he has turned to Russia and Iran, which don't criticise his clampdown on dissent. This has allowed him to claim that the West is empowering the Kurds in Turkey and Syria, as well as plotting against Turkey.

In sum, it looks like Erdoğan will continue to use security threats to keep and expand his domestic authority. At the same time, he recognises that he's needed by Western powers, which need Turkey to deal with refugees who head from east to west, as well as with defecting IS fighters, whether they're foreign or not.

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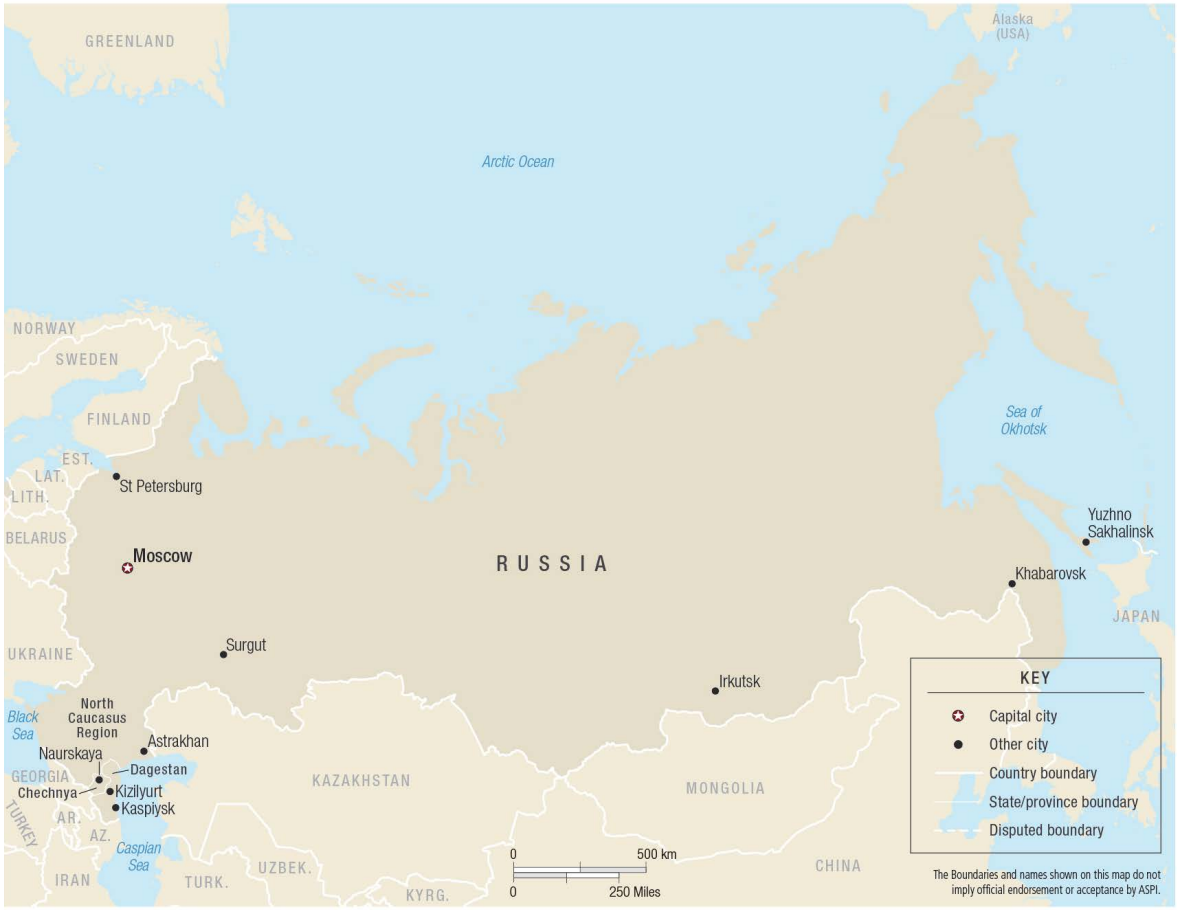
GREENLAND
Alaska (USA)
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Moscow
RUSSIA
Sea of Okhotsk
Yuzhno Sakhalinsk
Khabarovsk
JAPAN
UKRAINE
Surgut
Irkutsk
Black Sea
North Caucasus Region
Astrakhan
Naurskaya
Dagestan
GEORGIA
Chechnya
Kizilyurt
Kaspiysk
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MONGOLIA
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UZBEK.
KYRG.
CHINA
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500 km
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250 Miles
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
State/province boundary
Disputed boundary
The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.

Russia

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Terrorist attacks continued to disrupt Russia's security in 2017. IS emerged as one of the major threat groups, as it has claimed responsibility for the majority of terrorist attacks on Russian soil. In response to Russia's involvement in Syria, IS has stepped up its propaganda campaign, threatening more attacks. Despite Russia's successes in Syria, the domestic roots of radicalisation haven't been eliminated and the terrorist threat persists.

RUSSIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA

In 2017, Russia continued its presence in Syria in the name of CT. At the same time, cooperation with the other actors involved remained limited. When President Putin and President Trump spoke after Trump's inauguration, they agreed to attempt to find a way to cooperate on Syria. However, in April the US proceeded with a military strike on the Shayrat airfield in response to the Syrian Government's reported use of chemical weapons. The attack, which was the first US military action against Assad's forces, produced an adverse reaction from the Russian side. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov described the attack as a hindrance to the fight against terrorism. 'This creates a serious obstacle for building of an international coalition to fight it and to effectively resist this universal evil,' he said.[2] Subsequently, Russia suspended cooperation with the US on Syria. While tensions persisted, in September representatives of the Russian forces and the US-led coalition met in Syria and reaffirmed their commitment to finding common ground on the Syria issue. However, Russia subsequently warned the US of the consequences for any action the US might take to hinder CT activities on the ground.[3]

While Russia has asserted itself as an important actor in Syria, its involvement has produced mixed results. On the one hand, the Assad forces have regained control of substantial territory. IS has been pushed out of its strongholds, including Raqqa, the capital of its self-proclaimed caliphate. In November, President Putin promised that terrorists in Syria would soon be defeated.[4] On the other hand, IS today seems to present a more significant terrorist threat to Russia than it did in 2015, when Russia first launched air strikes in Syria.

In revenge for Russia's involvement in Syria, IS has released numerous statements threatening terrorist attacks. IS propaganda targeting Russian-speaking audiences has markedly shifted from the recruitment of fighters to calls to stage attacks at home. IS propagandists have switched from urging individuals to travel to Syria and Iraq to encouraging lone-wolf attacks against Russia. One attack that adhered to the IS propaganda script took place on 19 August in the Russian city of Surgut. Armed with a knife, Artur Gadzhiev wounded eight people before he was shot dead by police. The attack was claimed by IS, and *Furat Media* issued a posthumous video in which a masked man (allegedly Gadzhiev) pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and encouraged more small-scale knife or screwdriver attacks.[5] IS-affiliated media outlets have issued warnings of attacks in Moscow and St Petersburg, and have further threatened the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

Compared to previous years, the numbers of individuals leaving to fight in Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters for IS declined in 2017. For example, in the first half of 2017 the security services announced that they had prevented 190 people from travelling abroad to join terrorist forces.[6] At the same time as IS has been nearly defeated on the ground, foreign fighters have started returning to their home countries. Such individuals, hardened by combat experiences, present significant security challenges, as they might be coming back with the intent to continue using terrorist methods against their homelands.

In Russia, foreign fighting is criminalised under Article 208 of the Criminal Code.[7] As a result, many fighters who have returned from Syria have been detained and arrested. In May, the Russian Government estimated that, out of the returnees from the Middle East, 151 had been convicted and 29 more had been arrested.[8] While the exact number of foreign fighter returnees remains unknown, Russian fighters in Syria have previously issued statements containing threats to come back to Russia and wage a new wave of insurgency in the North Caucasus.[9] This might signify that some of them intend to come back to Russia to continue insurgent and terrorist attacks there. Thus, while the Russian Government has referenced successes in Syria, the threat posed by IS is no longer one on a distant battlefield but presents real security challenges within the country.

TERRORISM IN RUSSIA

The fear of terrorism in Russia remains high. Domestically, terrorist attacks continued across the country. While previously attacks in Russia were attributed mainly to the North Caucasus insurgents, 2017 continued the 2016 trend in which IS claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. While no exact number of terrorist attacks is available, at least 12 incidents were reported in the media in 2017. Out of those, at least seven were claimed by IS:

- 24 March: attack on a National Guard base near Naurskaya village in Chechnya
- 6 April: attacks on the police and the National Guard in Astrakhan
- 21 April: shooting at a Federal Security Service (FSB) office in Khabarovsk
- 12 May: attack on the police post in Malgobek, Ingushetia
- 19 August: Surgut knife attack
- 28 August: attack on the police in Dagestani Kaspiisk
- 3 October: attack on policemen in Kizilyurt, Dagestan.

While most of the terrorist attacks in Russia in 2017 were claimed by IS, the biggest attack of the year was not. On 3 April, a bomb set off on the metro in St Petersburg killed at least 14 people and injured more than 50 others.[10] Soon after the train left the Sennaya Ploshchad station, a suicide bomber identified as 22-year-old Akbarzhon Jalilov, a naturalised Russian citizen born in Kyrgyzstan, activated the explosive device. Around the same time, another explosive device, similarly made of TNT, was found and deactivated at another metro stop, Ploshchad Vosstaniya.

Following the attack, the Russian security services made a number of arrests that were broadcast on TV.[11] Several individuals from Central Asia were arrested as suspected accomplices of Jalilov. The attribution of the attack remained problematic, as no group claimed responsibility for it until the end of April. While IS was immediately suspected as the perpetrator, in this case the group remained silent. Instead, on 24 April the Mauritania-based Nouakchott News Agency, which is known to have previously transmitted al-Qaeda messages, reported a statement claiming the attack. According to the statement, a formerly unknown group called Imam Shamil Battalion with alleged links to al-Qaeda was responsible. Suicide bomber Akbarzhon Jalilov was reportedly acting on the orders of Ayman Zawahiri, carrying out an attack as a warning to the Russian people.[12]

Geographically, 2017 marked a significant expansion of the locations of terrorist attacks in Russia. In line with previous trends, the attacks continued to mainly target the North Caucasus region and the European part of Russia up to the Ural Mountains. The North Caucasus has remained the most affected region. The numbers of reported terrorist attacks there were similar to the numbers in 2016, indicating a marked increase in activities after a relatively quiet 2014 and 2015. While, historically, attacks in the North Caucasus were associated with the Caucasus Emirate and the North Caucasus insurgent groups, since 2015 IS seems to have emerged as the main perpetrator. Remarkably different from the past, in 2017 terrorist attacks spread to the eastern part of Russia. Previously not affected by terrorism, the eastern regions experienced attacks in Surgut and Khabarovsk during the year.

COUNTERTERRORISM LEGISLATION

In addition to Russia's declared commitment to battling terrorism in Syria, the Russian Government adopted a number of new security measures domestically. The fight against terrorism has remained an important topic in the domestic policy realm. To further fight terrorism, Russia has adopted a number of CT legislative acts.

On 28 May, President Putin signed federal law no. 102, mandating administrative monitoring for people released after serving sentences for terrorist and extremist offences.[13] The law mandates that they report to security services between one and four times per month. The law enables the security services to then place additional restrictions on the offenders. Government officials described the law as a preventive measure against recidivism. Duma Deputy Vasilii Piskarev justified the measure, stating that 'experience shows that seven out of ten supporters of radical structures released from detention facilities, who were sentenced for such offences, return to previous illegal activities.'[14] While in Piskarev's view administrative monitoring would have a prophylactic effect, the law doesn't include information on any deradicalisation assistance that terrorist offenders would receive.

Another measure that went into effect in 2017 concerns citizenship. The measure of stripping terrorist offenders of Russian citizenship was proposed back in 2016 as part of the Yarovaya legislation.[15] However, at the time the State Duma did not pass the measure, as concerns were raised regarding the constitutionality of the proposed policy. The measure once again became a discussion topic after the terrorist attack on St Petersburg. The suicide bomber, Jalilov, was identified as a Kyrgyz-born naturalised Russian citizen. Subsequently, the law to strip terrorist offenders of Russian citizenship went into effect on 1 September. Federal law no. 243 allows for the revocation of the Russian citizenship of naturalised individuals convicted of terrorism and extremism charges.[16]

In July, the Duma deputies proposed a bill that would punish terrorist recruitment with a life sentence. Currently, a person convicted of terrorist recruitment can be fined and imprisoned for up to 10 years. That punishment has been criticised as ineffective, and Duma deputies had previously suggested that a life sentence would be a more effective deterrent.[17] The bill, which aims to toughen measures against the involvement of individuals in terrorist activities and also targets propaganda for terrorism, was passed by the State Duma in the first reading on 16 November.[18]

The Russian Government has also passed a number of legislative acts concerning military personnel involved in CT. On 7 February, President Putin signed federal law no. 7, which placed military personnel participating in the fight against terrorism under state protection.[19] In October, another piece of legislation allowed foreigners to fight along with the Russian military in foreign operations. Presidential decree no. 469 includes provisions according to which foreigners

who serve in the Russian military can participate in CT operations outside Russia's borders.[20] This way, the decree legalises the use of foreign volunteers in overseas conflicts that are pronounced CT operations.

COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS IN RUSSIA

Russia's National Guard, established in 2016, has emerged as a principal organisation leading the fight against terrorism. The National Guard wields a rather broad mandate in the realm of CT. Having subsumed interior troops, special forces and mobile units of the Internal Affairs Ministry, the guard has relied on their vast expertise. The reorganisation of security services involved in CT has affected operations in the North Caucasus and the rest of the country. In July, President Putin signed decree no. 345, which reorganised the structures in charge of the CT operations in the region.[21] According to the decree, the National Guard command was placed in charge of the joint forces conducting those operations.

Declaring the results of CT operations has remained a routine practice in the North Caucasus. During the 2016–2017 autumn and winter, the National Guard conducted more than 1,000 operations against insurgents in the region. As a result, it liquidated 82 fighters, destroyed more than 100 infrastructural objects used by insurgents, and deactivated around 50 IEDs.[22] Based on the information provided by the National Counterterrorism Centre, in 2017 the security services neutralised 20 terrorist sleeper cells in the North Caucasus.[23]

Along with the National Guard, the FSB continued its CT activities. FSB forces were involved in CT operations and engaged in intelligence gathering, allowing the security services to prevent attacks. According to the National Counterterrorism Centre, the security services have become more effective in preventing attacks: in 2015, they were able to prevent 35 attacks, and 45 in 2016.[24] News media regularly reported on the FSB's arrests and detentions of people allegedly involved in planning terrorist attacks.

Russia's main approach to terrorism and IS-inspired radicalisation has remained focused on arrests and detentions. CVE measures and deradicalisation initiatives have remained underdeveloped. At the same time, independent verification of the data on arrests and detentions remains problematic, and concerns have been raised over applying CT provisions to domestic political opposition. Despite the activities of the National Guard and the FSB, insurgent groups in the North Caucasus have remained active. They include both the remaining factions of the Caucasus Emirate and insurgent groups that have pledged allegiance to IS. In October, one of the leaders of Vilayat Nohchicho of the Caucasus Emirate, Akhmed Umarov, brother of Doku Umarov, stated in an interview that the Caucasus Emirate is currently undergoing a restructuring in the North Caucasus and is planning a comeback.[25] Insurgent groups continue carrying out small-scale attacks on military and police posts in the region. For example, in March a small group of insurgents attacked the Naurskaya National Guard base in Chechnya.[26] In November, insurgents attacked a block post in Ingushetia.[27]

INTERNATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM INITIATIVES

Aside from its involvement in Syria, Russia has been actively engaged in other international initiatives against terrorism. The new UN Office of Counter-Terrorism was created during 2017, and it was a tremendous success for Russian diplomacy when Russian Vladimir Voronkov was appointed as Under-Secretary General of the office.[28] A UN spokesman explained that, in that role, Voronkov would 'provide strategic leadership to UN counterterrorism efforts, participate in the decision-making process of the United Nations and ensure that the cross-cutting origins and impact of terrorism are reflected in the work'.[29] This position affords Russia significant potential to influence future global CT efforts within the UN.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

The threat of terrorism remains a pressing security concern for Russia. In October 2017, a public opinion poll indicated that Russians were afraid of being directly affected by terrorism and expressed anxiety over more attacks across Russia in the future.[30] While the actions of the security services have made it more difficult to carry out terrorist attacks, they haven't effectively eliminated the roots of radicalisation. In fact, a new wave of 'telephone terrorism' is poised to replace physical terrorist attacks. Since 11 September 2017 alone, anonymous phone threats of terrorist attacks have resulted in evacuations of almost 800,000 people in 120 Russian cities.[31] The anonymous tips have affected shopping centres, schools, cinemas and other places of public gathering. The damage from the fake threats of terrorist attacks has amounted to at least 300 million roubles.[32] While not as deadly as physical terrorist attacks, 'telephone terrorism' still poses significant security threats and indicates that the root causes of terrorism in Russia are far from being eradicated.

NOTES

1 The views expressed in this chapter are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the US Department of Defense or the US Government.

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ICELAND
FINLAND
NORWAY
SWEDEN
Stockholm
RUSSIA
ESTONIA
Atlantic Ocean
Skagerrak
Kattegat
LATVIA
DENMARK
Copenhagen
North Sea
Baltic Sea
LITHUANIA
UNITED KINGDOM
Kaliningrad (Russia)
BELARUS
IRELAND
Celtic Sea
NETH.
The Hague
Berlin
POLAND
BELGIUM
Schaerbeek
GERMANY
UKRAINE
English Channel
Brussels
LUX.
CZECHIA (CZECH REP.)
SLOVAKIA
Paris
Créteil
MOLDOVA
Vienna
LIECH.
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
Bay of Biscay
SWITZ.
ROMANIA
FRANCE
SLOV.
CROATIA
SAN MARINO
BOSNIA AND HERZ.
SERBIA
BULGARIA
Marseille
MONACO
ITALY
Adriatic Sea
MONT.
KOS.
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Mediterranean Sea
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Capital city
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Country boundary
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Western Europe

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SECURITY CONTEXT

The terrorist threat remained critical in Western Europe throughout 2017 and continued to be dominated by *jihadi* terrorism. Although still representing a very small share of the overall number of terrorist incidents,[1] jihadist plots are generally perceived as more threatening than other forms of terrorism (and are indeed responsible for a much higher ratio of deaths per incident). That perception is further exacerbated because they receive more media coverage than other incidents. During 2017, 16 attacks struck eight different countries,[2] while more than 30 plots were foiled. There were also a significant number of terrorism-related police raids and arrests (at least 621 in France and 1,100 in Germany, 90% of which were linked to *jihadi* terrorism). In last year's *Counterterrorism Yearbook*, I anticipated that the main terrorist risk would shift from foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to homegrown terrorist fighters (HTFs), which is what happened. All attacks in 2017 were carried out by HTFs. Although the return of FTFs from Syria and Iraq continued to concern European authorities, only a few returnees were recorded in 2017 and no incident involving a returning foreign fighter was reported. As a result, CT agencies' attention and efforts focused mostly on the homegrown threat, for which new measures were devised, while they pursued the implementation of measures dealing with foreign fighters and radicalisation more broadly.

TERRORISM

OVERVIEW OF THE *JIHADI* PLOTS

Based on a review of open sources, I have been able to identify 16 completed jihadist attacks in Western Europe (excluding the UK) during 2017 (Table 8). Seven were claimed by IS, thus four less than in 2016, which tallied 11.[3] It's worth noting that, contrary to a common assumption, IS doesn't 'claim everything', as it didn't take credit for the other nine attacks accounted for here, or for any foiled plot or any other incident. Remarkably, IS claimed responsibility for attacks only where perpetrators died in action (in all cases but one—the June car ramming attack in Paris—the attackers were killed by police officers or soldiers). There was only one attack resulting in the death of the perpetrator that wasn't claimed by IS: the Orly attack in March. It would be worth exploring whether this is indeed a conscious strategy of the group, or mere coincidence.

TABLE 8: Jihadi attacks in Western Europe, 2017

Date	Country	Description	Perpetrator	Claimed by IS?	Nature of incident?
3 February	France	Egyptian tourist Abdallah El-Hamahmy, 29, attacked soldiers with two machetes near the Louvre, Paris, screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He's alleged to have sympathies for IS, but his motives remain unknown.	Arrested	No	Unclear
18 March	France	French citizen Ziyed Ben Belgacem, 39, assaulted soldiers at Orly airport, saying he wanted to 'die for Allah', after he had shot at several people hours before without injuring anyone. He was known for radicalisation, violence and drug use. The terrorist nature of the attack was uncertain, however, as he was under the influence and the attack seemed improvised.	Killed	No	Unclear
7 April	Sweden	Uzbek asylum-seeker Rakhmat Akilov, 39, drove a truck into a pedestrian street in Stockholm, killing five and injuring 14. He expressed sympathies with IS, but the group didn't claim the attack. Uzbekistan claimed that he had tried to join IS in Syria in 2014, but that information couldn't be confirmed.	Arrested	No	Treated as terrorism
20 April	France	French citizen Karim Cheurfi, 35, killed a police officer and wounded two with an assault rifle on the Champs-Elysées in Paris. He had pledged allegiance to IS, which claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
18 May	Italy	Homeless Italian drug-dealer Ismail Tommaso Ben Youssef Hosni, 20, stabbed a policeman and two soldiers at Milan's central railway station after they asked for his papers. It was discovered that he was an IS sympathisers, but the terrorist nature of the incident hasn't yet been established.	Arrested	No	Unclear

Date	Country	Description	Perpetrator	Claimed by IS?	Nature of incident?
6 June	France	Algerian PhD student Farid Ikken, 40, attacked police officers with a hammer and knives at the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, injuring one. Unknown to the authorities and apparently self-radicalised, he had pledged allegiance to IS in a video, but the attack wasn't claimed by the group.	Arrested	No	Unclear
19 June	France	French citizen Adam Djaziri, 31, who was known to the authorities for radicalisation, rammed his car, which was loaded with explosives and weapons, into a police van on the Champs-Elysées in Paris. The bomb failed to detonate, and only Djaziri was killed. He had pledged allegiance to IS, which claimed the attack a month later.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
20 June	Belgium	Moroccan citizen Oussama Zariouh, 36, detonated a suitcase containing gas canisters in the middle of Brussels central railway station (which was relatively empty at that time), but the device malfunctioned. He was gunned down as he run towards a military patrol screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He had written an allegiance letter to IS, which claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
30 June	Austria	A Tunisian citizen, 54, killed an elderly couple in their home in Linz before turning himself to police. He was known for radicalisation and had sworn allegiance to ISIS, but the police treated the incident as murder.	Arrested	No	Unclear, treated as murder
28 July	Germany	Palestinian asylum-seeker Ahmad A., 26, stabbed clients of a supermarket in Hamburg, screaming 'Allahu akbar', killing one and injuring six. He was known for radicalisation, but his motives remained unknown and the terrorist nature of the attack was contested by investigators (although the prosecutor mentioned an 'Islamist motive'). The attacker appeared to be psychologically unstable.	Arrested	No	Unclear
9 August	France	Algerian citizen Hamou Benlatrèche, 36, rammed his car into a military patrol in Levallois-Perret, injuring six people. The investigation revealed that he was sympathiser of IS, and may have considered joining the group in Syria before the attack.	Arrested	No	Treated as terrorism
17 August	Spain	Moroccan citizen Younes Abouyaaqoub, 22, drove a van through the pedestrian Rambla Street, in Barcelona, killing 15 and injuring 130. The attacker escaped but was killed four days later. The individual belong to the Ripoll *jihadi* cell, which was also responsible for the Cambrils attack. The attack was claimed by IS, and a document pledging allegiance was found.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
18 August	Spain	Five Moroccans from the Ripoll cell, which was linked to the Barcelona attack, rammed pedestrians with a car in Cambrils before stabbing passers-by, killing one and injuring six. The attack was claimed by IS, and a document pledging allegiance was found.	4 Killed, 1 arrested	Yes	Treated as terrorism
18 August	Finland	Moroccan asylum-seeker Abderrahman Bouanane, 22, stabbed people in central Turku, killing two passers-by and injuring eight. The police treated the case as a terrorist attack, as Bouanane was known for radicalisation and IS sympathies.	Arrested	No	Treated as terrorism

Date	Country	Description	Perpetrator	Claimed by IS?	Nature of incident?
25 August	Belgium	A Belgian citizen of Somali origin, Haashi Ayaanle, 30, attacked three soldiers on a Brussels street with a knife, screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He had been treated for psychological problems. Although he was unknown to the authorities, he seemed to have online contacts with Somali extremists. IS claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
1 October	France	Tunisian illegal resident Ahmed Hanachi, 29, stabbed two women to death at Saint-Charles station, Marseilles, screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He was killed by a soldier. Hanachi is thought to have been radicalised by his brother, who joined IS in Syria. IS claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism

Source: Author's own compilation.

However, there were significant doubts about the credibility of some IS claims either because investigators couldn't find any evidence of a connection with the group or because the claims didn't bring any evidence of such a connection beyond information available from media reports. In the case of the 20 April attack on Paris's Champs-Elysées, for instance, the group even misidentified the perpetrator as being Abu Yussef al-Belgiki (a name that had circulated in the media the previous day), instead of Karim Cheurfi.[4]

Next to IS-claimed attacks, there were nine other attacks seemingly bearing the *jihadi* seal. In all those cases, the perpetrator appeared to be inspired by IS, although neither having direct contacts with the group nor having received specific instructions. As a result, the terrorist motive doesn't appear clearly in the incidents, some of which are indeed being treated as criminal incidents. In some cases, investigators may later uncover ties with known *jihadi* individuals or local radical milieus, or find that the individual was truly isolated but identified with IS for various (and often unclear) reasons. In other cases, the investigators may conclude that the incident had no link with terrorism at all, either because there was a personal motive (such as revenge) or because the perpetrator was psychologically destabilised, suicidal or insane. In at least two cases, in France and Italy, the attacker appeared to be under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or both at the time of the incident. In 2016, there had already been a number of similarly ambiguous cases, as I reported in last year's yearbook. For instance, Hicham Diop, who stabbed police officers in Schaerbeek, Belgium, in 2016, was convicted for murder in 2017, but a terrorist motivation was rejected during his trial.[5]

The multiplication of unclaimed attacks perpetrated by isolated and unstable individuals with tenuous links to *jihadi* organisations, and attacks supported by doubtful claims, together confirm a trend identified by the European security services towards a more diffuse, multifaceted, unpredictable jihadist threat in Europe. This evolution is linked more broadly to the displacement of the threat from the FTF phenomenon to the HTF one. HTFs are individuals who didn't travel to Syria or Iraq, but who act on behalf of a foreign jihadist organisation with which they have either developed operational contacts (notably through online communications) or to which they feel ideologically connected but with which they have established only loose interactions, if any. This absence of travel and connections, physical or virtual, as well as the diversity of profiles among perpetrators, makes it more complicated for the security services to anticipate and prevent such attacks.

It's noteworthy that no plot involved a returning FTF in 2017. Even if it's confirmed that the Stockholm attacker, Rakhmat Akilov, did indeed try to join IS in Syria in 2014, as claimed by the Uzbek authorities, he didn't manage to do so, as he was arrested at the Turkish border.[6] Similarly, Adam Djaziri (the 19 June Champs-Elysées attacker), was observed at the border between Greece and Turkey in February 2015, but isn't known to have reached Syria.[7] In fact, no terrorist plot on mainland Europe since the March 2016 Brussels attacks has involved returnees. All the 2017 plots were conducted by HTFs, except the Louvres attack, which was perpetrated by an Egyptian tourist.

The terrorists had very diverse profiles and backgrounds. The vast majority were first-generation migrants (born in Morocco, Algeria or Somalia) who had arrived in the host country several years ago (often more than 10 years ago), most likely with no prior terrorist intention. It's assumed that their radicalisation occurred in Europe. Four attacks involved second-generation migrants (born in the country they attacked, to migrant parents), whereas three were conducted by asylum seekers. With the exception of the Spanish cell (composed of youngsters between 17 and 24 years old), most perpetrators were around 30 years or older, thus belonging to an older age bracket than the vast majority of people who have left Europe to join IS in Syria and Iraq.[8] Most perpetrators had criminal records, confirming the growing links between criminality or delinquency and terrorism; and at least two were considered psychologically unstable, confirming another trend towards a growing proportion

of mentally ill or psychologically challenged individuals among *jihadi* plotters.

In terms of *modus operandi*, all attacks except the Barcelona/Cambrils plot were lone acts. This seems to confirm a deeper evolution from complex plots conducted by wider cells towards (homegrown) lone actors.9 The majority of *jihadi* attacks in 2017 were rather unsophisticated, using knives, machetes or hammers in 10 out of 16 attacks, whereas vehicles were used as weapons in five attacks. With regard to targets, there were exactly the same number of targeted attacks against police or soldiers as indiscriminate attacks against civilians: nine cases each, as two perpetrators attacked both civilians and police or soldiers (the Orly and the Brussels Central Station attacks).

The most sophisticated attacks were all claimed by IS, although this isn't necessarily a defining feature for the group's claims. They included the Barcelona/Cambrils plot in August, which was meant to be more elaborate than occurred, possibly involving coordinated bombings in Barcelona,[10] and was the only plot involving more than one perpetrator—in this case involving a whole *jihadi* cell. They also included the two consecutive but unrelated suicide-bombing attacks in Paris (19 June) and Brussels (20 June). Although resulting in no victims due to the bombs' misfiring, both were considered highly sophisticated for lone actors with no prior training. According to investigators, the Brussels bomb was indeed very powerful.[11] By contrast, all the attacks that weren't claimed by IS were quite unsophisticated (stabbings or car rammings).

Geographically, eight countries were affected by jihadist attacks in 2017. France was by far the most affected nation, with seven completed attacks and at least 13 foiled plots, including one masterminded from behind the walls of Fresnes prison.[12] Germany and Belgium continued to be targeted, but also successfully dismantled plots and cells (there were at least 11 foiled attacks in Germany).[13] Other countries that had been relatively spared by terrorism so far became more alert in 2017 due to attacks but also to a growing number of *jihadi* activities leading to a number of police operations and arrests. That was certainly the case in Italy and Spain, which have a long history of terrorism but had been relatively less affected than their northern neighbours over the past few years. Nordic countries continued to be affected by terrorism (a trend since the publication of the Mohammed cartoons in the mid-2000s), while Finland, which had been spared so far, suffered its first *jihadi* attack.

Overall, the 16 attacks in 2017 resulted in 29 fatalities and injured around 180, marking a sharp decrease from the 135 fatalities in 2016 and 150 injured of 2015. It could be tempting to link this decrease to the weakening of IS, resulting from the loss of territory and the death of key operatives (including so-called 'virtual planners', such as the infamous Rachid Kassim[14]) and affecting the group's capacity to organise attacks in Europe. We could also speculate that this is the result of the evolution described above towards a more diffuse threat, on the assumption that HTFs are more 'amateurish' because they lack training or access to weapons. However, we should remember that the most lethal attack of 2016, in Nice, was by a lone HTF using a very crude weapon—a truck. Furthermore, the Barcelona/Cambrils attacks could have been much deadlier if the cell had not been forced to improvise a Plan B after the cell's 'bomb factory' exploded in Alcanar the previous day, resulting in the death of its leader, imam Abdelbaki Es Satty.[15] A number of foiled plots also appeared to be potentially very deadly, as at least four foiled attacks in France involved explosives. In short, the limited number of victims may be due to sheer luck more than anything else. It's simply too soon to tell.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND THE FALL OF THE 'CALIPHATE'

Since 2016, there have been only very few departures of Europeans to Syria and Iraq, and there have been equally few returns. European authorities remain concerned, however, as even a small number of diehard fighters can be a significant threat. It is also feared that returning FTFs could recruit and encourage individuals to act locally, without inciting them to travel in order to join IS. For instance, it's believed that the Marseille attacker, Ahmed Hanachi, was radicalised by his brother, Anis, who fought with IS in Syria between 2014 and 2016.[16] More broadly, returnees could become a real danger over the long term, acting as radicalising agents and new entrepreneurs of local *jihadi* cells, starting within prison, as has happened in the past.[17]

In September 2017, the EU CT Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, estimated that there were still 2,000–2,500 European fighters alive in Syria (although this is probably a high estimate), while around 1,500 had returned to Europe since the beginning of the conflict.[18] European intelligence services no longer expect a massive return of those who are still overseas, despite IS territorial losses and the fall of the caliphate. Many have died over the past few months or have been arrested (and in some cases summarily executed) by local forces. Fatalities include a significant number of high-profile fighters, recruiters, virtual planners and propagandists. This is reducing the terrorist threat in Europe, although a number of virtual planners are believed to remain active vis-a-vis their European audience. Jihadist propaganda and other materials will also continue to appeal to a certain group of individuals, although the

amount of new material produced has significantly decreased.[19] In late 2017, some reports mentioned that a number of European fighters were relocating to other conflict zones, including Afghanistan. The further dispersal of European combatants might lead to the internationalisation of certain conflicts and possibly destabilise some countries or regions. This is a trend that will require constant monitoring by European intelligence services over the years to come. Overall, as discussed above, the threat of HTFs has been more tangible. In short, while the threat of returning FTFs will persist, particularly over the medium to long term, HTFs present a more immediate and probable risk.

RADICALISATION AND POLARISATION

Youth radicalisation towards violent extremism remained a serious concern in 2017. According to Gilles de Kerchove, there are around 50,000 'radicalised' Muslims within the EU, including about 20,000 in France and 10,000 in Germany (although these are high estimates, based on inclusive criteria).[20] Despite the military defeats of IS in Syria, the phenomenon of radicalisation doesn't yet seem to be waning in Europe. According to some anecdotal evidence gathered from my discussions with local prevention officers, radicalisation may actually still be growing in several Western European countries,[21] perhaps because there's a certain momentum or 'snowball' effect (as people radicalise through kinship or friendship, with more radicalised individuals triggering still more radicalisation), but also because the conducive environment to radicalisation is insufficiently addressed across Europe. Radicalisation in Europe is seen first and foremost as a societal challenge. Not all the 50,000 'radicals' are seen as a threat to society, but some are. Although there's no straight path from radicalisation to terrorism, it's feared that more HTFs could emerge from this broader pool of radicalised youth.

As a corollary to the rising challenge of radicalisation, the polarisation of society (or mutual radicalisation) became a more acute problem, marked notably by a rise in far-right extremism as well as far-left and anti-fascist groups. In Germany, for example, refugee centres suffered almost daily attacks in 2017.[22] In a twisted scenario, neo-Nazi soldiers had planned an attack disguised as refugees, with a view to killing left-wing pro-migrant politicians and to reinforcing societal polarisation.[23] Attacks against Muslims or places of worship were reported across Europe in significant numbers. Interestingly, a number of those attacks copied the *modus operandi* of jihadist groups, highlighting that polarisation operates like an echo chamber. For instance, in June, a man attempted to kill Muslims with his car at the end of prayers at the mosque of Créteil, France. He claimed that he wanted to 'avenge the Bataclan' but seemed psychologically unstable, according to investigators.[24] There were also a number of knife and hammer attacks in France, claimed by an anti-Islam commando, although investigators had doubts about the credibility of the claim.[25] Overall, polarisation seems to be leading to more intergroup violence.

COUNTERTERRORISM

Most Western European countries maintained their threat levels at 'high' or 'very high' in 2017. Finland raised its threat level from 'low' to 'elevated' following the attack in Turku.[26] In their CT responses, most European countries continued to lean towards a security-oriented approach, favouring repression over prevention. Efforts focused on implementing measures approved over the past couple of years, mostly related to FTFs, on the one hand, while working on their progressive broadening with a view to covering the threat from HTFs, on the other.

THE HOMEGROWN THREAT, COUNTERTERRORISM AND THE SECURITISATION OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

Over the past few years, Europe's CT efforts have focused essentially on the wave of FTFs travelling to IS's caliphate. 2015 was a milestone year, marked by the adoption of new laws, strategic frameworks and action plans, whereas 2016 was mainly a year of consolidation, with the pursuit and implementation of efforts initiated earlier. In 2017, however, CT agencies had to shift their attention to HTFs. The task of identifying potential terrorists, and preventing them from taking action, has now become more complicated for the security services because HTFs are often less connected to radical milieus or terrorist organisations than FTFs. Even though most perpetrators in 2017 were known to the authorities because of their radicalisation, criminal activities, or both, they weren't under close watch by the CT services, as they didn't appear to be immediate threats.[27] Although absolute security is a mere illusion, governments have started to extend existing laws and instruments or devise new ones to address the HTF challenge. Similar discussions are taking place at the international level as well, notably within the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which launched a new initiative on HTFs in 2017, in Malta.

Specific measures adopted in this area include, for instance, the extension of the Belgian dynamic database that was designed to share information on Belgian FTFs among all relevant services to include HTFs and hate propagandists. There were also discussions on extending the mandate of some of the key operational platforms that were designed to address the FTF issue (regular meetings among security services and local authorities) to also address potential HTFs. Furthermore, the Belgian federal prosecutor suggested in 2017 that the penal code could be extended in order to criminalise visits to *jihadi* websites, based on a widespread fear that a 'lone wolf' radicalised online could totally escape the radar of the security services.[28] The measure was supported by the government but opposed by a number of civil society organisations on the grounds that it would compromise the civil liberties of the many people who consult such websites and materials for research purposes, potentially criminalising cohorts of people who pose no

danger to society. It has not yet been approved. However, a similar law was adopted in France in 2016, before being declared unconstitutional and scrapped, but immediately restored by the National Assembly in February 2017.[29] In December 2017, the Constitutional Court rejected it again.

Such controversial measures are part of a broader European trend towards criminalising 'preparatory acts' of terrorism and strengthening the legislative arsenal to be able to prosecute wannabe terrorists before they strike. In 2015–16, as a response to the FTF challenge, such measures focused on the criminalisation of travel to conflict zones to join terrorist organisations. As the travel dimension is absent from the HTF dynamic, legislators are now seeking to criminalise new types of behaviour, such as visiting *jihadi* websites or possessing *jihadi* material (such as ISIS flags). In a similar vein, Denmark has criminalised apologia for terrorism,[30] and Belgium is considering moving in the same direction. Apologia for terrorism is already considered an offence in France and Spain, and a new contested German law forces big internet social media companies to take down any 'hate speech' material (vaguely defined) within 24 hours.[31]

There's a clear trend across Europe towards strengthening security measures, often at the expense of privacy and fundamental rights. Amnesty International, for example, has denounced what it describes as an 'Orwellian twist' in which people can be pursued for thoughtcrime, with limited means to defend themselves.[32] The flagship measure in this area is the new French CT legislation that transferred into common law most measures introduced under the state of emergency declared in November 2015 after the Paris attacks and prolonged until the end of October 2017, when the new law was adopted. The bill gives sweeping powers to the administration, and only limited control or oversight to the judiciary. For example, individuals suspected of terrorism can be placed under house arrest, and their property may be searched, without approval from a judge.[33] This extensive law is supported by a view, articulated by Interior Minister Gerard Collomb, that France is 'in a state of war', which requires a 'lasting response to a lasting threat'.[34] Exceptional measures have, de facto, become permanent.

Other measures recently adopted in Europe that are denounced by human rights organisations include the deportation of individuals suspected of terrorism. In Germany, the power to deport non-German citizens has existed since 2001, but it wasn't used until Anis Amri's attack in December 2016. It has now become more standard practice, even when evidence is deemed insufficient for prosecution.[35] Italy has also significantly increased its use of deportations, making it a 'cornerstone' of its strategy.[36] The Netherlands has also made it possible to scrap the Dutch nationality of (and therefore possibly expel) dual nationals who are considered a threat to national security but haven't been convicted.[37] While some in Belgium are pushing for a similar law, two key *jihadi* figures had their Belgian nationality revoked in November 2017 under the current legislation: Malika el-Aroud, nicknamed the 'Black Widow', who has played a central role in the national (and European) *jihadi* scene since the 1990s, and Bilal Soughir, who organised a recruitment network for the Iraqi *jihad* in the early 2000s.[38]

According to Kim Cragin, this rising practice of deportations and scrapping citizenship is resembling a dangerous 'hot potato' game, in which countries are simply offloading their most problematic terror cases onto other countries (mostly in North Africa), which are often already overwhelmed.[39] Such practices may therefore increase the security risk in certain countries, but could also rebound on Europe if those deported aren't properly handled, or if they use the opportunity of their deportation to build new ties with local groups and establish new terror networks across the Mediterranean.

Other controversial measures include Germany's use of electronic ankle bracelets to surveil suspected terrorists, even in the absence of a conviction,[40] and Belgium's extension of police custody for terror suspects from 24 to 48 hours (although the government was asking for 72 hours).[41]

Yet another trend that's raising opposition across Europe is the lifting of restrictions on professional secrecy and patient confidentiality for various professionals who deal with radicalisation challenges. Governments are devising more comprehensive CT strategies to include a broader set of actors in the 'prevention' component, which is creating some tensions among actors whose main mission isn't security-oriented. In Belgium, according to a new law, social workers dealing with people on government benefits are now required to pass information to the prosecutor's office when there's a 'serious indication' of terrorism activities. In the view of social workers, that puts at risk their professional secrecy and, as a result, the trust of their interlocutors.[42] Training to help them recognise signs of radicalisation began in 2017. In France, President Emmanuel Macron announced his intention to deepen cooperation with health institutions, raising similar concerns about medical records and patient confidentiality.[43]

FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND DERADICALISATION

Despite the preponderance of the homegrown threat, European authorities remained extremely attentive to the evolution of the situation in Syria and the whereabouts of European citizens in the conflict zone. As combat intensified, leading to the crumbling of the so-called caliphate, European governments sought to anticipate the next moves of European fighters, which could lead them to other *jihadi* theatres or back to their homelands, where they could become a liability. France (and the UK) adopted a radical and controversial position, publicly stating that they're actively engaged in targeted killings to prevent the return of their most dangerous FTFs.[44] French Defence Minister Florence Parly said in October that 'the more jihadists who die, the better'.[45] Although most European governments share this view off the record, they do not make it official policy.

A number of European fighters who weren't killed have been taken prisoner by local forces in Syria and Iraq, triggering new dilemmas and responses from European governments. On the one hand, some European governments sent intelligence officers into the area to interrogate the prisoners.[46] On the other hand, a political debate arose within Europe as to whether consular assistance should be offered to the prisoners, and whether diplomatic démarches should be initiated to seek to repatriate them (as European governments have no extradition agreement with Syria and Iraq, and certainly not with local militias), given that they're likely to be subject to torture and execution locally. Across Europe, the political appetite for actively seeking the return of dangerous individuals is quite low, and some countries argue that it is indeed normal to let local authorities prosecute and decide the fate of people who commit crimes in their jurisdictions. Legal, ethical and security considerations underpinned this debate concerning the fate of European FTFs in Syria and Iraq.

The perception of returning women and children evolved in 2017, to broadly converge across Europe.[47] Whereas women had been treated more leniently in the past, most countries are now systematically prosecuting them for terrorist activities, particularly since recent reports suggest that a number of them participated directly to the fighting in 2017, and could return with malicious intentions. As to children, they are mostly treated as victims, through a childcare approach as opposed to a criminal one, at least under a certain age (10 years old in Belgium, 13 in France). Their situation is decided on a case-by-case basis above that age limit. The German Foreign Ministry undertook démarches to repatriate children born to German parents under the caliphate who are now prisoners in Iraq,[48] whereas France and Belgium seemed to move in a similar direction.[49]

A key concern among European security services remains that a number of foreign fighters will come back, via official routes or—more worryingly—clandestinely. With a view to having the best possible information on potential returnees, Gilles de Kerchove urged members of the military coalition to improve the sharing of military evidence from the battlefield with European authorities.[50] Such evidence includes fingerprints or recent photos that are extremely useful, particularly to border agencies, if they are entered into European databases in a timely manner.

Furthermore, a number of measures and mechanisms have been established to deal with returnees back home. In last year's yearbook, I identified this as a key task for 2017, as EU member states had been experimenting with such programs over the past couple of years. A lot was done in 2017 to develop a more comprehensive response to this challenge, but this is still work in progress.[51] Key issues of concern remain:

- understanding the potential role that FTFs can play in prison in radicalising and recruiting inmates, including the apparently growing nexus between crime and terror
- designing effective rehabilitation and reinsertion programs for returnees
- dealing with returning children, including a number of orphans, some of whom have been exposed to violence and extremist ideology.

In the areas of rehabilitation and deradicalisation, a major development in France was the dismantling of the costly Pontourny deradicalisation centre, which was designed to welcome radicalised individuals (but not convicted ones) on a voluntary basis. In under a year, the institution, which used an ambitious but controversial methodology, attracted only 17 residents. This experiment was deemed a 'total fiasco' in a Senate report.[52] Meanwhile, the French Government has initiated a much more discreet initiative, called Research and Intervention on Violent Extremists (RIVE), which is inspired by a Danish example (the so-called 'Aarhus model').[53] This pilot project (in contrast to Pontourny) is designed for radical convicts, who are offered intensive multidisciplinary counselling and mentoring outside of prison for at least a year. Also in contrast to the Pontourny model, RIVE is mandatory for selected individuals and is tailored for their personal needs. If it's successful with a first group of 14 convicts, RIVE will be broadened to include more candidates. In Belgium, the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis, the national fusion centre, has also announced its intention to review all existing deradicalisation programs, with a view to bringing some order and scientific evaluation into a burgeoning but unregulated market.[54]

COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM EFFORTS—OFFLINE AND ONLINE

In the light of the continuation of the terrorist threat, most European countries have pursued their own efforts to strengthen their security apparatus. Many countries, including France and Germany, have announced that they'll continue to hire more personnel for their police and intelligence services. Reforms of the intelligence services, and an extension of their powers, have also been tabled in some countries. Finland

passed new legislation to extend the powers of its civilian agency, and France has reshaped some of its intelligence agencies by merging two of them and creating an overarching 'fusion centre', placed directly under the authority of the President.[55] Germany, however, still struggled to reform its intelligence landscape, which is dominated by the services of the *Länder* and gives little power to the federal agencies. Finally, Europe's hard security approach to CT was also visible in Denmark's decision to deploy soldiers at its border with Germany and in the streets,[56] becoming the fourth country to do so after Italy, France and Belgium. Soldiers can also take part in CT operations in Spain and Sweden, but aren't permanently deployed, whereas Germany and Austria are debating the possible deployment of soldiers domestically.

Next to these 'hard' CT measures, governments continued to devote effort and resources to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism, particularly at the local level. Compared with 2015, local actors are now much better prepared and organised to deal with this phenomenon. An increasing number of actors from the social services, local authorities and educational systems have been trained, while local platforms continue to be set up in order both to deal with cases of radicalisation (or family support) and to facilitate the exchange of information among relevant actors and services. However, it remains true that these efforts are unequally distributed and developed across Europe, and even within countries.[57]

In this regard, it's worth emphasising the positive role played by the EU through a number of initiatives, particularly the Radicalization Awareness Network, with a view to connecting prevention actors across the continent to share experiences and good practices. More broadly, the EU has continued to support a number of projects in the context of its Security Union Agenda, notably to enhance the security of public spaces and to limit terrorists' access to dangerous materials. The European Commission has also set up a high-level expert group on radicalisation to identify new priorities in counter-radicalisation.[58]

Finally, a number of interesting developments were reported in relation to the digital space. Those measures include European efforts to combat radicalisation and recruitment online.[59] Europol's Internet Referral Units continued to play an active role in identifying terrorist content that should be taken down. As cooperation with the technology industry (and particularly internet search engines and social media platforms) is crucial in this area, the EU and its member states have sought to deepen that partnership through the EU Internet Forum (a gathering of EU officials and internet representatives), adopting an action plan to combat terrorist content online in July 2017. Another EU priority is linked to encryption, which is a major challenge in terrorism investigations. Although some countries, particularly France and Germany, have invested in their ability to investigate encrypted messenger services, to decrypt content or to monitor the darknet (where a growing proportion of digital activities is taking place), those issues remain a major challenge for most member states with more limited human, financial and technical capabilities. The EU has therefore announced its intention to reinforce Europol's own decryption capabilities and to support member states' capacities in this area by offering training on investigation techniques and shared toolboxes.[60]

PROSPECTS FOR 2018

After the fall of IS's caliphate and the weakening of the group in Syria and Iraq, European security agencies expect the terror threat to evolve. As a sign of this post-caliphate era, on 22 January 2018 Belgium was the first European country to lower its threat level, from 3 ('serious and credible threat') to 2 ('average and unlikely'), although emphasising that the threat remained higher than in 2014–15 (when it was also at level 2), and that it would not suddenly disappear. While the main risk will continue to emanate from HTFs, a key issue in 2018 will be the fate of European FTFs. Some will move to other conflict zones and will continue to require monitoring by the intelligence services, as they're likely to maintain some ties with Europe and possibly encourage youngsters to either travel to join them or to strike at home. Others will try to come back, becoming a security and societal challenge for the authorities. Returning children, particularly, will be a sensitive issue calling for long-term responses. In 2018, a number of foreign fighters will also be released from European jails, putting national approaches to dealing with *jihadi* terrorists after prison to the test.

In the post-caliphate landscape, other jihadist groups, and particularly al-Qaeda, could regain importance in certain parts of the world. As a consequence, some European individuals could again associate with al-Qaeda, as opposed to IS, which calls for greater attention to these group dynamics among security services. Beyond the *jihadi* threat, polarisation will also continue to draw attention.

In CT, a number of key tasks lie ahead. First, there's a need to continue deepening and improving responses to terrorism and radicalisation. As the threat is evolving—and to some extent waning—in the post-caliphate era, that will somewhat reduce the pressure on the authorities and present an opportunity to address the conducive environment to radicalisation and terrorism. A lot's been achieved

over the past few years, often in a rather experimental manner (the 'try and learn' approach), and there's now a need to evaluate those efforts and develop a more comprehensive and systematic response to these issues. The aim is to avoid wasting resources or supporting counterproductive measures, but it is also necessary to ensure the sustainability of all recent efforts and good practices over the long term and to finalise a comprehensive and coherent strategy before political attention and will are diverted from terrorism to other topics—something that's been labelled 'CT fatigue', which has occurred before. Second, the internet is clearly a new frontier in the fight against terrorism and radicalisation. A lot's already happening on this front, but clearly more is needed, and public–private partnerships will be crucial in this area. Finally, in the context of the Brexit negotiations, 2018 will see operational discussions on future EU–UK CT cooperation.

NOTES

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2 This chapter excludes the UK from its analysis, as the UK is covered in a separate contribution.

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Atlantic Ocean
Scotland
Edinburgh
North Sea
Northern Ireland
Belfast
UNITED KINGDOM
Isle of Man
IRELAND
Manchester
England
Wales
Celtic Sea
Cardiff
London
NETH.
BELGIUM
English Channel
FRANCE
Guernsey (UK)
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
State boundary
0
250 km
0
125 Miles

United Kingdom

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SECURITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

While exit from Europe dominated UK politics during 2017, the UK's terrorism landscape grew closer to that of continental Europe because of several mass-casualty terrorist attacks that were very similar to prior events in France and Germany. However, if 2017 was the 'Year of Steel' (reflecting the weaponisation of vehicles and kitchen knives),[1] it was also a year of steely resolve in the response to terrorism. There were no dramatic declarations of emergency, emergency legislation, round-ups of suspects or closed borders.[2] In consequence, there were more continuities than discontinuities in the CT context and background in 2017. Even the general election of May 2017 failed to disrupt, despite claims that CT was inadequately funded.[3]

The main threat remained international Islamist terrorism. The threat level became 'Critical' (an attack is imminent) for a few days after the Manchester attack in May 2017 and again in the aftermath of an attempted bombing on a tube train at Parson's Green in September.[4] Otherwise, the level has remained at 'Severe' (an attack is highly likely) since August 2014. Despite the shocks of 2017, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson declared that Islamist terrorism isn't 'an existential threat'.[5] Even more constant is the threat of Northern Ireland (mainly dissident Republican)[6] terrorism ('Severe' in Northern Ireland and 'Substantial'—attack being a strong possibility—in Britain, which are unchanged since they were first published in 2010).[7] Outside Northern Ireland, any nexus with organised crime remains tenuous.[8]

CT policy and legislation likewise displayed steadfastness in 2017. The Countering International Terrorism (CONTEST) policy[9] remained under review but was essentially constant, as were CT organisational structures shared between the Security Service (MI5) and the police Counter Terrorism Command and Counter Terrorism Intelligence Units, although plans are afoot for a national infrastructure police force.[10] Following the major attacks, which resulted in record numbers of arrests,[11] Prime Minister Theresa May announced a four-point plan for further CT powers (defeat the ideology of Islamist extremism, deny extremism a safe space online, diminish segregation in society, and impose stricter sentences for terror-related offences).[12] Little has yet been delivered, reflecting negatively a weak government but also positively the sufficiency of existing measures.[13] As for legislation, the only emergent proposal is for a new offence of repeated viewing of terrorist content online; this supplements the current offence of possessing information likely to be useful to a terrorist (section 58 of the *Terrorism Act 2000*), which requires downloading and storage.[14] However, doubts about clarity, as well as the infringement of freedom of expression, have twice resulted in the condemnation of an equivalent crime by the French Conseil Constitutionel.[15] Another longstanding and prominent item on the government's wish list—deportation of terror suspects "with assurances"—was equally traduced in 2017 in a report commissioned by the Home Office.[16] The report expressed considerable reservations, adding to the unavailing outcomes of the 2011 Arab Spring. Such continuity is less welcome in Northern Ireland, where 'legacy' issues such as unresolved murders and allegations of collusion remain highly divisive.[17]

Some hanker after sterner responses. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson stated on 6 December 2017 that, 'I do not believe that any terrorist, whether they come from this country or any other, should ever be allowed back into this country … a dead terrorist can't cause any harm to Britain.'[18] However, the official practice is that killings abroad, such as through drone strikes, are rare,[19] while only 24% of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) are prosecuted.[20] In practice, the preference is for internal reintegration and external cooperation with weaker allies so as to avoid the exportation of risk, which is then directed back at Western countries.

DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN COUNTERTERRORISM

Under the theme of continuities, four aspects of CT aspects are here selected as the primary issues during 2017.

THE ATTACKS

The most prominent issue was how the UK fell victim to four attacks in the first half of 2017, the most deadly since the 7/7 London transport bombings of July 2005. First, on 22 March, Khalid Masood drove into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and then fatally stabbed PC Keith Palmer outside the Houses of Parliament. Masood was shot dead by armed police. Six people were killed, including Masood. Second , on 22 May, suicide bomber Salman Abedi attacked at Manchester Arena. The explosion killed 23 people (including Abedi) and injured 116. Third, on 3 June, Khuram Butt, Rachid Redouane and Youssef Zaghba drove a van at pedestrians on London Bridge and then stabbed bystanders in London Borough Market. Eleven people died (including the attackers, who were shot by police) and 45 required hospital treatment. Fourth, on 19 June, Darren Osborne drove a van into worshippers outside the Finsbury Park Islamic Centre in London. Makram Ali, who had been taken ill and was lying on the ground, was killed. Ten others were injured. Osborne was arrested and awaits trial for murder. An audit of the internal reviews of responses to these attacks by the security agencies was undertaken by David Anderson QC, the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, in his report, *Attacks in London and Manchester March–June 2017: independent assessment of MI5 and police internal reviews*.[21]

Anderson's summary analysis of these incidents points again to continuities.[22] All attackers were male, three were British, three resided in London, three were known to MI5, and most had no links to proscribed organisations. As for lessons learned, no calamitous errors were unearthed. Although three of the six attackers were known to MI5, that finding must be put into the context of 3,000 active 'subjects of interest' (SOIs) and 20,000 closed-file SOIs. The only marginal case, which might have been forestalled 'had the cards fallen differently', was Salman Abedi, from a family of anti-Gadaffi militants, whose file was pending for review by MI5.[23] The recommendations arising from the review aren't fully detailed but point towards better data exploitation, greater local sharing of MI5 data, and equivalent priority for extreme right-wing terrorism.[24] Overall, substantial reassurance can be derived from the review. Most attacks have been thwarted (22 since October 2013[25]), and the overall verdict is that 'The UK's CT effort has been effective over the years …'[26] Further wise words reflect that 'intelligence is always imperfect … not everything can be stopped … there is no cause for despair … and finally, even marginal improvements are capable of paying dividends.'[27]

FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

The focus on FTFs shifted in 2017 from those travelling to the Middle East to those returning. The problem may be overstated; many do not return, and returnees have skills related to war rather than terrorism.[28] Nevertheless, the threat of FTFs remains clear and present, as shown by attacks in neighbouring countries, and so an array of issues should be addressed.[29] The criminalisation of every returning FTF isn't necessary,[30] but there's less assurance about what programmes of rehabilitation (including mental and medical help) and reintegration should be concocted. No cohesive policy or legal response has emerged,[31] perhaps discouraged by the political unpopularity of offering 'bribes' to terrorists.[32]

'PREVENT' AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM

The most troubled strand of CONTEST is 'Prevent', which reflects the perception that 'a long-term effort would be needed to prevent another generation falling prey to violent extremism of the [al-Qaeda] ideology.'[33] The theoretical development of 'Prevent' is a sound and necessary element of CT. By addressing the narratives of terrorism, extremists should find it harder to sustain their arguments. Official attempts to divert children and other vulnerable people away from violent extremism are no less legitimate than diversion from drug-taking or other harmful or self-abusive behaviour. However, 'Prevent' faces significant challenges. It's founded on uncertain theories, in which the triggers of radicalisation, extremism and violence, and causal relationships between them, aren't fully understood.[34] Then there's a lack of accountability and audit as to its operations or published evidence to prove that it's effective. In addition, the funding for 'Prevent' falls far behind that for CT policing and security.

The Home Office sought to reformulate 'Prevent' in 2011.[35] As a result, 'Prevent' now points in two directions. One aspect—the Channel programme—handles individuals identified as being at risk.[36] Subject to consent, responses involve youth, education and health services or appointed counsellors (such as religious experts). In 2015–16 (the year for which the latest figures are available),[37] 7,631 individuals were referred, mainly via education authorities (2,539) and the police (2,377); 4,997 referrals arose from Islamist extremism and 759 from right-wing extremism. Of the 7,631 people, 1,072 were categorised as suitable candidates for Channel. Channel support was then accorded in 381 cases, and it's claimed (on unstipulated grounds) that vulnerability to terrorism was reduced for 302.

The other direction for 'Prevent' is to assist institutions in which extremism might be propagated. Many such organisations are in the public sector, with schools, colleges, and universities at the forefront. In 2015–16, 142 projects were financed, and 850,000 officials received training.[38] As well as public institutions, some private institutions have come under scrutiny, and charities, mosques, madrassas and faith schools have become targets for regulatory action by the Charity Commission[39] and school inspectors.[40]

Both aspects of 'Prevent' have been reinforced by the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Part V,[41] which imposes a duty on local authorities to establish Channel schemes and on many public authorities to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. Work in the education sector has been audited, and generally positive pictures have emerged.[42] In *Butt v. Secretary of State for the Home Department*,[43] the High Court endorsed the 'Prevent' guidance as lawful,[44] subject to the important proviso that 'Prevent' activities should be confined to extremism creating a risk of violence. In this way, the 2015 Act has operated as a positive step in developing 'Prevent' and subjecting it to the rule of law. However, much accumulated distrust remains to be overcome. Thus, the policy was challenged before and after the attacks in 2017. Even the Mayor of Manchester, Andy Burnham, had (when previously Shadow Home Secretary) dismissed the policy as 'so toxic now that I think it's got to go'.[45] After the Manchester attack, he inaugurated a review into extremism and community cohesion, which will report in 2018.[46] UN special rapporteurs have similarly been critical.[47]

As well as 'Prevent', a counter-extremism agenda has been mooted since 2013[48] in response to the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in Woolwich.[49] Recurrent ideas include banning orders against groups and individuals, closure orders against premises, counter-ideology measures[50] and building a more cohesive society. Three inquiries have followed. First, a review of the role of sharia law is ongoing.[51] Second, *The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration*, which is about community cohesion, was published in December 2016.[52] Third, the results of a review by the Home Office Extremism Analysis Unit of the funding of 'extremism' were announced in a statement to the House of Commons on 12 July 2017.[53] However, difficulties of resolving the meanings and boundaries of counter-extremism and squaring it with respect for free expression and cultural diversity have held back overarching legislation. The proposed Countering Extremism and Safeguarding Bill of May 2016 failed to appear even as a draft. The Queen's Speech in June 2017[54] was confined to a non-statutory Commission for Countering Extremism, indicating at best further deliberation about potential action.

While a full legislative or policy agenda on counter-extremism has proven impossible to devise or deliver,[55] the government's determination to curtail online extremist content, especially via social media, has produced tangible and insistent action. This policy increasingly involves administrative controls of messages rather than the suppression of messengers under criminal law.[56] Formal 'take-down'[57] can be secured under the Terrorism Act 2006, section 3, in response to a notice from the police to a communications service provider. However, informal, administrative take-down is more common. The key to its working is the setting up of public denunciation mechanisms that can feed into regulatory action. In the UK, public notifications are fed into the police's Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit, launched in 2010[58] and now replicated with the establishment in 2015 of the Europol Internet Referral Unit.[59] In quantitative terms, much has been accomplished, as website take-downs now amount to hundreds of thousands per year.[60] Yet the official demand for stronger action seems insatiable and has been voiced by parliamentary select committees;[61] following the London Bridge attacks, the Prime Minister stated: '… we cannot allow this ideology the safe space it needs to breed. Yet that is precisely what the internet—and the big companies that provide internet-based services—provide …'.[62] Therefore, further measures are now under consideration, including a code of practice under the Digital Economy Act 2017, section 103, the payment of a levy to cover enforcement costs, and the publication of transparency reports.[63] This pressure has also been reinforced by the European Commission[64] and by Five Eyes endorsement.[65] There remain practical enforcement difficulties, including the identification of (undefined) 'extremism',[66] as well as delays and denials in responses. A more principled note of caution concerns whether rights to free expression and privacy should be entrusted to these informal and private mechanisms.[67]

CRIMINALISATION

Criminalisation remains the preferred UK policy response to identified terrorists, following its adoption after 1972 as a replacement for military interventions and executive orders (such as internment or other administrative restrictions).[68] However, the consequent cohort of terrorist prisoners[69] has accentuated disquiet about prison regimes. After several years of special programs of deradicalisation, most of which have been abandoned as being of uncertain value and impact,[70] a preferred policy of warehousing and containment has emerged, pursuant to recommendations by Ian Acheson in his *Summary of the main findings of the Review of Islamist Extremism in Prisons, Probation and Youth Justice*.[71] Under the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2017,[72] three 'separation centres' (each holding up to 12 prisoners) are being set up. Alongside containment, the search for the Holy Grail of deradicalisation continues, the latest form being the (unexplained and unaudited) 'Desistance and Disengagement Programme' for those who have engaged in terrorism.[73]

A further consequence of growing criminalisation has been belated attention to terrorism sentencing policy, which is seen as inconsistent and, in the eyes of the government, not severe enough.[74] Some guidance on sentencing levels had been given by the Court of Appeal in its 2016 decision in *R v Kahar*[75] but only in relation to the offence of preparation of terrorism (section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006). However, following the London Bridge attacks, the Prime Minister pointed to the potential need for heavier sentences,[76] and in stepped a somewhat blundering Sentencing Council with the issuance of a consultation paper.[77] Among the flaws in its paper is that, first, there's no attempt to explain the objective of sentencing in regard to terrorism, nor how it fits within the wider CT policy under the CONTEST strategy. Second, it embarks on its exercise on faulty assumptions:[78]

> The Council determined that, when considering these actions in the current climate, where a terrorist act could be planned in a very short time, using readily available items as weapons, combined with online extremist material on websites which normalise terrorist activity, and create a climate where acts of terrorism can be committed by many rather than a few highly-organised individuals, these offences are more serious than they have previously been perceived. The Council believes that our proposals take account of the need to punish and incapacitate to a greater extent in the light of the emergence of greater threats to society.

This asserted claim isn't justified in the consultation paper, although the expected impact involves an increase in sentences at the lower end of culpability for at least some offences. There are three reasons to doubt the stated claim. The first is that there is scant evidence to show that existing sentence levels are inadequate. Second, terrorism 'in the current climate' isn't more deadly or more wicked than previous terrorism, especially Irish terrorism.[79] Islamist groups

are less capable, proficient and organised than groups such as the Irish Republican Army, despite ambitions or claims to the contrary—in short, knives and vans are less deadly than Semtex.

In the absence of objective reasons, the policy of increasing sentences appears discriminatory. The assumption is that current terrorists, who mainly have brown skins and non-Western cultures and religions, are somehow more wicked than white nationalist terrorists.

OVERALL OUTLOOK AND CHALLENGES

Despite the overall picture of stability, several challenges remain. The ongoing review of CONTEST might eventually afford clarity on 'Prevent' and 'extremism'.[80] But review is also needed of another element of CONTEST: 'Protect' (protective security). The attacks of 2017 highlighted that the rich and powerful may be well protected in their iconic public buildings, utilities, security estates and large commercial enterprises, but the general public and small businesses are less so.[81]

Three other challenges require attention.

BREXIT

One pressing topic is Brexit and future security relationships with the EU, which include linkages to Europol, Eurojust, the Schengen Information System and the European Arrest Warrant system. The UK Government's aspiration is for a close working association in all areas.[82] The need for ongoing partnership is especially vital in regard to the Republic of Ireland, and so the Northern Ireland Office and Department for Exiting the EU have emphasised the need to uphold the Peace Process, to maintain the Common Travel Area, and to avoid new physical checks.[83]

Issues relating to financial sanctions, including sanctions against suspected terrorists and terrorist organisations, are being handled by the Sanctions and Anti Money Laundering Bill 2017–19,[84] which seeks to replace the EU instruments on which UN and EU financial sanctions currently depend. It also supersedes the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010, Part I, which allows for autonomous UK sanctions. The Bill was presaged by a full consultation process.[85] However, two uncertainties remain. One is whether the UK will simply shadow foreign allies.[86] According to one minister, the intention is to 'lift and shift' existing sanctions regimes so as to 'remain aligned with the EU—with existing sanctions'.[87] Should there be corresponding coordination with Five Eyes allies, and how will the legislation be implemented in such a way that the UK remains 'a credible and reliable partner for international allies'?[88] The second uncertainty is whether the listing processes will be fair. The key grounds for designation are delineated in clauses 10–12. For autonomous sanctions (clauses 10(2) and 11(2)), the minister must have reasonable grounds to suspect involvement in an activity relevant to clause 1(2), such as terrorism. The minister must also consider that designation is 'appropriate'. By contrast, section 2 of the 2010 Act adopts a significantly higher standard for autonomous designations—'reasonable belief'. Another backward step concerns review and expiration. Clause 20 contains a default periodic review set at three years, whereas the current period is one year under section 4 of the 2010 Act. Next, the legal duty under section 31 of the 2010 Act to provide an annual report on the operation of sanctions (fulfilled by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation) is dropped from the Bill.

PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE

The increasing emphasis within CT on mass surveillance continues to generate legal problems around privacy. The UK Government has reacted by traversing a commendable path of transparency and legality. Thus, its flagship legislation, the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, after full inquiries and debates,[89] explicitly grants broad powers (including for bulk data collection and retention) but at the same time strengthens independent oversight through the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and other judicial commissioners. Even before this legislation came into force, it became evident that not all privacy concerns had been allayed. Thus, the Court of Justice of the European Union decided in joined cases C-203/15 and C-698/15, *Tele 2 Sverige and Watson* of 21 December 2016, that national legislation on access to retained data should confine the powers to the objective only of fighting serious crime, to where access is subject to prior review by a court or other independent authority, and to where data is retained within the EU. Notification to the subject should also be considered. Although the EU is uncertain as to how to respond,[90] the UK Home Office has laid down a marker in its paper, *Investigatory Powers Act 2016: consultation on the government's proposed response to the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union on 21 December 2016 regarding the retention of communications data*. Proposed new oversight by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner regarding authorisations is welcome. But no change is proposed on notification or on the other problematic limits set by the European Court of Justice. No doubt, the UK Government is pinning its hopes on the alternative remedy of pending litigation that seeks to exclude EU law altogether from national security cases by reference to article 4(2) of the Treaty of the European Union.[91]

These debates about surveillance and privacy rights are likely to be replicated regarding other powers that involve bulk, universal data collection and retention, all of which must meet similar standards set in *Case C-362/14, Schrems v. Data Protection Commissioner and Digital Rights Ireland Ltd*, 6 October 2015. For instance, the Terrorist Finance Tracking System[92] and existing agreements on (airline) passenger name records (PNRs)[93] (as well as the EU's initiative)[94] seem vulnerable. In *Opinion 1/15 of the Court,* 26 July 2017, the Court of Justice held that the interferences with privacy incurred by the EU–Canada PNR Agreement 2014 weren't strictly necessary.[95] Faults included the inclusion of sensitive data, such as racial origins; post-arrival processing by Canada; storage on too broad a scale; lack of limits on transfer abroad; insufficient confinement to terrorism and serious crime; lack of notification to the data subject; and lack of oversight.

VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

The final challenge facing UK CT, so typically relegated to the last place in the list, is to formulate a more comprehensive regime of treatment for terrorism victims. At present, mainly state-oriented regulatory responses, which are marked by fragmentation and pragmatism, are delivered through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (covering Great Britain)[96] and the Compensation Services for Northern Ireland.[97] These agencies pay monetary compensation (up to £500,000) to individuals who have been physically or mentally injured because of a violent crime. Given the doctrine of criminalisation, the depiction of terrorism victims as victims of crime makes sense, but it fails to deliver full justice to the particular needs of the victims of terrorism. First, the systems are said to be dilatory and ungenerous, especially by victims of mass attacks, after which large numbers of large and complex claims all arrive at once.[98] Second, the systems incorporate limits and exclusions. One limit disqualifies claims by people with criminal records, which is especially relevant in Northern Ireland, where ex-paramilitaries are frozen out. Third, property damage isn't covered. Fourth, terrorism inflicted overseas on British citizens was ignored. A few of these gaps have since been filled. Some corporate (but not personal or public) property losses can be covered through expensive insurance, which is underwritten by a state reinsurer, Pool Re, set up under the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993.[99] A scheme for UK victims of terrorism abroad has been established by the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme under the Crime and Security Act 2010 and initiated in 2012.[100] However, there's no overall 'victims service' to act as a dedicated source of information and advice,[101] and the lack of attention to victims abroad is indicated by the failure of the UK Government, in contrast to the US and French governments, to negotiate for compensation for foreign state terrorism, such as by Libya.[102] Pressures remain to offer more. There's pressure from the EU Directive 2017/541 on combating terrorism, Title V, 'on protection of, support to, and rights of victims of terrorism'. There's pressure from article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights 1950, which imposes a duty to provide suitable protective measures for the protection of lives.[103] In short, the challenge remains to respect 'the particular vulnerability of victims of terrorism', as was recognised by the Republic of Ireland's Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017.[104]

NOTES

1 Compare the Italian 'years of lead': M Lazar, M-A Matard-Bonucci, *Il Libro degli Anni di Piombo: Storia e Memoria del Terrorismo Italiano*, Rizzoli, Milan, 2010.

2 Compare the reactions in France: B Boutin, 'Administrative measures in counter-terrorism and the protection of human rights', *Security and Human Rights*, 2016, 27:128; G Keppel, *Terror in France*, Princeton University Press, 2017; Amnesty International, *Dangerously disproportionate*, London, 2017.

3 See D Anderson, *Attacks in London and Manchester, March–June 2017: independent assessment of MI5 and police internal reviews*, Home Office, 2017, footnote 54, online. See also Vikram Dodd, 'Don't cut police anti-terror budget as threat grows, warns top officer', *The Guardian*, 22 September 2017, online. From 2016 to 2020, CT policing was to be reduced by 7.2% within an overall increase of 30% for CT, although that reduction has since been offset by £24 million and £50 million grants in September and December 2017

4 See MI5 Security Service, *Threat levels*, online.

5 Boris Johnson, 'How Global Britain is helping to win the struggle against Islamist terror', speech, 7 December 2017, online.

6 See David Seymour, *Report of the Independent Reviewer, Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, ninth report, 1st August 2015 – 31st July 2016*, NIO, Belfast, 2017, paras 4.3, 6.45.

7 According to Europol (*TESAT: Terrorism situation and trend report 2017*, The Hague, 2017), jihadism was the main source of deaths in Europe (135), but most attacks are nationalist, with more in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in Europe.

8 Europol, *European Union serious and organised crime threat assessment*, The Hague, 2017, p. 55.

9 Home Office, *Countering international terrorism*, Cm. 6888, London, 2006, as revised annually.

10 Conservative Party, *Forward together*, 2017, p. 44.

11 Home Office, *Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, quarterly update to September 2017*, statistical bulletin 24/17, London, 2017: 400 arrests in the year ending 30 September 2017 (compared to 259 arrests in 2016), but port examinations in Britain decreased by 22% to 16,919. No stops and searches occurred under terrorism legislation in Britain, but there was

considerable usage in Northern Ireland; see David Seymour, *Report of the Independent Reviewer, Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007: Ninth Report: 1st August 2015 – 31st July 2016*, NIO, Belfast, 2017, chapter 6). The use of executive orders remained modest: seven Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures orders in force, 1 December 2016 to 28 February 2017 (Hansard HCWS 80, 19 July 2017); six in force, 1 March – 31 May 2017 (*Hansard* HCWS 98, 20 July).

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16 D Anderson, C Walker, *Deportation with assurances*, Cm. 9462, London, 2017.

17 See Committee of Ministers, H46–38 McKerr group v. the United Kingdom (application no. 28883/95) (CM/Notes/1294/H46–38, 1294 meeting, 19–21 September 2017 (DH)); *In re Barnard* [2017] NIQB 82; *In re McGuigan and McKenna*, NIQB, 27 October 2017.

18 Larisa Brown, 'Defence Secretary is accused of dreaming up a Netflix-style plot by threatening to "eliminate" UK *jihadis* before they can return to Britain', *Daily Mail*, 8 December 2017, online.

19 See Joint Committee on Human Rights, *The government policy on the use of drones for targeted killing* (2015–16 HL 141/HC 574) and *Government response* (2016–17 HL 49/HC 747); Intelligence and Security Committee, *Lethal drone strikes in Syria* (2016–17 HC 1152); Attorney General, *The modern law of self defence*, speech at International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 2017, online.

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21 Anderson, *Attacks in London and Manchester, March–June 2017: independent assessment of MI5 and police internal reviews*.

22 Anderson, *Attacks in London and Manchester, March–June 2017: independent assessment of MI5 and police internal reviews*, paras 1.6–1.8.

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24 Anderson, *Attacks in London and Manchester, March–June 2017: independent assessment of MI5 and police internal reviews*, Chapter 3, para. 5.4.

25 See *Hansard* (House of Commons), vol. 632, col. 913, 5 December 2017, Amber Rudd.

26 Anderson, *Attacks in London and Manchester, March–June 2017: independent assessment of MI5 and police internal reviews*, para. 5.2

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CANADA
Portland
Oregon
Pacific Ocean
Nevada
California
Las Vegas
San Bernardino
UNITED STATES
New York
New York (Manhattan)
Washington D.C.
Charlottesville
Virginia
Atlantic Ocean
The Boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ASPI.
KEY
Capital city
Other city
Country boundary
State boundary
0
500 km
0
250 Miles
MEXICO
Gulf of Mexico
BAHAMAS
CUBA

United States

SEAMUS HUGHES AND BENNETT CLIFFORD
Deputy Director and Research Fellow, respectively, George Washington University's Program on Extremism

OVERVIEW

US CT strategy requires responses to dual threats from international and domestic terrorist organisations. Currently, the US is involved in CT activities in several rapidly changing hotspots worldwide. Meanwhile, the challenge from domestic terrorism is extensive. In September 2017, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray testified that the bureau is conducting more than 1,000 active domestic terrorism investigations into supporters of jihadist groups and an additional 1,000 active terrorism investigations into supporters of other extremist ideologies (such as far-right and far-left extremists, white nationalists and 'sovereign citizens').[1]

Spanning the domestic and international threat landscapes are jihadist groups such as IS, which, while mainly active overseas, have inspired or directed individuals inside the US to act. 2015 was the banner year for IS-related activity in the US, as 63 US citizens or residents were charged with a variety of offences related to the group. In 2016, the number dropped to 38 people, and declined further to 34 in 2017.[2] There has been a concomitant decrease in the number of US persons travelling from the US to join jihadist groups overseas.[3] The dwindling numbers are the result of several disincentives for American supporters, including IS's loss of physical territory in Syria and Iraq, the US Government's success in convicting supporters of terrorist groups, and the lengthy prison sentences that typically befall convicted terrorists.

Adjusting to these changes, CT efforts have shifted away from intercepting travellers towards identifying individuals who may be planning domestic attacks. This threat not only includes people in the US inspired by the ideologies of foreign terrorist organisations, but also people motivated by domestic terrorist groups with an array of ideologies. In 2017 alone, there were five jihadist attacks in the US. The most lethal of these incidents occurred on 31 October, when a US permanent resident, Sayfullo Saipov, rented and then rammed a rental truck into a bike path in New York City, killing eight and injuring 11 more.[4] There was also a spike in violent incidents perpetrated by individuals inspired by other ideologies, particularly far-right extremists, during 2017.[5] As terrorists change methods and motives, law enforcement must continuously adapt and respond.

This chapter outlines the existing US CT infrastructure, highlighting the challenge of distinguishing between domestic and foreign-based terrorism. It assesses and compares the threats from jihadist travellers (including returning foreign fighters) and from 'homegrown' attackers, and then reviews the US response to the evolving nature of the threat from foreign and domestic terrorist groups.

THE US COUNTERTERRORISM LANDSCAPE

INTERNATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM

During 2017, US international CT policy largely remained constant. The change in administration has, so far, not had any major impact. However, the Trump administration has proposed some changes in CT operations, including expanding drone strike campaigns in Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel and increasing the footprint of US Special Forces. Interfused with these proposals, the Central Intelligence Agency has pushed for expanded authority to conduct drone strikes, which have largely been considered the purview of the US military.[6]

In continuity with its predecessor, the Trump administration continues to invoke the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) to justify its CT engagements overseas.[7] The AUMF was adopted in 2001 and provides the President with the authority to use 'all necessary and appropriate force' against groups that 'planned, authorized, committed or aided' the attacks on 11 September 2001, or affiliates of those groups. Successive administrations have expanded the geographical limits of the AUMF by adding new organisations to what constitutes 'al-Qaeda and its associated forces'.[8]

Debate on new legislation to revise or replace the AUMF is ongoing, and was exacerbated by an October 2017 ambush in Niger against US Special Forces personnel who were providing CT training to the Nigerien military under the AUMF. The ambush resulted in the deaths of four US soldiers.[9] Proposed changes to the AUMF would geographically limit the scope of CT operations and prevent the executive branch from extending the AUMF authority to new areas without congressional approval.

The US-led coalition continued to make strides in reducing the territorial holdings of IS and other jihadist groups. In 2017, the Coalition and US partners ousted IS from two of its major strongholds in Syria and Iraq.[10] A plethora of operations by local Coalition partners (including the Iraqi military and the Syrian Democratic Forces) and other regional actors are underway to clear IS from its last remaining holdings, including in eastern Syria and western Iraq.[11]

DOMESTIC COUNTERTERRORISM

While the US's international CT efforts are shaped to a greater degree by overarching strategies and guidelines, which have allowed international CT programs to stay constant over multiple administrations, domestic CT efforts lack clear, defining strategies. This has resulted in a much more piecemeal approach, split between multiple departments and agencies with different goals, priorities, guidelines and metrics for success.

Without a clear interagency strategy, domestic CT response is heavily reliant on traditional measures (such as law enforcement investigations, arrests and prosecutions) to interdict potential terrorists.

As a result, alternative and preventive measures remain on the backburner. Domestic countering violent extremism (CVE) programs are in an especially tenuous state due to lack of funding and commitment. CVE tasking continues to be split between the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the National Counterterrorism Center, and relevant state and local law enforcement agencies. The respective missions of those organisations have remained static throughout the change in administrations, although the Trump administration has proposed significant changes at the program level. The proposed 2018 budget includes substantial cuts to several relevant programs, including the DHS's grant funding for local CVE projects, and re-brands CVE as 'terrorism prevention'.[12] Several local organisations awarded grants for CVE had their funding rescinded or declined to accept future funding following the cuts. Complicating this matter, many senior-level posts within government agencies tasked with CT (especially at DHS) remain unfilled.[13]

Meanwhile, issues facing federal law enforcement in its response to terrorism and remaining from the Obama administration are still largely unaddressed. Faced with a daunting number of open international and domestic terrorism cases, the FBI is forced to triage its investigations, assigning a priority status to each case file based on risk assessments and other internal processes. This increases the chance that law enforcement might not always accurately gauge the risk and that the triage method will fail. Resources are limited; an individual attacker, traveller or returnee, even while on the FBI's radar, may not be constantly watched. Several of the attackers in the US had some touchpoint with the FBI prior to committing their terrorist acts.

CT efforts face another challenge in the digital space. Terrorist groups have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and adaptability after having their content removed from online platforms. Terrorist groups' presence in the online space has undoubtedly faltered, but pales in comparison to the material and territorial losses suffered by those groups on the ground.[14] The two appear to be somewhat linked—multiple studies suggest that IS propaganda output has been drastically reduced because of territorial losses.[15]

To counter the presence of terrorists online, the US Government has relied heavily on technology companies, especially large social media service providers and filesharing sites (Facebook, Twitter, Alphabet), to wage the fight against online terrorism by strictly enforcing terms of service.[16] While those collaborations have been successful in reducing the amount of content on and supporters attracted through major social media platforms, terrorists have largely shifted towards niche platforms, filesharing services and messaging applications with end-to-end encryption. Those shifts have, at times, impeded law enforcement's ability to connect online accounts to their offline owners and detect emerging threats.[17]

FOREIGN FIGHTERS, TRAVELLERS AND RETURNEES

The motivations of Americans who have travelled overseas to join terrorist groups vary, and have shifted over time. While some are drawn to the ideology, goals or methods of a particular group, others travel out of a sense of moral responsibility to defend certain international actors from others, and some do so for highly personalised reasons.[18]

The FBI has publicly acknowledged that at least 300 US citizens or residents have travelled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq to join extremist groups.[19] However, the bureau hasn't acknowledged how many from that number arrived there, or how many have been fighting for designated jihadist groups.

From that number, the Program on Extremism has identified more than 60 American travellers: men and women who joined jihadist groups, including IS, the al-Nusra Front and smaller outfits in Syria and Iraq.[20] The exact nature of the threat that these individuals pose to the US depends on the individual in question and what specific actions they participated in. It's often hard to determine exactly what the individual has engaged in overseas, which leads to ambiguity about their combat experience and ideological commitment or disillusionment.

There's a concern that returnees may plan attacks or act as recruiting nodes upon re-entry to the US. However, most American travellers to Syria and Iraq have probably died there; US Secretary of Defense General James Mattis claimed in May 2017 that it was the position of the US that 'foreign fighters do not survive the fight to return home'.[21]

Of those travellers who survive, some are captured on the battlefield. Some travellers, including Americans, have already surrendered themselves to Coalition, Kurdish or other military forces. The current case of an American citizen captured on the battlefield in September 2017 and detained as an enemy combatant by US forces will be a key test case for law enforcement proceedings against jihadist travellers in future.[22]

The remainder will be faced with a choice between travelling onward to third countries, including countries with nascent or established *jihadi* insurgencies, or returning to the US.

Only a small percentage of the American citizens who travelled to Syria and Iraq are likely to return (or attempt to return) home. So far, the Program on Extremism has identified 12 US persons who travelled to join jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq since 2011 and returned home.[23] Nine (75%) were arrested overseas and extradited, or were arrested quickly after returning to the US. In three of those cases, law enforcement declined to formally charge the returnee in question. Only one returned to the US and plotted an attack after returning.[24] Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, of Columbus, Ohio, returned from Syria with explicit instructions from an al-Nusra emir to plot an attack against a military facility in the US. However, Mohamud was apprehended in the planning stages of this plot and pleaded guilty to material support in June 2017.[25]

There's also the unaddressed question of how to respond to those who travelled to Syria and Iraq but didn't serve in a fighting role. Several women and children left the US for the conflict zone and may require tailored responses if they attempt to return.[26] In October 2017, authorities returned a 15-year-old Kansas native from Syria, who had left with her family years before. Complicating the matter, she was pregnant with the child of an IS member whom she married in Syria.[27] While it's important to recognise that women are often equally committed ideologically and practically (albeit in different roles) to jihadist groups and responsible for their actions, women and children travellers bring unique reintegration challenges.[28]

In general, the US has taken an ad hoc approach to returning travellers. In October 2017, Mohamad Jamal Khweis was sentenced to 20 years in prison after he was captured by Kurdish forces while fighting for IS and was extradited.[29] In contrast, a returnee from New York is conducting interventions for radicalised individuals, attempting to dissuade them from their extreme beliefs.

In many more cases, authorities have kept legal proceedings sealed, and in a select few they have declined to issue criminal charges against returnees. While the number of American IS travellers is considerably lower than numbers from most Western countries, the number of returnees is likely to rise as IS loses territory.

ATTACKS

Five jihadist attacks occurred in the US during 2017.[30] In those attacks, a total of 14 people died and at least 24 were injured. The highest casualty incident was the truck-ramming attack in Lower Manhattan on 31 October, which resulted in eight deaths and dozens of injuries.[31]

These events fit within the broader trends of jihadist attacks in the US since IS's declaration of its 'caliphate' in June 2014. Since that time, there have been 19 attacks, resulting in 85 deaths.[32] These numbers make the US one of the Western countries most targeted for jihadist attacks. Only a few European countries—most notably France—have experienced a similar number of attacks during that period. The casualty rates from those events have tended to be much higher. For instance, from June 2014 to June 2017, 17 attacks in France killed more than 200 people.[33]

Several incidents have also highlighted the growing frequency of attacks committed by individuals inspired by domestic terrorist groups, including a stabbing spree on a commuter train in Portland, Oregon, that killed two people and a car ramming attack at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that resulted in one fatality.[34]

Two aspects of recent attacks, regardless of the ideology inspiring the attackers, are especially concerning for law enforcement: attack frequency, and the low-budget, 'do-it-yourself' nature of attacks, which has become a common security concern internationally. While the latter may have had a role in reducing casualty rates in US attacks, it also limits opportunities for law enforcement to detect and interdict emerging plots. The October 2017 New York City attack, for example, only required Sayfullo Saipov to plan a route and rent a truck.[35] Unlike large-scale plots involving firearms or explosives, attackers like Saipov can obtain all the materials necessary for an attack without heightening scrutiny or crossing an illegal threshold.

More broadly, large-scale attacks remain concerning for law enforcement. The experience in Europe, where networks of attackers with experience fighting or training abroad were able to commit several major attacks (including the 2015 and 2016 Paris and Brussels attacks), especially exacerbates this concern for the US. While US attackers largely lack the operational connections and technical expertise of their foreign counterparts, some unique factors in the US domestic context, such as the wide availability of firearms, pose a risk of larger attacks.[36] In addition, attackers not connected to any specially designated foreign terrorist organisation (including members of domestic terrorist groups) do not commit an *ipso facto* crime in many aspects of planning an attack, and cannot be prosecuted unless they're arrested after the attack or commit an unrelated crime.[37]

One factor that has somewhat blurred the lines between small-scale, lone-attacker plots and large-scale, planned ones is externally planned attacks via digital communications technologies.[38] Several US attackers contacted 'virtual entrepreneurs' located abroad via encrypted messaging services; those individuals guided the attackers through the ideological, logistical and technical aspects of their plots.[39] In the case of IS, several of its English-speaking virtual entrepreneurs were killed in Syria in 2015 and 2016, but the risk from these types of externally guided attacks remains.[40]

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Overall, processing travellers and financial supporters of terrorist groups through the US criminal justice system has proved overwhelmingly effective. However, it may not be possible to identify, investigate and prosecute every would-be attacker, even with optimal information-sharing from US allies and partners.[41]

US supporters of international terrorist groups, now largely prevented from travelling overseas, may turn their attention inward and attempt domestic attacks. As the threat of homegrown violent extremists develops, it's incumbent upon US CT authorities to devise alternative and preventive responses to the threat. Several studies have found that so-called 'frustrated' travellers—those who intended to travel but were prevented from doing so—are at a much higher risk of being involved in terrorist plots than returning travellers.[42] Additionally, individuals incarcerated in the US prison system and local communities affected by terrorist violence require individually tailored rehabilitation measures.

A final concern is law enforcement having the wherewithal, know-how and staff power to respond to terrorist threats from a number of different ideologies, foreign and domestic. Islamist extremism remains the priority, but an *FBI/DHS Joint Intelligence Bulletin* released in May 2017 assessed that 'lone actors and small cells within the white supremacist extremist movement likely will continue to pose a threat of lethal violence within the next year.'[43] Some academic research, backed by anecdotal evidence from the past year, has found that violent extremists with opposing ideologies radicalise and commit attacks in response to attacks motivated by opposing ideologies.[44] The growing phenomenon of 'reciprocal radicalisation' in the US context indicates that law enforcement will be forced to respond to a multitude of significant violent extremist actions from various ideologies.

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Hacking terrorist infrastructure:

INTERNATIONAL LAW ANALYSIS

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CONTEXT

Although the use of cyberspace by terrorists isn't a new phenomenon, it has become increasingly common and sophisticated, as has been well illustrated by the online activities of IS. CT strategies therefore seek to prevent terrorist organisations from leveraging cyberspace for activities ranging from proselytising to recruiting, communicating, training and financing. Those strategies necessarily involve both the government and the private sector.

Of particular note is the significant role that social media have played in the dissemination of terrorist content. In response to growing pressure to remove such content from their sites, the so-called 'tech giants' have become more agile and effective in countering extremist narratives promulgated on their platforms.[1] Twitter has been especially active in this regard. For instance, between August 2015 and June 2017 it suspended 935,897 accounts for promoting terrorism.[2] Typically, social media companies rely on breaches of their contractual terms of service as the legal basis for engaging in content management. Accordingly, many firms are setting out new grounds for taking down, blocking or filtering unwanted content in their terms of service.[3]

As terrorist groups are driven from popular social media sites, they're gradually migrating to alternative service providers that have yet to adopt the robust CT approach of the leading technology companies. IS, in particular, is said to increasingly operate on the darknet and to use encrypted communication channels, such as Telegram and WhatsApp,[4] making its activities more difficult to detect and disrupt. Research conducted in 2017 identified 40 domains (39 third-party domains and IS's server) that IS used; those most often used were its own server and justpaste.it, archive.org, sendvid.com, YouTube, and Google Drive.[5] This demonstrates that terrorist content is far from being eradicated. Rather, it's simply forced to move repeatedly to alternative online locations.

There are indications that states are turning to offensive cyber operations in order to counter terrorists' online activity, both to defend themselves and as a CT force multiplier. The publicly known examples mainly relate to anti-IS operations. For instance, in 2016, then US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter acknowledged that the US was resorting to cyber operations:

> … to interrupt [and] disrupt ISIL's command and control, to cause them to lose confidence in their networks, to overload their network so that they can't function, and do all of these things that will interrupt their ability to command and control forces there, control the population and the economy.[6]

To avoid jeopardising their success, Carter refused to elaborate further on the operations.[7]

The media has also reported the use of offensive cyber operations. According to a *Washington Post* story, US Cyber Command 'obtained the passwords to a number of Islamic State administrator accounts and then used them to access the accounts, change the passwords and delete content such as battlefield video. It also shut the group's propaganda specialists out of their accounts.'[8] Other reports suggest that the command may have disrupted IS's online money transfers.[9] There are even accounts of plans to leverage cyber means to imitate high-ranking IS officials or alter their messages in order to direct their fighters into locations where they can be attacked by drones or local ground forces.[10]

The US isn't alone in hacking terrorist infrastructure. For example, then UK Secretary of State for Defence Sir Michael Fallon stated in 2016 that without 'going into operational specifics … we are conducting military operations against Daesh as part of the international coalition, and I can confirm that we are using offensive cyber for the first time in this campaign.'[11] Along the same lines, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Israel has referred to attacks by 'western hackers' against IS websites on the darknet and 'new challenges being placed before [IS] by western countries'. However, the institute didn't specify which states were engaged in the cyber operations or discuss the nature of those operations.[12]

Although CT cyber operations are highly secret, the fact that they're directed against cyber infrastructure located abroad means that they're governed, at least in part, by international law. The discussion that follows outlines the international law with which CT cyber operations must comply. It indicates those circumstances in which they're either plainly permissible or prohibited, as well as when they fall within the so-called 'grey zone'[13] of law that's characterised by a lack of legal clarity.

INTERNATIONAL LAW RESTRICTIONS ON COUNTERTERRORIST CYBER OPERATIONS

An international law assessment of a CT cyber operation always begins with the question of where the cyber infrastructure to be targeted is located. This is so even if the operation only remotely manipulates terrorist data, as in the case of deleting content, and in no way damages any cyber infrastructure. In the latter case, the location of the underlying infrastructure hosting the data will be determinative for the legal analysis.

When the cyber infrastructure in question is situated in the territory of the state planning the CT cyber operation, the operation is governed by the state's domestic law and any applicable international human rights law. Human rights law issues aside, the operation is unlikely to violate international humanitarian law.

By contrast, legal analysis of a CT operation that unfolds on cyber infrastructure located abroad must

address whether international law prohibits the state from virtually crossing another state's border and, if so, whether a permissive legal rule overrides that prohibition and thus renders the operation lawful. On the first question, the principle of sovereignty looms large. That principle provides for the territorial integrity of sovereign states[14] and affords each state the exclusive right to exercise state functions within its borders.[15] As with traditional CT operations involving the use of armed force, such as drone strikes, if the principle of sovereignty (as well as the prohibition of the use of force[16]) would proscribe a cyber operation, a rule that overrides sovereignty (and the use-of-force prohibition) must apply before the operation may be mounted. Such rules are discussed in the following section on justifications.

Interpretation of the principle of sovereignty is less settled in the cyber context; the *Tallinn Manual 2.0*, a study produced by an international group of 19 experts on how international law applies in cyberspace, examined sovereignty in some depth.[17] Most of the experts concurred that a remote cyber operation causing physical damage to the target cyber infrastructure violates sovereignty, as was the case with the damage to Iranian nuclear centrifuges caused by the Stuxnet malware.[18]

Moreover, most of them agreed that a remote cyber operation resulting in functional damage can amount to a breach of sovereignty. Whether it does depends on the nature and extent of the loss of functionality caused to the cyber infrastructure in question, as well as the significance of the effort required to restore it. This 'functionality test' would, for instance, bar CT cyber operations that cause damage similar to that suffered by Saudi Aramco in 2012 as a result of the Shamoon malware, which permanently wiped the company's computers' hard drives.[19]

Whether cyber operations that cause less significant damage also violate sovereignty will eventually be settled through the interpretation that states themselves accord to sovereignty. In this regard, to date, states have not protested other states' cyber operations on the basis of breach of sovereignty, whether conducted as part of CT campaigns or for other purposes, when they fall below the physical and functional damage thresholds.

The CT cyber operations cited above that may have been conducted vis-à-vis IS—disrupting its command and control, overloading networks, changing or deleting content, and locking militants out of their accounts—arguably have not violated the sovereignty of the states into which they have been conducted, since none of them presumably caused physical or functional damage. Therefore, states engaging in these types of cyber operations against terrorist organisations need not rely on a specific authorisation in international law to conduct them. If, however, states engage in or plan to conduct more robust CT cyber operations causing physical or functional damage, they may only do so when an international law justification renders the operations permissible despite the sovereignty of the state concerned.

Interestingly, in contrast to the above analysis, some officials and agencies in the UK and the US appear to have adopted the view that the principle of sovereignty places no legal limits on their countries' CT or other cyber operations. Denying respect for sovereignty as a binding international law obligation posits even greater leeway for cyber operations.

In the case of the US, a policy memorandum to that effect was issued in early 2017 by then Department of Defense General Counsel Jennifer M O'Connor to senior combatant commanders and lawyers. In the memo, O'Connor stated that:

> there is insufficient evidence of state practice or *opinio juris* to support the assertion that sovereignty acts as a binding legal norm, proscribing cyber actions by one State that result in effects occurring on the infrastructure located in another State, or that are manifest in another State.[20]

Explicit mention is made of CT cyber operations:

> a State involved in operations against transnational terrorist organizations is not precluded from taking action against terrorist cyber infrastructure in other States … unless doing so constitutes an intervention or use of force.[21]

Although no UK agency has publicly rejected sovereignty's applicability to cyber operations, the principle is tellingly omitted from the international law annex to the UK Ministry of Defence's *Cyber primer*. That document catalogues, *inter alia*, the legal rules that place limits on the UK's cyber operations. It mentions the prohibitions of intervention[22] and the use of force,[23] but not that on violating sovereignty.[24]

The prohibition of intervention protects states against coercive interference by other states into their internal or external affairs. A coercive interference is one that compels a state to act in a manner in which it would otherwise not act, or refrain from conduct in which it would otherwise engage.[25] In the non-cyber context, the paradigmatic example of an unlawful intervention is 'training, arming, equipping, financing and supplying … contra forces or otherwise encouraging, supporting and aiding military and paramilitary activities in and against' another state.[26] Translated into the cyber context, funding a terrorist organisation that operates in another state and mounts destructive cyber operations

there, or providing it with the hardware and software to conduct operations, would qualify as a prohibited intervention vis-à-vis that state. It's difficult to envision how CT cyber operations would constitute unlawful intervention, as in the vast majority of cases they wouldn't meet the requirement of coercion. After all, their intent is to force the terrorist organisation, not the state into which the operations are conducted, to act in an involuntary manner.

The other international law limit to cyber operations referenced in the US Department of Defense memo and the UK's *Cyber primer*[27]—the prohibition of the use of force—sets a much higher threshold for rendering CT cyber operations unlawful than the rule requiring respect for another state's sovereignty. Cyber operations that injure or kill people or physically damage or destroy objects clearly qualify as uses of force.[28] Although states increasingly appear to take the position that a cyber operation need not necessarily result in physical consequences to constitute an unlawful use of force, the threshold for violating the prohibition nevertheless remains high. For example, the *Cyber primer* suggests that a cyber operation resulting in 'severe financial damage to the state leading to a worsening economic security situation for the population' is a use of force. By this standard, a CT cyber operation would need to have far-reaching consequences for the state itself, which, again, is unlikely in the case of highly targeted CT operations.

The no-sovereignty view, if adopted and implemented by states, would set the bar for unlawful cyber operations directed against terrorist cyber infrastructure high. By contrast, the conventional understanding of sovereignty, in which the question isn't whether sovereignty restricts states' CT cyber operations but rather when it does so, places a greater limit on CT operations. By way of example, permanently disabling an IS server via cyber means wouldn't be unlawful under the former approach. However, on the traditional and presumably prevailing view, the operation would violate the sovereignty of the state where the server is located unless an overriding permissive rule applies. Thus, for the latter position, the international law justifications for otherwise unlawful CT cyber operations are crucial.

INTERNATIONAL LAW JUSTIFICATIONS FOR COUNTERTERRORIST CYBER OPERATIONS

International law foresees three primary situations in which a state may lawfully perform otherwise-prohibited CT cyber operations:

- when authorised by the UN Security Council
- in the exercise of individual or collective self-defence
- when based on consent.

COUNTERTERRORIST CYBER OPERATIONS AUTHORISED BY THE SECURITY COUNCIL

The Security Council's authority to decide upon CT measures, including cyber operations, resides in Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, titled 'Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression'. Article 41 empowers it to authorise activities that do not involve the use of armed force, such as 'complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations'. Should the Security Council determine that Article 41 measures have been or will prove inadequate, it may authorise forceful action under Article 42. To date, the Security Council hasn't specifically authorised cyber operations to neutralise terrorist or other threats. That said, insofar as cyber operations could be interpreted as encompassed within a broader authorisation issued by the Security Council under either article, they would be lawful.

Article 41 is generally not used to authorise operations that would be carried out on the territory of another state; instead, it tends to involve the imposition of measures on states to refrain from or engage in certain activities (such as freezing terrorists' assets) within their own territories.[29] Therefore, it's unlikely that states could rely on a Security Council decision adopted under Article 41 to justify their CT cyber operations that are directed against cyber infrastructure located in other states.

Decisions of the Security Council adopted under Article 42 of the UN Charter constitute a more likely legal basis for CT cyber operations. As mentioned, Article 42 entitles the Security Council to authorise measures involving the use of force. Such an authorisation usually takes the form of a resolution that permits the use of 'all necessary means' or 'all necessary measures' to maintain or restore international peace and security. By way of example, in 2015, the Security Council called upon:

> Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law, in particular with the United Nations Charter, as well as international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, on the territory under the control of ISIL also known as Da'esh, in Syria and Iraq …[30]

The 'all necessary measures' clause clearly justifies both cyber and non-cyber operations by any state in IS-controlled territory in those two countries. Therefore, for example, cyber operations directed against an IS server located on territory it controls, including destructive operations amounting to a use of force, would be lawful under the resolution.

Of course, a territorially limited authorisation, such as that concerning IS, is only partially responsive to the threat that terrorist organisations pose in cyberspace. As discussed, IS has a significant presence on the darknet, which means that it relies on cyber infrastructure that's

geographically dispersed around the world. Indeed, the US Department of Defense is said to have identified about 35 countries other than Iraq and Syria that 'might have hosting services with videos and other Islamic State content'.[31] The current Security Council resolution wouldn't legitimise CT cyber operations directed against servers in those countries.

COUNTERTERRORIST CYBER OPERATIONS AS AN EXERCISE OF SELF-DEFENCE

A state's inherent right to individual or collective self-defence, set out in Article 51 of the UN Charter and customary international law, arises when an 'armed attack' occurs. The right entitles the victim state to resort to force to defend itself, provided that doing so is 'necessary' because non-forceful measures will not suffice and the force employed is proportionate, in the sense of not being more than is required to mount an effective defence. Although still subject to some controversy,[32] the prevailing view today provides that states are not only permitted to exercise the right of self-defence vis-à-vis armed attacks by other states, but also by non-state actors, such as terrorist organisations operating from another state.

If an armed attack is carried out by a terrorist group, the right of self-defence permits the victim state to perform CT self-defence operations in the territorial state only if the territorial state is either unwilling or unable to put an end to the armed attack. For instance, prior to the Security Council's adoption of the resolution calling on states to counter IS with 'all necessary measures', US- and French-led coalition operations against IS in Syria were based on Syria's inability to thwart the armed attack by IS that was underway against Iraq from Syria. In law, the operations, including any associated cyber operations, were an exercise of collective self-defence of Iraq.[33] In Iraqi territory, their operations were permissible due to Iraq's consent (a justification discussed below).

However, the right of self-defence doesn't entitle the defending state to direct CT cyber operations at cyber infrastructure outside the unwilling or unable state. As an example, Iraq's right of self-defence against IS in Syria wouldn't have legitimised cyber operations against servers in third countries that the group may have been using for communication. As a result, the only legal basis for conducting otherwise prohibited CT cyber operations in third states is when the third states have consented to such operations.

CONSENSUAL COUNTERTERRORIST CYBER OPERATIONS

The consent[34] of the state into which a CT cyber operation is conducted is required if the operation would otherwise violate an international law obligation owed to the state, such as respect for sovereignty; and self-defence or Security Council authorisation do not operate to render the operation lawful. The first point merits emphasis. Should the debate over whether respect for sovereignty is a rule of international law be resolved against the existence of such a rule, many cyber operations directed against cyber infrastructure used by terrorists wouldn't be unlawful and accordingly not require the consent of the state into which they're conducted.

Due to the distributed nature of cyberspace, states wishing to mount CT cyber operations that would be unlawful but for consent are left with the requirement to reach out to all the territorial states whose cyber infrastructure is used by a terrorist organisation and request their consent for the operations. Soliciting consent, however, will often be precluded for reasons of operational and national security. In the face of this dilemma, as states develop their CT strategies, they can be expected to interpret the principle of sovereignty, as well as the prohibitions of intervention and use of force, in a manner that places CT cyber operations below their respective unlawfulness thresholds.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS OF NOT-UNLAWFUL CYBER OPERATIONS

Even if covert CT cyber operations that unfold abroad don't violate an international law rule, they nevertheless carry significant political sensitivity and risk. This is evidenced by the anonymous statement of a former US official, made in the context of anti-IS cyber operations: 'Think how we would react if one of our allies undertook a cyber operation that affected servers here in the US without giving us a heads-up.' That sentiment signals that states are unlikely to tolerate covert cyber operations in their sovereign territories, even if conducted against IS, an organisation that's universally condemned and the defeat of which constitutes a broadly shared strategic objective.

Fear of political blowback would also explain why the US reportedly decided to inform 15 of the 35 countries in which it had identified IS's cyber operations.[35] Those states can be presumed to be allies with which information-sharing obstacles are smaller and the potential costs of damaging relationships by failing to notify them are higher. In general, however, states will be reluctant to provide notification to states in whose territories they have identified malicious cyber activity,

including that of terrorists. The legislative process concerning the *National Defense Authorization Act* in the US Congress in 2017 was illustrative. An early version of the bill included the following provision:

> Section 1621(f)
>
> (f) Policies Relating To Offensive Cyber Capabilities And Sovereignty.—It is the policy of the United States that, when a cyber attack or malicious cyber activity transits or otherwise relies upon the networks or infrastructure of a third country –
>
> (1) the United States shall, to the greatest extent practicable, notify and encourage the government of that country to take action to eliminate the threat; and
>
> (2) if the government is unable or unwilling to take action, the United States reserves the right to act unilaterally (with the consent of that government if possible, but without such consent if necessary).[36]

Secretary of Defense James Mattis found the notification provision 'particularly concerning' and requested its removal.[37] In the final version of the bill, it was omitted.[38] That elimination allowed the US greater domestic law latitude to engage in covert unilateral CT cyber operations on foreign soil, thereby signalling a greater willingness to accept the political risk that foreign states might discover those operations. Mattis clearly wished to retain the discretion to determine to whom the US would provide notification of CT cyber operations.

Notification, it appears, is likely to be provided to allied states for which any associated political risk outweighs the operational and strategic concern of revealing US capacity to detect and counter terrorist operations online. A decision to not inform would inevitably hamper relations with allies, perhaps by having a negative effect on cooperation in law enforcement, intelligence matters and CT.[39]

Of course, non-allied and adversarial states would likewise condemn CT cyber operations on their territories, were the operations to become exposed. Whereas justifications by the acting state in those situations that the cyber operations did not constitute violations of international law may potentially shield it from international legal responsibility, they would be futile in mitigating political risk and consequences. Insofar as any ensuing political repercussions have the potential to endanger international peace and security, it would appear to be in the interest of the international community writ large to find avenues to develop common understandings as to which practices in countering terrorists' use of cyberspace are acceptable.

CONCLUSION

Regrettably, new technological solutions can't be limited to benign users. Products and services, as well as the underlying technology, that individuals legitimately rely upon on a daily basis for communication, banking and entertainment are simultaneously enabling terrorists to more effectively recruit members, organise their operations and carry out attacks. If advances in technology result in novel products and services that terrorists can use to advance their goals, they'll do so. This means that CT approaches will constantly be developing in order to be responsive to the terrorist threat online.

Hacking terrorist infrastructure is one CT approach that states have started experimenting with. Extant international law, however, provides few definitive answers about such operations' lawfulness. CT cyber operations that target cyber infrastructure in the state in which the terrorists are based may be lawful because the Security Council has authorised them, they constitute an exercise of self-defence, or the territorial state has consented to them.

Whether international law permits covert CT cyber operations in third states is even less settled. It's accepted that the determinative factors are the nature and severity of the operations' consequences, but the law doesn't clearly answer the critical question concerning the degree of severity required to render an operation unlawful. It's with respect to this category of CT cyber operations that states are faced with an especially difficult dilemma: refraining from the operations has the potential to significantly reduce states' ability to effectively fight terrorist activities; engaging in them is guaranteed to upset the states in which the operations unfold, if they're discovered; and notifying the territorial states of the operations would reveal sensitive national security information. Legal clarity will only emerge once states have determined an appropriate balance between those countervailing interests.

NOTES

1 Letter dated 26 April 2017 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counterterrorism addressed to the President of the Security Council, para. 11, UN doc. S/2017/375, 28 April 2017.

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3 *New data, new insights: Twitter's latest #Transparency report*.

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5 Maura Conway, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson, David Weir, *Disrupting Daesh: measuring takedown of online terrorist material and its impacts*, VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, p. 37, online.

6 Kevin Baron, 'The battle for Mosul has begun', *Defense One*, 29 February 2016.

7 Baron, 'The battle for Mosul has begun'.

8 Ellen Nakashima, 'US military cyber operation to attack ISIS last year sparked heated debate over alerting allies', *Washington Post*, 9 May 2017.

9 Dan Turkel, 'The US military has a new plan to fight ISIS—and it starts with making them "extremely paranoid"', *Business Insider Australia*, 27 April 2016.

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13 On grey zones in international law that are relevant in the cyber context generally, see Michael N Schmitt, 'Grey zones in the international law of cyberspace', *Yale Journal of International Law Online*, 2017, 42:1.

14 For a detailed discussion on the matter, as well as references to support this assertion, see Michael N Schmitt, Liis Vihul, 'Respect for sovereignty in cyberspace', *Texas Law Review*, 2017, 95:1639, 1646–1647.

15 Island of Palmas (Netherlands v. US), 2 RIAA 829, 838, Permanent Court of Arbitration, 1928.

16 UN Charter, Article 2(4).

17 The issue is discussed at length in Michael M Schmitt, Liis Vihul (eds), *Tallinn manual 2.0 on the international law applicable to cyber operations* (hereafter *Tallinn manual 2.0*), 2017, pp. 11–29.

18 *Tallinn manual 2.0*, p. 20.

19 *Tallinn manual 2.0*, p. 20–21.

20 US Department of Defense, Office of General Counsel, *International law framework for employing cyber capabilities in military operations: memorandum for commanders of the combatant commands*, 19 January 2017, p. 3. See also Gary P Corn, Robert Taylor, 'Sovereignty in the Age of Cyber', *American Journal of International Law Unbound*, 2017, 111:207–212. For a contrary position to that of the Department of Defense, see Michael N Schmitt, Liis Vihul, 'Respect for sovereignty in cyberspace'; Michael N Schmitt, Liis Vihul, 'Sovereignty in cyberspace: lex lata vel non?', *American Journal of International Law Unbound*, 2017, 111:213–218.

21 US Department of Defense, Office of General Counsel, *International law framework for employing cyber capabilities in military operations: memorandum for commanders of the combatant commands*, p. 4.

22 UN Charter, Article 2(1).

23 UN Charter, Article 2(4).

24 UK Ministry of Defence, *Cyber primer*, 2nd edition, 2016, Annex 1A, pp. 12–14, online.

25 *Tallinn manual 2.0*, p. 317.

26 See, for example, Military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. US), judgment, 1986 ICJ, rep. 14, para. 292, 27 June 1986.

27 UK Ministry of Defence, *Cyber primer*.

28 *Tallinn manual 2.0*, p. 333.

29 Relatedly, when the Security Council, widely perceived to be operating under Article 41, authorised a naval blockade in the Iraq–Kuwait war in 1990, it was questioned whether the council had introduced and applied 'Article 41 and a half'. See Security Council resolution 665, 25 August 1990, para. 1; Yoram Dinstein, *War, aggression and self-defence*, 5th edition, 2011, p. 320.

30 Security Council resolution 2249, 20 November 2015, para. 5.

31 Nakashima, 'US military cyber operation to attack ISIS last year sparked heated debate over alerting allies'.

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33 Statement by Mr Kerry on behalf of the US, UN doc. S/PV.7527, 30 September 2015, p. 22; Statement by Mr Delattre on behalf of France, UN doc. S/PV.7565, 20 November 2015, p. 2.

34 See, for example, General Assembly resolution 56/83, annex, Responsibility of states for internationally wrongful acts, 28 January 2002, article 20.

35 Nakashima, 'US military cyber operation to attack ISIS last year sparked heated debate over alerting allies'.

36 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, HR 2810, 115th Congress, § 1621(f) (2017–2018).

37 US Secretary of Defense, letters (identical) to John McCain, Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, US Senate; Jack Reed, Ranking Member of the Committee on Armed Services, US Senate; William M 'Mac' Thornberry, Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, US House of Representatives; Adam Smith, Ranking Member of the Committee on Armed Services, US House of Representatives (17 October 2017), online.

38 On this topic, see also Robert Chesney, 'Cyber operations and the draft NDAA: analyzing section 1621 (and SecDef's objections)', *Lawfare*, 20 October 2017, online; Robert Chesney, 'The NDAA FY18's cyber provisions: what emerged from conference?', *Lawfare*, 14 November 2017, online.

39 Chesney, 'Cyber operations and the draft NDAA: analyzing section 1621 (and SecDef's objections)'; Chesney, 'The NDAA FY18's cyber provisions: what emerged from conference?'

Appendixes

Appendix 1:
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFRICOM	US Africa Command
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ANZCTC	Australia – New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQIS	Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group (Philippines)
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
AUMF	Authorization for Use of Military Force (US)
AUSTRAC	Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre
BCJI	Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (Morocco)
BNPT	Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (National Counterterrorism Agency, Indonesia)
CJFLCC	Combined Joint Force Land Component Command
CNLT	Commission Nationale de la Lutte contre le Terrorisme (Tunisia)
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CTS	Counter Terrorism Service (Iraq)
CVE	countering violent extremism
DAESH	Dawla al Islamiya fi Iraq wa Sham
DHS	Department of Homeland Security (US)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (US)
FSB	Federal Security Service (Russia)
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
GDP	gross domestic product
GNA	Government of National Accord (Libya)
GSIM	Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (Algeria)

HTF	homegrown terrorist fighter
IED	improvised explosive device
INSLM	Independent National Security Legislation Monitor (Australia)
IS	Islamic State
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and The Levant
ISIS-K	Islamic State–Khorasan
ISR	intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
JCTT	Joint Counter-Terrorism Team
JeM	Jaish-e-Muhammad (Pakistan)
JNIM	Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (Mali)
JuD	Jamaat-ud-Dawa (Pakistan)
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba (Pakistan)
LNA	Libyan National Army
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines)
MINUSMA	UN Multinational Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Directorate of Security (Afghanistan)
NSW	New South Wales
PJCIS	Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (Australia)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*)
PNR	passenger name record
PREACT	Partnership for Regional East Africa Counter-Terrorism
PVE	preventing violent extremism
RIVE	Research and Intervention on Violent Extremists (France)
SNA	Somali National Army
SOI	subject of interest
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Armed Forces)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
YPG	People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*)

Appendix 2:
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Isaac's work has appeared in Defense Studies, Contemporary Security Policy, Comparative Strategy and Studies in Conflict & Terrorism as well as the Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights and the Texas Journal of Women and the Law.

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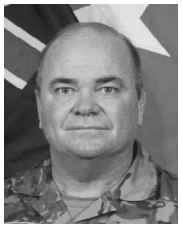

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Roger Noble enlisted in the Australian Army in 1984 and began military life as a staff cadet at the Royal Military College. In 1986, he graduated from the Australian Defence Force Academy, where he was awarded the Commander-in-Chief's Medal. He subsequently graduated from the Royal Military College in 1987 and was allocated to the Royal Australian Armoured Corps.

Roger has held a variety of non-corps postings, including as ADC to the Chief of Army, Staff Officer Grade 2 Operations at Strategic Command and SO1 Concepts in Army Headquarters. He was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for his performance at Strategic Command and Army Headquarters. In 2016, Roger was deployed with the US 101st Airborne Division as Deputy Coalition Land Force Commander, Iraq. Promoted to Major General in November 2016, he was posted as Deputy Commander US Army Pacific from 1 March 2017. Roger has completed six operational tours of duty.

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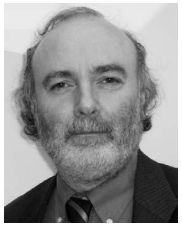

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Clive Walker is Professor Emeritus of Criminal Justice Studies at the School of Law, University of Leeds, where he served as the Director of the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies (1987–2000) and as Head of School (2000–2005, 2010). Clive has written extensively on terrorism issues, and many of his papers and books have been published not only in the UK but also in several other jurisdictions, especially the US. In 2003, he was a special adviser to the UK parliamentary select committee that scrutinised what became the *Civil Contingencies Act 2004*. Based on that experience, he published *The Civil Contingencies Act 2004: risk, resilience and the law in the United Kingdom* (Oxford University Press, 2006). His books on terrorism are cited widely and include *Terrorism and the law* (Oxford University Press, 2011), *The anti-terrorism legislation*, (3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2014), and the *Routledge handbook of law and terrorism* (Routledge, 2015). More recent works have concentrated on the financing of terrorism, including C King, C Walker (eds), *Dirty assets: emerging issues in the regulation of criminal and terrorist assets* (Ashgate, Farnham, 2014) and C King, C Walker, J Gurule (eds), *Handbook of criminal and terrorism financing law* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018). In 2010, Clive was appointed by the Home Office as Senior Adviser to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation. He became a Queen's Counsel (Hons) in 2016.