The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israeli Intelligence & Heritage Commemoration Center

March 1, 2015

The International Coalition Campaign against ISIS – Initial Analysis (First Six Months)[1]

ISIS's defeat in Kobanî, northern Syria ... **and its success in Libya**

Left: Kurdish fighters in Kobanî do a victory dance after the city was taken from ISIS (Facebook page affiliated with the Peshmerga, January 26 2015). Right: ISIS establishes itself in Libya. An ISIS military display in the Libyan city of Sirte (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS, February 18, 2015).

Overview

1. On **September 10, 2014**, American President Barack Obama announced the launching of **a comprehensive campaign against ISIS aimed to "degrade and ultimately destroy" it.** The campaign strategy had several aspects: **intensive airstrikes** in Syria and Iraq; **strengthening local forces** in Syria and Iraq (the Iraqi army, the Kurdish forces, the so-called moderate Syrian rebel organizations); **damaging ISIS's sources of power** (especially its financial resources); and **improving the methods used by the United States and the international community to cope with the incidence of foreign fighters joining ISIS**. All that was intended to weaken ISIS without significant American forces on the ground in Syria or Iraq.

[1] Complete Version

2. To implement the campaign, within a relatively short period of time the United States put together **an international coalition of Western and Arab countries** for active (if symbolic) participation or support. Some of the Western allies (particularly France and Britain) joined the United States in carrying out airstrikes in Iraq, while a number of Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan and Bahrain) carried out airstrikes in Syria. Jordan also joined in attacking ISIS targets in Iraq after the captured Jordanian pilot was burned to death by ISIS operatives. Egypt carried out airstrikes against ISIS in Libya after 21 Egyptian Copts were beheaded, although not as part of the coalition (on February 16, 2015).

3. The **Syrian Observatory for Human Rights** reported that **1,601 people had been killed in Syria by coalition force attacks** between September 23, 2014 (when the airstrikes began) and February 23, 2015. Of them, **1,465 were ISIS operatives, most of them not Syrians** (Syriahr.com, February 23, 2015). The number of fatalities relates mainly to Kobanî and probably does not include ISIS operatives killed in other locations in Syria and Iraq. In ITIC assessment the overall number of ISIS fatalities is **several thousand**. That would indicate that **the airstrikes and the losses incurred by ISIS in the fighting hurt the organization**, which has a limited order of battle (it is generally estimated that the organization has between 25,000 and 30,000 operatives). **Nevertheless, at this point ISIS's losses have not significantly undermined its military capabilities or its control of large sections of the population in Syria and Iraq**.

4. The coalition campaign against ISIS is **expected to last several years** (at least until 2019, according to some American estimates), and may extend beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq. However, at this point, half a year after the launching of the anti-ISIS campaign, it is possible to form an **initial assessment of its impact on ISIS,** and of the strengths and weaknesses of the coalition's strategies.

5. **The first six months of the campaign indicate no clear-cut balance between success and failure**:

1) **Syria and Iraq**

A. The coalition, with the support (significant, in ITIC assessment) of local forces, **has succeeded in containing the spread of ISIS to other regions and has kept it from cleaning out pockets of resistance in extensive areas under its control** (the provinces of Al-Anbar in Iraq and Deir al-Zor, Al-Raqqah and Al-Hasakah in Syria). ISIS's most outstanding

failure during the past half year was **the blow dealt by the reinforced Kurdish YPG forces in Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab)** after four months of fighting (which began after the coalition campaign was launched). In **Tikrit**, north of Baghdad, ISIS is currently facing an attack by the Iraqi army to retake the city.

B. The coalition attacks resulted in **a significant decrease in ISIS' revenues, especially oil revenues**. That harmed its ability to govern (i.e., providing civilian services to the large population under its control). However, the continuing airstrikes and the decrease in revenue **have not yet shaken its hold over the extensive areas it conquered in Syria and Iraq**, especially its two main strongholds, Mosul (Iraq) and Al-Raqqah (Syria).

2) **ISIS's successes beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq**:

A. While contained in Syria and Iraq, **ISIS is establishing itself in other Middle Eastern countries**, using local jihadi organizations which swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and created "provinces" of the self-declared Islamic State. Its most prominent successes have been in **Libya and Egypt (focused in the Sinai Peninsula). Thus ISIS has created a potential threat to Egypt, Israel, and the countries of North Africa and southern Europe**.

B. ISIS also had **two important successes in the international arena** during the past half year: one was that **the influx of foreign fighters who joined its ranks continued** (although it has faced certain difficulties created by the preventive measures taken by various countries). The other was that **jihadist operatives in Western countries** (not necessarily those who joined ISIS in Syria) responded positively to ISIS's propaganda campaign and **carried out attacks in their own countries against government and Jewish targets**, especially in the coalition countries (so far apparently the attacks have not been orchestrated or organized).

C. **ISIS's jihadist ideology is spreading rapidly and its image and brand as a leading jihadi organization remain undamaged and intact**. **ISIS is ahead in its rivalry with Ayman al-Zawahiri's Al-Qaeda, at least for the present**.

6. The international campaign focuses on Iraq and Syria, however, during the past half year it has been faced with a **series of challenges** in other countries. The main challenges are the **spread of ISIS** to **other Arab-Muslim countries**; **the influx of foreign fighters** joining the ranks of the jihadi organizations; the increasing jihadi terrorism in Western countries and **the strong attraction of Salafist-jihadi ideology** in both the Arab-Muslim world and the Muslim communities in the West. As the campaign continues, **the coalition will have to reexamine its concepts and strategies in the face of the challenges.**

7. **As far as Israel is concerned, the establishment of ISIS and other global jihad organizations in Syria and Iraq poses two primary threats**:

1) The **increased threat of terrorism from Israel's southern and northern borders**:

A. The terrorist threats to Israel's southern borders increased when **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, the leading terrorist organization in Egypt, became an active "province" in the Islamic State** (although the organization clearly gives priority to its campaign against the Egyptian regime).

B. In the north, **ISIS does not yet have a foothold in the Golan Heights** (and in south Syria in general). Of the rebel organizations deployed in the central and southern Golan Heights, **Al-Nusra Front**, the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, is the strongest (although the priority of Al-Nusra Front and the rebel organizations is currently fighting the Syrian regime, which, with support from Hezbollah, is trying to oust them from the Golan Heights).

2) **Turning Jewish institutions and Jewish figures in Western countries into targets of terrorism:** during the past half year jihadists in Western countries, some of them in solidarity with ISIS, carried out a wave of individual terrorist attacks on governmental targets. At the same time, Jewish targets were also attacked (in Belgium, Denmark and France attacks targeted a Jewish museum, a synagogue and a kosher supermarket). **In ITIC assessment attacks on Jewish targets will continue**. **In addition global jihad supporters may also attack Israeli targets in Western countries**.

The Structure of this Study

8. **Five aspects of ISIS's successes and failures will be examined**:

1) Containing ISIS's wave of success in Syria and Iraq.

2) ISIS's establishment beyond Syria and Iraq (i.e., Egypt and Libya).

3) Countries where ISIS has been contained or has failed, so far, to establish itself.

4) The lack of significant growth in ISIS's order of battle.

5) The wave of jihadi-inspired terrorist attacks in Western countries.

Containing ISIS's Wave of Success in Syria and Iraq

Syria

Syria (Google Maps)

9. **In Syria the momentum of ISIS's successes was contained by the combined efforts of the local forces (primarily Kurdish) and the coalition airstrikes and logistic support**. The most important achievement on the ground was the Kurdish YPG's retaking of the Kurdish city of Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab), situated close to the Turkish border, and expelling ISIS from the surrounding rural area. The fighting

around Kobanî continues and the Kurdish forces threaten to wrest the city of Tel Abiad (east of Kobanî) from ISIS. The attack on the region of Kobanî, for which ISIS brought in several thousand fighters, began in the middle of September 2014, shortly after the United States declared its campaign, and became a kind of test case for the effectiveness of the campaign and the military capabilities of the Kurds against ISIS.

10. **That ended with the defeat of ISIS after four months of fighting**. The Kurdish fighters retook Kobanî and the surrounding rural area and killed several thousand ISIS operatives. The main probable cause of ISIS's defeat was the difficulties it had in waging extended fighting in an urban setting against the strongly-motivated Kurds, who were familiar with the territory and were determined to defend it. The coalition airstrikes and logistic support also contributed to ISIS's defeat, although it seems that the military capabilities of the Kurds were the **deciding factor**.

11. A main lesson to be learned from Kobanî, relevant for other battle zones in Syria and Iraq, is that **airstrikes alone are not sufficient and that skilled ground forces are necessary for decisive victory** (the Americans are currently trying to apply the lesson by training a skilled Iraqi army for the attack on Mosul). Another lesson learned is that ISIS is a tough nut to crack and the coalition will have to wage a strenuous campaign to take control of its strongholds in Syria and Iraq (ISIS forces held out for months in Kobanî against the pressure of the Kurds and the coalition).

The region of Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab) near the Syria-Turkey border, where ISIS suffered its most significant defeat since the beginning of the international campaign (Google maps).

Video in which an ISIS operative admits that the organization was defeated in Kobanî (A'amaq News Agency, January 31, 2015). ISIS's propaganda machine attempted to minimize the importance of the defeat and to divert attention to other issues.

12. ISIS has so far failed to clean out pockets of resistance in other battle zones in Syrian provinces under its control, and has not gained a foothold in new areas in central and southern Syria:

1) **Failure to clean out the significant pockets of resistance**: During the past half year ISIS has made an unsuccessful attempt to clean out significant pockets of resistance in large areas in northern and eastern Syria under its control. The military airfield in the **Deir al-Zor province**, controlled by the Assad regime, is the most significant area of resistance. In early December 2014 ISIS launched an attack on the airfield and surrounding towns and villages. Since then (end of February 2015) there have been battles at the airfield between ISIS and the Syrian army (supported by the Sunni Shu'aytat tribe), so far without a decisive outcome. In addition, the city of **Al-Hasakah**, in northeastern Syria, is controlled by the Kurdish forces (YPG) and significant pockets of anti-ISIS resistance remain throughout the entire Al-Hasakah province.

2) **ISIS's failure to extend its influence and gain a foothold in new areas in central and southern Syria**:

A. During the past half year **ISIS has failed to establish itself in the Damascus region** (where it has a presence), **in southern Syria** (the Suwayda and Daraa provinces, where Al-Nusra Front is dominant among the rebel organizations) and **along the Syria-Lebanon border in the Al-Qalamoun region** (where ISIS does have a presence but has been faced

with difficulties from Hezbollah and suffers from internal disputes). ISIS has tried both directly (by means of its operatives and local "emirs") and indirectly (by means of other rebel organizations that swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) to gain a foothold in central and southern Syria.

B. So far ISIS's attempts to spread to and gain a foothold in central and southern Syria have not met with notable success. **Thus it can be said that the regions under its control in northern and eastern Syria remain as they were at the beginning of the coalition campaign**. It can also be said that **Al-Nusra Front**, ISIS's rival, **is the dominant force in the central and southern Golan Heights**, regions held by the rebel organizations (and now under attack from the Syrian army with the support of Hezbollah), and that **at this point ISIS does not have a significant presence near the Israeli border**.

13. **Influence of the airstrikes on ISIS's governance capabilities**:

1) The ongoing coalition airstrikes and the sharp decline in oil revenues (See below) have made it difficult for ISIS to provide governance. James Clapper, director of national intelligence (DNI), told a Senate panel that ISIS's financial difficulties had recently **forced it to cut pay to its fighters** (Washingtonpost.com, February 26, 2015). The tribal population in eastern Syria continues its resistance (although ISIS's well-oiled propaganda machine, which controls information leaving the area, does not publicize its governance problems, and rather stresses its achievements).

2) However, so far the coalition airstrikes have not yet shaken ISIS's control over the population. It is apparently still **supported by the local residents**. That is because ISIS provides them with vital services, and because **it has managed – brutally – to enforce a certain amount of law and order** (through its morality and ordinary police forces, and through the Islamic religious courts).

3) Regarding ISIS's **economic situation**, the airstrikes hurt its ability to refine and market oil and, **according to American reports, its oil revenues have declined significantly** (an unverified Pentagon report from mid-February 2015 noted that once again oil revenues were not ISIS's leading source of income). However, ISIS is still **the richest terrorist organization**, enjoying revenues from various sources (donations, taxes, various types of criminal activities). That enables it to allot resources for fighting, military buildup, administrating the

various provinces of the Islamic State and supporting terrorist organizations beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq that have sworn allegiance.

Iraq

Iraq (Google Maps)

14. **During the past half year ISIS's momentum in Iraq was contained**, having peaked in June 2014 with the occupation of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, taken from the Iraqi army. ISIS's attacks in northern and western Iraq were contained because of the military capabilities demonstrated by the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and to a lesser degree by the improved fighting capabilities of the Iraqi army and the Shi'ite militias. The local forces in Iraq received air and logistic support from the coalition, an important contribution to containing ISIS's momentum, although most of the work was done by the local forces themselves. At the same time (but without coordination) **Iranian experts have been operating on the ground** to support the Iraqi army and the Shi'ite militias, also contributing to their stance against ISIS. **The Iranian Qods Force, commanded by Qassem Suleimani**, provides the Shi'ite militias and Iraqi army with weapons and advisors, among other things.

Hamid Taqavi, a brigadier general in the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards, killed in battle in the region of the Shi'ite city of Samara, north of Baghdad, at the end of December 2014.

15. The containing of ISIS's momentum in Iraq had several aspects:

1) **ISIS's failure to clean out the pockets of resistance in the Al-Anbar province**: ISIS controls most of the large Sunni Al-Anbar province, but there are still significant pockets of resistance ISIS has been trying to clean out for several months, so far unsuccessfully. The Iraqi army operates in those pockets, supported by local Sunni tribesmen and with help from the coalition. Since the end of September 2014 ISIS forces have made an effort to clean out those resistance pockets, so far without success: **Ramadi**, the capital city of the Al-Anbar province, is partially controlled by the Iraqi army, which announced on February 21, 2015 that it had contained an ISIS attack on the city's administration buildings. Other pockets of resistance in the province include the **city of Haditha** (besieged by ISIS), **and the Ayn Al-Asad air base near the city of Hit, the second largest military air base in Iraq** (located about five kilometers, or three miles, from the city of Al-Baghdadi, most of which is controlled by ISIS) and the city of **Haditha**, under ISIS siege.

The three major pockets of anti-ISIS resistance in the Al-Anbar province, circled in red: (from left to right) Haditha, the Ayn Al-Asad air base, and Ramadi, the capital city, all three lying on the road from Baghdad to Syria along the Euphrates. The city of Fallujah, circled in black, is an ISIS stronghold in Al-Anbar province.

2) **The failure to clear the region of the oil city of Baiji and Samara, both north of Baghdad, and the struggle for control of Tikrit**: In November 2014, five months after Baiji was occupied by ISIS, the Iraqi army managed to retake it **and enter the area of the oil refineries**. However, ISIS controls the regions around the city and battles between it and the Iraqi army continue. The **city of Samara** is mostly controlled by Shi'ite militias. ISIS forces operate around the city and are trying to cut it off from the roads leading south to Baghdad and north to Tikrit. Currently (the beginning of March 2015) **ISIS in Tikrit is facing an attack of the Iraqi army**, which is planning to retake the city.

Pictures from the battles between ISIS and the Iraqi Shi'ite militias near the city of Samara, north of Baghdad (File sharing website, February 13, 2015).

An Iraqi army force en route to attacking Tikrit (Al-Arabiya TV, March 1, 2015).

3) **At various locations in the regions of Kirkuk, Mosul, Sinjar (west of Mosul), and in the Nineveh province** local clashes continue between ISIS and Kurdish Peshmerga forces. ISIS had no particular successes in the clashes and did not significantly enlarge the territory under its control.

16. **ISIS is working to establish its governance in Mosul, a city of more than a million people, and in other regions it occupied**. It would seem that so far the coalition attacks have not had great influence on the services ISIS provides to the local population, and **there do not seem to be signs of grassroots dissatisfaction** (although there is no reliable information, since ISIS closely supervises information about areas under its domination). ISIS employs brutality to rule the Mosul population, employing a limited number of operatives (estimated at several thousand). ISIS's control of large Sunni populations can be understood through the Sunni-Shi'ite schism. During the past few months the flames of the schism were fanned by violence carried out by Shi'ite militias against Sunni inhabitants returning to their homes from locations where ISIS was ousted.

17. **The coalition agenda includes an attack on Mosul, to be carried out by the Iraqi army and local Iraqi auxiliary forces**. Senior American army officers recently told the American media that the attack would occur in the fall of 2015 (the initial target date was April-May 2015, but it has been postponed to August-September). Following the American media announcements ISIS began deploying in Mosul for a possible attack, blowing up the runway at the Mosul airport and booby-trapping the bridges over the Tigris river.

18. An attack on Mosul, if in fact it is carried out as stated by the media, **will be an important test case for the United States, the Iraqi army and ISIS**. Retaking Mosul may turn the wheel back in Iraq and strike a formidable blow to ISIS's image, undermining its foothold in Syria. However, if the attack fails, or is postponed to a much later date, ISIS may be encouraged to undertake a renewed military effort to expand the area in northern and western Iraq under its control, and **possibly to increase its pressure on Baghdad,** which has tapered off in recent months.

ISIS's Establishment beyond Syria and Iraq (i.e., Egypt and Libya)

Overview

19. When the international coalition's campaign began ISIS was riding the crest of a wave of success in Iraq (including the occupation of Mosul and other regions) and Syria (establishing its control of the northern and eastern parts of the country). During the first six months of the campaign **ISIS extended its influence in Syria and Iraq to countries in North Africa (Libya and Egypt), increasing its potential threat to the West and the Arab world**.

20. Today ISIS officially has **six provinces in countries outside Syria and Iraq: five are the Sinai Peninsula, Libya, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen**, and were declared as Islamic State provinces as of November 13, 2014. The sixth, **Khorasan** (**Pakistan-Afghanistan**), was declared a province on January 26, 2015. According to the seventh issue of Dabiq, ISIS's English-language publication, the seventh province is expected to be established in the **Caucasus**. Two provinces where jihadi organizations joined ISIS and are waging a terrorist-guerilla campaign against the local authorities are **Egypt (mainly in the Sinai Peninsula) and Libya**. **Despite its formal announcements, ISIS has not yet succeeded in establishing itself** in the other provinces.[2]

[2] It would appear that ISIS is aware of the gap between swearing allegiance and declaring the establishment of a new province on the one hand, and the situation on the ground which sometimes makes it difficult for ISIS to expand on the other. To bridge the gap ISIS recently established criteria for turning a local jihadi organization into a new Islamic State province.

Map from a November 13, 2014 ISIS video showing the provinces it claimed had sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Algeria, Libya, the Sinai Peninsula, Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Reblop.com, November 17, 2014). Actually ISIS has established itself in the Sinai Peninsula and Libya, while its expansion to other countries where provinces were declared has met with difficulties.

21. ISIS's efforts to expand in the Arab-Muslim world are carried out by **proxies** and local jihadist operatives. **ISIS invests certain resources** to encourage them (including guidance, funds, weapons and media campaigns), although **it is clearly concentrating its efforts on fighting in Syria and Iraq**. The most powerful organization so far to swear allegiance to ISIS is **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis**, which is waging a terrorist campaign focused on the Sinai Peninsula against the Egyptian regime.

22. Two of ISIS's most prominent successes so far have been in **Libya (a disintegrating Arab state)** and **the Sinai Peninsula (where the level of Egyptian governance is low)**. However, it has failed to establish itself in countries where **it has met with determined resistance from strong local forces, such as the Al-Qaeda-oriented Sunni jihadi organization** and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan**; the Shi'ite jihadi organizations supported by Iran** (Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi rebels in Yemen); and **strong local security forces in countries unaffected by the regional upheaval** (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria). It has also been unsuccessful in establishing itself in Israel and the Palestinian territories, due to the absence of broad popular support and the effective counterterrorism actions of **the Israeli security forces** (Israel, Judea and Samaria), **Hamas' security forces** (Gaza Strip) and **the PA's security forces** (Judea and Samaria).

Two ISIS Success Stories: Egypt and Libya

23. Egypt and Libya are two countries where ISIS has successfully established itself in the six months since the initiation of the coalition campaign, using local organizations as proxies (Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in Egypt and local jihadi organizations in Libya). Presumably veterans of the fighting in Syria and Iraq contributed to ISIS's successes, especially in Libya. ISIS's gaining a foothold in North Africa **potentially threatens the security of Israel (through the Sinai Peninsula), Egypt, the countries of southern Europe (through Libya), other North African countries (with Algeria and Tunisia in the crosshairs), and sub-Saharan African countries**. **Boko Haram in Nigeria** recently swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (although the practical significance of the step is unclear).

24. **The footholds gained by ISIS in Egypt and Libya are the following:**

1) **Egypt**

A. On November 10, 2014, two months after the launching of the coalition campaign, **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis**, the organization leading the terrorist campaign against the Egyptian regime, publicly swore allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Three days later **Al-Nusra Front** declared the Sinai Peninsula had become **the Sinai province of the Islamic State**. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis' joining the ranks of the Islamic State marked **ISIS's first expansion to a country beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq**.

B. In the months that have passed since then, **the jihadists in the Sinai province have demonstrated high operational capabilities in their campaign against the Egyptian security forces**. So far they have attacked at Karam el-Qawadis, south of El-Arish (where they killed 33 Egyptian security force soldiers) and carried out combined attacks on Egyptian targets in the northern Sinai Peninsula (where they killed approximately 30 Egyptian army soldiers). However, the terrorist attacks carried out by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis have been more modest since they attack within Egypt itself, where the security forces are more effective. ISIS seeks to move its terrorist campaign against the Egyptian regime from the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt itself, copying the model of Iraq (which ISIS considers a success).

An ISIS operative in the Sinai Peninsula carries a Strela SA-7 surface-to-air shoulder-carried missile launcher (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS, February 2015; File-sharing website, February 5, 2015). Apparently the ISIS operatives in the Sinai Peninsula receive support from ISIS in Syria and Iraq. ISIS's establishing itself in Libya may strengthen the ties between the ISIS branch in the Sinai Peninsula and the jihadi network in Libya.

ISIS operatives in the Sinai province display their presence (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS; File-sharing website, March 1, 2015).

2) **Libya**

A. ISIS managed to infiltrate Libya by exploiting the chaos that engulfed the country. Libya has two rival governments, a secular government in Tobruk and an Islamic government in Tripoli, which fight each other and the rival militias which control the various regions. Within the chaos, **in early November 2014 ISIS succeeding in staking a claim in Libya when a local jihadi organization in the eastern city of Dernah** joined the ranks of the Islamic State and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

B. In the four months after the establishment of the first province, ISIS's influence in Libya increased and three additional ISIS provinces were declared: **Barqa province** in the east, **Tripolitania province** in the west, and **Fezzan province** in the south. The jihadists continue to gather momentum and held a victory parade in mid-February 2015 in the city of **Sirte** (See pictures).

C. The Tripolitania province has carried out two attacks to date which made an impact: **a showcase attack at the five-star Corinthia Hotel** in Tripoli, **and the execution of 21 abducted Egyptian migrant workers** (in response to an Egyptian airstrike on ISIS targets in Libya, the beginning of new phase in the campaign against ISIS).

Left: ISIS operatives hold victory parade in Sirte (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS, February 18, 2015). Right: Local jihadist militia operatives from the Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam (the Islamic Youth Shura Council) in Dernah carry the ISIS flag. Dernah was the first place in Libya ISIS gained a foothold using a local jihadi organization (Mobtada.com).

Left: The Corinthia Hotel during the attack (Al-Minbar al-Alami al-Jihadi, January 27, 2015) Right: The Corinthia Hotel in ISIS's Tripolitania province before the attack (Al-Minbar al-Alami al-Jihadi, January 27, 2015).

The 21 Egyptian Copts before they were beheaded by ISIS operatives of the Tripolitania province (From a video produced by Al-Hayat and posted to the social networks; Twitter, February 15, 2015).

Countries Where ISIS Has Been Contained or Has Failed, So Far, to Establish Itself

Overview

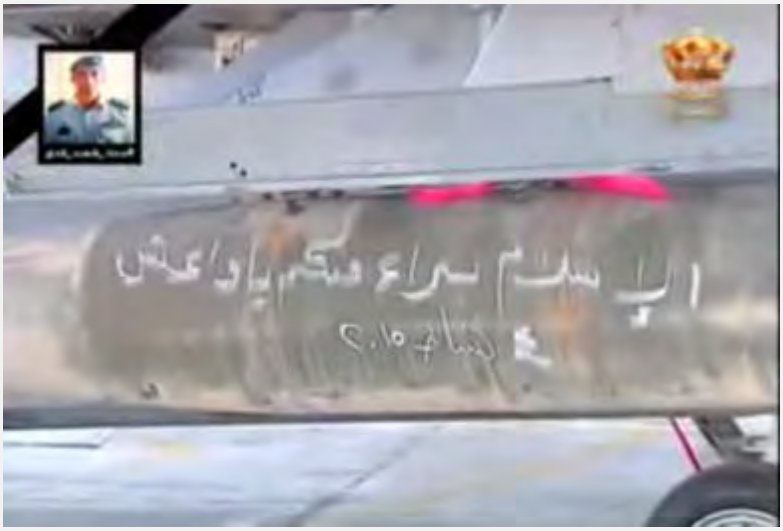
25. While ISIS has succeeded in Egypt and Libya, it has so far failed to spread to other Arab-Muslim countries (in some of which ISIS has publicly declared the establishment of a province and some in which provinces have not been established). Examples include:

1) **Jordan**

A. ISIS's successes in Syria and Iraq have been met with support and solidarity in Jordan, especially in **the southern city of Ma'an** (a traditional site of anti-regime unrest). Support increased with the return of veterans of the fighting in Syria and Iraq (in ITIC assessment more than a thousand Jordanian foreign fighters have participated in the fighting). However, as a result of the preemptive activity of the Jordanian security forces (aware of the threat ISIS poses to the regime) ISIS has not succeeded so far in establishing an organized, effective network in Jordan.

B. The brutal murder of the Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh, burned alive by ISIS operatives, did not increase ISIS's influence in Jordan but rather led to the population's closing ranks behind the regime. Jordan's immediate response was to carry out intensive airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria and Iraq in coordination with the coalition, to execute jihadist operatives, and apparently also to undertake a wave of detentions of Jordanian jihadists. The Jordanian security forces also increased inspection of the border with Syria to prevent Syrian operatives from entering the country and conducting subversive activities.

Jordanian army bombing of ISIS target in Syria as broadcast by Jordanian TV. At the upper left is a picture of Moaz al-Kasasbeh, the Jordanian pilot murdered by ISIS (YouTube, February 5, 2015).



The inscription on one of the Jordanian planes that attacked ISIS reads, "Islam is innocent of you, ISIS, February 4, 2015" (i.e., there is no connection between ISIS and Islam). At the upper left is a picture of Moaz al-Kasasbeh, the Jordanian pilot murdered by ISIS (YouTube, February 5, 2015).

2) **Lebanon**

A. ISIS considers Lebanon important and seeks to establish an effective branch there. In recent months it has tried to gain a foothold within the Sunni population in the Beqa'a Valley (in the Sunni town of Arsal north of Baalbek) and in the Al-Qalamoun region on the Syria-Lebanon border. While ISIS does have a presence in Arsal and the Al-Qalamoun region (along with Al-Nusra Front and other rebel organizations), so far it has not been able to declare an effective emirate or Islamic State province in Lebanon.

B. ISIS's difficulties in Lebanon are mainly caused by the very powerful Shi'ite Hezbollah, supported by Iran, by the Lebanese army, and by a broad spectrum of political powers in Lebanon (including Hezbollah's rivals in the Sunni-Christian camp). Moreover, ISIS is not the only jihadi organization in Lebanon, and its Al-Nusra Front rival enjoys influence in both the Al-Qalamoun region of Syria and Lebanon itself. ISIS also suffers from internal disputes which recently resulted in the murder of the ISIS "emir" in Al-Qalamoun.

ISIS operatives in the Sunni town of Arsal, north of Baalbek (YouTube, August 5, 2014).

Notice posted at the end of January 2015 stating that ISIS would soon declare an emirate in Lebanon headed by Ahmed al-Asir (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS, January 28, 2015). In effect, so far ISIS has not succeeded in establishing itself in Lebanon.

3) **Yemen and Saudi Arabia**: On November 15, 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi issued a recording in which he claimed that jihadi organizations in Yemen and Saudi Arabia had joined the Islamic State, and that Islamic State provinces had been established in both countries. In reality, **ISIS finds it difficult to establish itself in Yemen**, where two important powers oppose it: **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**, a strong jihadi organization with its power base in south Yemen, is loyal to Ayman al-Zawahiri's Al-Qaeda; and **the Houthi Shi'ite rebels, supported by Iran**, in the north, and currently in the middle of a wave of success, having taken over Sana'a, the capital city. In Saudi Arabia itself no

Islamic State province has been established and the local security forces prevent ISIS from gaining a foothold in the kingdom.

4) **Pakistan and Afghanistan (Khorasan)**

A. On January 26, 2015, an ISIS spokesman claimed that conditions had become ripe for the establishment of another Islamic State province. According to the announcement, it would be called the **Khorasan province** and would include **Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries**.[3] **Hafez Said Khan**, a former Taliban operative, would be appointed "emir." **Note**: During the past half year ISIS has tried a number of times to gain a foothold in Pakistan and Afghanistan using local leaders and networks, exploiting the **internal disputes in the Taliban's leadership**.

B. So far **the Taliban, headed by the Mullah Omar, and Al-Qaeda headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri, have effectively contained ISIS's efforts**. Apparently, the effort to block the potential danger posed by ISIS was behind the announcement made at the beginning of September 2014 by Ayman al-Zawahiri of the establishment of a jihadi organization called "**Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent**" (AQIS). AQIS, according to the announcement, would be subordinate to Taliban leader Mullah Omar (called by Ayman al-Zawahiri "emir of the faithful").

Muslims at a mosque in India (part of the historical Khorasan, according to ISIS), wearing ISIS T-shirts (MEMRI.org, September 10, 2014). Despite declarations of support and solidarity in India and other countries in Southeast Asia, conditions are not (yet) ripe for an ISIS foothold.

[3] The ancient region of Khorasan included Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and part of present-day Iran.

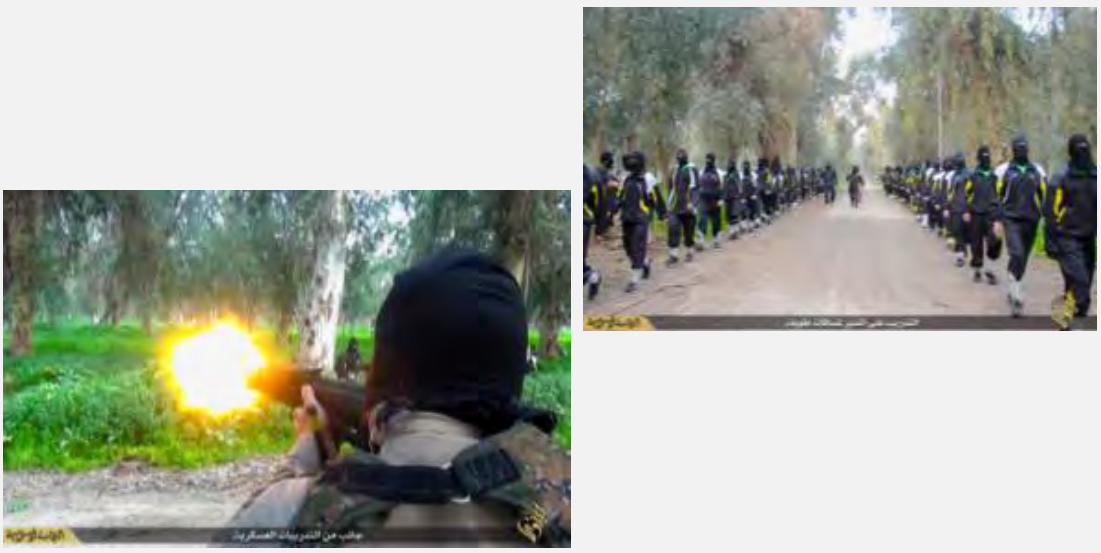
The Lack of Significant Growth in ISIS's Order of Battle

Overview

26. During the past half year ISIS has tried to increase the number of its operatives. Behind its efforts was the great gap between its needs and its ambitions. While it has taken control of approximately a third of the total area of Iraq and Syria, involving a population of between five and six million, at the beginning of the coalition campaign had a core of only **an estimated 25,000-30,000 operatives**, and requires more to be able to fight its many enemies and impose its governance. ISIS's small order of battle makes it difficult to assign forces for extended fighting at a number of locations simultaneously and to establish governance in the areas it controls, which can make it hard for ISIS to achieve its far-reaching ambitions.

27. To increase its forces ISIS has given intensive training to new Iraqi and Syrian fighters, provided attractive salaries and encouraged Arab and Western foreign fighters to join its ranks (for the children of Western foreign fighters who are sometimes brought by their parents, ISIS established schools in Al-Raqqah where English is the language of instruction). It can be assumed that during the past half year **ISIS has replaced the operatives lost in coalition airstrikes and the ground war** (estimated at several thousand, about half of them at Kobanî). However, **ISIS has not, in ITIC assessment, managed to enlarge meaningfully its order of battle to the extent it would like or in a way that would provide a response to its fighting and governance requirements and also allow it to achieve its ambitions**.

On February 28, 2015, an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted a wanted ad stating that the Islamic State needed fighters and experts in the fields of engineering, medicine, and other professions. Successful candidates were promised a monthly salary and "respectable accommodations" (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS, February 28, 2015). Similar notices have been posted in the past and were answered by foreign fighters who joined ISIS's ranks.



ISIS operatives graduate from a training course at the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi training camp in the Nineveh province in Iraq (File sharing website, February 19, 2015).

ISIS's Order of Battle Has Marched in Place during the Past Half Year

28. In mid-February 2015 American intelligence officials estimated the number of ISIS operatives in Syria and Iraq at **between 20,000 and 30,000** (Nytimes.com, February 14, 2015). **Their estimate is not significantly different from the ITIC estimate at the beginning of the coalition campaign** (25,000 operatives) **or the CIA estimate issued the day after Obama's speech** (on September 11, 2014 a CIA

spokesman said that according to intelligence assessment, ISIS had 20,000-30,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria).[4]

29. However **there has apparently been a change in the ratio of ISIS's local to foreign fighters, although not a dramatic one**. **The influx of foreign fighters rose, even despite the international campaign and the declarations that the local authorities would take steps to prevent them from leaving their countries of origin** (although recently it seems that slightly fewer foreign fighters have been joining the ranks of ISIS, possibly because of the preemptive steps). On the other hand, the number of fatalities of Iraqi and Syrian operatives has apparently been higher than among the foreign fighters, and there has not been a sufficient number of training course graduates to fill the ranks.

30. According to the mid-February 2015 American estimate, **ISIS has 20,000 foreign fighters from 90 different countries**, **more than 12,000** from the Arab states. Particularly prominent are **Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco** (Sky News Arabic, February 12, 2015). Approximately **3,400 Western foreign fighters** also joined (at the beginning of the campaign the ITIC estimate was 3,000 Western foreign fighters, almost half of them from France and Britain, thus there was an increase in the last half year, although it was not dramatic). According to DNI James Clapper, in recent years approximately **180 Americans** tried to join the ranks of the global jihad, many of whom did not succeed in reaching Syria (Statement to Senate panel reported in the Washington Post, February 26, 2015).

The Struggle against Foreign Fighters

31. The American-led international coalition campaign against ISIS **was accompanied by UN Security Council Resolution 2178**, passed on September 24, 2014 (based on Chapter VII, Article 42 of the UN Charter)."[5] The resolution reached at the end of deliberations led by President Obama stated that "[t]hrough resolution 2178 (2014), adopted unanimously...the [Security] Council condemned violent extremism and decided that Member States shall, consistent with international law, prevent the 'recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the

[4] For further information see the November 27, 2014 bulletin "ISIS: Portrait of a Terrorist Jihadi Organization."

[5] Which states that the Security Council "may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations" (http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml).

perpetration, planning of, or participation in terrorist acts... [the Security Council] decided that all States shall ensure that their legal systems provide for the prosecution, as serious criminal offences, of travel for terrorism or related training, as well as the financing or facilitation of such activities...[and] shall prevent entry or transit through their territories of any individual about whom that State had credible information of their terrorist-related intentions...' "[6] **However**, although it can be said that various Western countries did take initial steps to contain the flow of foreign fighters to Syria**, in reality the United States and the other Western coalition countries have not yet succeeded in formulating an effective strategy for dealing with the issue of foreign fighters**.

32. On March 2, 2015, **John Allen**, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, told the Atlantic Council that a "foreign fighter or ISIL sympathizer never even has to travel to or return from Syria or Iraq to become a national security threat." He added that **"[c]oalition members are beginning to take the coordinated, and hopefully increasingly concerted actions, required to meet the emerging foreign fighter threat. More than a dozen nations have changed laws and penalties to make it more difficult to travel and fight in Syria and Iraq."** However, he said, **"even with these expanded measures, foreign fighters continue to make their way to the battlefield**. We must continue to harmonize our border and customs processes and promote intelligence sharing among partners"[7] (ITIC emphasis) (Website of the American State Department, March 2, 2015).

33. **The American-led international coalition's lack of success to contain the unprecedented influx of foreign fighters into the ranks of ISIS[8]** is particularly striking because of the importance of stopping it, and in view of its potential for terrorism and subversion. The **reasons for the lack of success are**, in ITIC assessment, **ISIS's attractive Salafist-jihadi ideology** (which has become more popular since the beginning of the coalition campaign) **combined with internal, political, legal and law enforcement difficulties in many countries** (especially in the West). In addition, **it is relatively easy for foreign fighters to reach Syria, especially through Turkey** (although Turkey has recently made the transit to Syria

[6] http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11580.doc.htm
[7] http://www.state.gov/s/seci/238108.htm
[8] **Nick Rasmussen**, deputy director of the American National Counterterrorism Center, said that **the said the rate of foreign fighter travel to Syria was without precedent,** far exceeding the rate of foreigners who went to wage jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen or Somalia at any other point in the past 20 years (CBSnews.com, February 10, 2015). That is also the opinion of experts dealing with Al-Qaeda and other global jihad organizations.

more difficult, there are still political considerations that prevent effective preventive steps from being taken to significantly limit their passage).

The Wave of Jihadi-Inspired Terrorist Attacks in the West Carried Out by Operatives in Solidarity with Jihadist Ideology

Overview

34. Following the American declaration against ISIS, the organization launched a media campaign calling on its supporters in the West to kill local residents. The campaign continues and has integrated Westerners who fight in its ranks. As part of the campaign, on September 22, 2014, ISIS spokesman **Abu Muhammad al-Adnani** called on Muslims in Western countries who support ISIS to take action, each according to his ability. **Every Muslim, he said, could chose his own form of attack as long as he hurt "infidels" and helped ISIS defend itself from the campaign the "Crusader" Western countries and their Arab "agents" were waging against it**.

A video posted at the end of 2014 by Sharia4Belgium, claiming the flag of ISIS would soon fly over the palaces of Europe, and then the White House (MEMRI.org, December 11, 2015). On February 11, 2015, a Belgian court designed Sharia4Belgium as a terrorist organization and its leader, Fouad al-Qassem, was sentenced to 12 years in prison.

35. During the past half year it has become apparent that **ISIS's media campaign fell on willing ears**, and has led to in a **wave of terrorist attacks in Western countries carried out by local jihadists**. **The attacks are most likely local initiatives inspired by but not orchestrated or organized by ISIS** (in at least one

instance an organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda was involved). **The underlying terrorist potential of veterans of the fighting in Syria and Iraq has not yet been manifested in the attacks**, perhaps because the veterans prefer to keep a low profile for the time being lest they be apprehended and tried.

Jihadists Call for Terrorist Attacks in Western Countries

French-speaking ISIS operatives threaten more attacks in France (YouTube video posted on one of the ISIS-affiliated news sites, February 14, 2015).

"Abu Anwar the Canadian," a jihadist operative who appeared in an ISIS video and called for terrorist attacks in Canada (Twitter, December 7, 2014)

ISIS threatens Twitter employees, including co-founder Jack Dorsey specifically, with death over the social network's practice of blocking accounts associated with the organization. ISIS told Twitter that "your virtual war on us will cause a real war on you." It warned that Jack Dorsey and Twitter employees have "become a target for the soldiers of the Caliphate and supporters scattered among your midst!" (Theguardian.com, March 2, 2015). The difficulties posed by Twitter and other social networks can harm ISIS's successful campaign, turning them into ISIS targets.

Terrorist Attacks in Western Countries

36. **The terrorist attacks carried out in Western countries so far can be described as follows**:

1) **Timing and location**: With the exception of one, they were carried out after September 2014, when the coalition began airstrikes targeting ISIS in Syria and Iraq. **All the attacks were carried out against coalition members**. Most of the attacks (eight) were carried out in Europe, mainly France, two in Canada, and one each in the United States, Turkey and Australia. **Most of them were carried out by so-called "lone wolf" shooters**.

2) **Affiliation with global jihad organizations**: Most of the attacks were inspired by ISIS and other global jihad organizations, **although only one terrorist (who carried out the attack in Brussels) had fought in the ranks of ISIS in Syria**. It is also possible that at least one of the terrorists who attacked the editorial offices of Charlie Hebdo in Paris had been in Yemen and **had ties to AQAP**, which claimed responsibility for the attack. Most of the terrorists expressed solidarity with the global jihad organizations, some of them also said they had wanted to fight in their ranks but had not realized their ambition. In two instances the links between the terrorist operatives and the global jihad organizations were unclear (the attacks in New York and Sydney).

3) **Operational level**: With the exception of Charlie Hebdo, the attacks were relatively simple shooting attacks that did not require a high level of operational capabilities. Apparently, at least some of the attacks were spontaneous and did not involve extensive or organized planning or preparations.

4) **Targets**: **Three of the targets were Jewish** (the museum in Brussels, the kosher supermarket in Paris, and the synagogue in Copenhagen). Others included **security force personnel** (police and army) in various countries, and in two instances (Paris and Copenhagen) the attacks were **carried out against people perceived as "insulting the prophet Muhammad."**

Smartphone with an ISIS cover; the Paris kosher supermarket where the attack occurred is in the background (Twitter account affiliated with ISIS, January 24, 2015).

37. An exception in the wave of attacks in Western countries was the **Charlie Hebdo attack** in Paris, which was particularly deadly, killing 12 people. Unlike the other attacks, **it was carried out by AQAP operatives** and the organization claimed responsibility. It was carried out by **three terrorist operatives**, (two brothers of Algerian origin, who did the shooting, and a driver). The attack was obviously carefully planned over a long period of time, **possibly by a local French network affiliated with AQAP**. **Its execution showed daring and high operational capabilities**. The iconoclastic Charlie Hebdo had been in global jihad organizations' crosshairs for a number of years because of its cartoons, which the organizations perceived as insulting the prophet Muhammad.

38. **The profile of the terrorist operatives who carried out the attacks in Western countries can so far be summarized as follows**:

1) **Socio-economic background**: Most of the operatives were **Muslims, children or grandchildren of immigrants**. **Most of them had criminal records** for minor felonies. Some of them were being monitored by the authorities or had been designated as high risks.

2) **Extremist Islamization**: Many of the operatives were introduced to Salafist-jihadi Islam in prison (the prisons seem to be jihadist hothouses) or were influenced by sermons in mosques or by the Internet. Some of them were Christians who converted to Islam. Some were known to the local security services as planning to go to fight in Syria or Iraq.

3) **Claims of responsibility**: With the exception of the Charlie Hebdo attack, ISIS and the other global jihad organizations did not claim responsibility. In ITIC assessment that is an indication that the attacks were the result of local initiatives, undertaken without external direction or logistic or financial support.

Attacks Carried Out in Various Countries

Country	Date	Attack	Perpetrator	Jihadi Organization Affiliation	Notes
Brussels, Belgium	May 24, 2014	Shooting attack in the Jewish Museum in Brussels. Four killed, two of them Israelis.	Mehdi Nemmouche, French Muslim, criminal record, family originally from Algeria	Went to Syria in January 2013 and fought in the ranks of ISIS. Returned to France after a number of months.	The only terrorist attack carried out before the campaign against ISIS began.
Quebec, Canada	September 20, 2014	Canadian soldier run over and killed, another soldier wounded.	The driver was Martin Couture-Rouleau, 25. Converted to Islam the previous year, wanted to die as a shaheed.	His Facebook page had a picture of ISIS's flag and expressed solidarity with the organization.	His name was on the list of extremist Muslims monitored by the local security sources to prevent his leaving the country.
Ottawa, Canada	September 22, 2014	Canadian soldier shot to death at a national memorial. Shooter then entered the Parliament building and began firing.	Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, 32, born in Montreal. Criminal record. Recently converted to Islam. Father of Libyan origin.	Was apparently planning to fly to Syria.	Designated a high security risk and his passport was confiscated.

Queens, New York	October 23, 2014	Man armed with an axe attacked four police officers and a nearby woman.	Zale Thompson, 32, converted to Islam two years previously.	Surfed websites affiliated with the global jihad.	Unclear if his attack was connected o the global jihad.
Vienna, Austria	October 30, 2014	Boy aged 14 detained on suspicion of planning to blow up IEDs in crowded areas.	Son of Turkish immigrant.	Recruited by ISIS through the Internet and was offered money in return for the attack.	
Sydney, Australia	December 15, 2014	Man took over coffee house and held 20 people hostage, killing two.	Manteghi Boroujerdi, aka Sheikh Man Haron Monis, criminal record, of Iranian origin.	Link to ISIS unclear.	
Tours, France	December 20, 2014	Man broke into police station, shouted "Allahu akbar" and attacked police with a knife.	Bertrand Nzohabonayo, born in Burundi, known to police, brother known as devout Muslim.	His brother considered going to Syria. Two days before the attack posted a picture of the ISIS flag on his Facebook page.	
Istanbul, Turkey	January 6, 2015	Woman with grenade carried out suicide bombing attack in police station. Police officer also killed.	Diana Ramazanova, 18, from Dagestan.	Widow of ISIS operative, Norwegian citizen of Chechen origin killed in Syria.	
Paris, France	January 7, 2015	Shooting attack in the offices of Charlie Hebdo, 12 killed.	Said and Sharif Kouachi, 32 and 34, brothers, Muslims from Algeria, affiliated with AQAP.	Both affiliated with AQAP.	
Paris, France	January 9, 2015	Shooting attack in kosher supermarket, four killed.	Amedy Coulibaly, 32, of Malian origin. Criminal record. Jihadist operative, ISIS supporter.	Declared himself an ISIS operative and supporter of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. His life partner fled to Syria and appeared on an ISIS propaganda film.	

Nice, France	February 3, 2015	Three French soldiers stabbed while securing the Jewish community center.	Mousa Coulibaly, 30, parents from Mali, criminal record.	Apparently on route to join one of the jihad organizations in Syria.	The week before the attack he was expelled from Turkey to France, detained and interrogated by the French authorities.
Copenhagen, Denmark	February 14, 2015	Shooting attack in coffee house targeting event for freedom of expression. One man killed.	Omar Abdel Hamid al-Hussein, 22, of Palestinian origin. Criminal record.	May have undergone Islamic radicalization while in prison. Posted a video on his Facebook page advocating jihad.	
Copenhagen, Denmark	February 15, 2015	Shooting attack at Jewish bat mitzvah celebration, Jewish security guard killed.	Omar Abdel Hamid al-Hussein, 22, of Palestinian origin. Criminal record.	May have undergone Islamic radicalization while in prison. Posted a video on his Facebook page advocating jihad.	