Overview

The stabbing attack near London Bridge (two killed and three wounded) was the first attack carried out in Britain and the West in general in 2019 for which ISIS claimed responsibility. The attacker was Usman Khan, a British citizen of Pakistani origin, with the familiar profile of terrorists who are liable to carry out ISIS-inspired attacks in Europe: he was of Muslim origin, had a Salafist-jihadist ideology, and had served time in prison (where prisoners often undergo radicalization). What was exceptional in his case was the practical terrorist experience he had gained in a terrorist network exposed in Britain in 2010 which planned several attacks, including detonating a bomb in the London Stock Exchange.

The stabbing attack near London Bridge was the only ISIS attack carried out in Western countries in 2019. A multiannual examination of the attacks carried out by or inspired by ISIS (the majority of the attacks) shows a steady increase in the number of attacks between 2014 and 2016 (24 attacks in 2016). However, since then there has been a steady decrease in the number of attacks in Europe and other Western countries (falling to one in 2019) (See the graph in the Appendix).

The steady multiannual decline in the number of attacks is primarily the result of the crushing blows ISIS suffered in Syria and Iraq, its two core countries, which led to the loss of the Islamic Caliphate. That continued in 2019 and caused the collapse of ISIS’s strongholds in the Euphrates Valley (the fall of al-Baghouz) and the killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (in an American targeted attack). That weakened the motivation of ISIS supporters to carry out attacks, despite ongoing encouragement from senior ISIS figures and ISIS’s media outlets.

However, the recent attack in London showed that in Britain (as well as in other European countries) ISIS's supporters still have terrorist potential, which may be expressed more broadly in the future. The potential rests primarily on the hold ISIS's Salafist-jihadist ideology has on Muslim communities in various countries. To the ideological dimension, the presence of ISIS operatives and supporters who may put their ideology into practice.
has to be added. That includes prisoners who have been released and returned to society, some of whom were radicalized in prison; operatives who gained combat experience in Syria and Iraq and in one way or another returned to their countries of origin; and ISIS families (women and children) who are liable to return and bring with them the jihadist ideology of the Islamic State.

A possible renewal of the wave of ISIS-inspired attacks is today the central threat against the countries of Europe and the West in general. Coping with the potential threat demands the deployment of the security services of Western countries on two levels: on the national-local level (more effective control of local potential ISIS supporters) and the inter-national level (oversight of the movement of operatives and their families from the Middle East towards their countries of origin, with greater intelligence cooperation). On the strategic level, it is imperative for the campaign of the American-led coalition against ISIS to continue in Syria and Iraq, ISIS's two core countries, without signs of weakening. That is because a renewed strengthening of ISIS in Syria and Iraq will of necessity influence the motivation of ISIS supporters to return to carrying out terrorist attacks in Europe and the West.

The terrorist attack in London

Initial overview

On overview 29, 2019, Usman Khan, a jihadist terrorist of Pakistani origin, carried out a stabbing attack near London Bridge. He killed a man and a woman and wounded two women and a man. Passersby, among them several released prisoners who were participating in a conference held nearby, overcame and restrained him. He was shot and killed by police rushed to the scene. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.
Police and civilians near the terrorist, who is lying on the ground after being shot by a policeman (24.ae, a UAE news website, photographs from a video shot on London Bridge).

The stabbing attack began in a conference held in Fishmongers’ Hall, conducted by the Cambridge University Institute of Criminology to help convicts reintegrate into society. Usman Khan, who was a convicted felon, was a participant. He threatened he would "blow up everyone" at the conference with an explosive belt he was wearing, which turned out to be a fake. He then began stabbing people. He then left the hall and fled towards London Bridge.

London Bridge is apparently a popular target for ISIS supporters, who consider it a symbol of Britain. On June 3, 2017, three terrorists carried out a combined vehicular-stabbing attack on the bridge, for which ISIS claimed responsibility. The attack killed seven passersby and wounded 48. It was carried out as part of an effort ISIS made to carry out showcase attacks in Western countries during the Muslim religious month of Ramadan, at a time when the American-led coalition and SDF forces were attacking al-Raqqa, ISIS’s "capital" in Syria.

**ISIS claims responsibility for the attack**

On overview 30, 2019, the day after the attack, ISIS claimed responsibility through its A’maq news agency. According to the claim, "the person who carried out the London attack was a fighter from the Islamic State. He carried out it out in response to calls [from ISIS] to target citizens of [the American-led anti-ISIS] coalition” (A’maq through Telegram, November 30 2019). The language of the claim may indicate it was an ISIS-inspired attack, carried out in response to a call from ISIS to attack in the coalition countries. The killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi may increase the motivation of ISIS-supporting jihadists to avenge his death. However, in effect, so far only one attack has been carried out, in Britain.
General description of Usman Khan

The terrorist who carried out the attack in London was Usman Khan, 28, a British citizen of Pakistani origin (his family came from Pakistani-controlled Kashmir). He was detained in 2010 for membership in a jihadist network of nine operatives who were inspired by al-Qaeda. They planned to plant a bomb in the restroom of the London Stock Exchange and to carry out other showcase attacks. The operatives of the network also planned to raise funds to establish a training camp in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir and to send British Muslims to train there.

Usman Khan was described as one of the three most serious operatives in the network. In 2012 he was sentenced to a minimum of eight years in prison. He served six and was released in December 2018. At the time of the attack, because of his early release was wearing an electronic ankle bracelet.

In ITIC assessment, Usman Kahn's jihadist ideology was influenced by two prominent figures, with global jihad reputations:

- **Anwar al-Awlqi**, a jihadist operative who was born in the United States to parents from Yemen. He went to Afghanistan where he participated in al-Qaeda training camps.
He later went to Yemen and was a senior operative in al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). He recruited operatives from Western countries and trained them in camps in Yemen. He used the Internet to spread his jihadist ideology, by which Usman Kahn was influenced. Al-Awlaqi was killed in Yemen in September 2011 by a drone in an American targeted attack.

Anwar al-Awlaki
(from a YouTube video, September 30, 2011).

Anjem Choudary, a British jihadist of Pakistani origin, born in 1967. He began studying medicine at Southampton University but switched to law and became a lawyer. He was later appointed chairman of the Society of Muslim Lawyers. He was an aide to jihadist Bakri Muhammed (who had escaped to Lebanon), who founded the al-Muhajiroun organization. The organization was dismantled after Britain decided to outlaw it. In its place Choudary founded an organization called Ahl al-Sunna w'al-Jama’a. He later helped found an organization called al-Ghuraba, whose activities were also outlawed. In overview 2008 he established Islam4UK and became its spokesman. The British outlawed the organization in 2010. Choudary criticized Britain's activity in Iraq and Afghanistan and praised bin Laden for his terrorist attacks against the United States and Britain.

Anjem Choudary
(al-Youm al-Sabea, February 16, 2019).
In August 2016 Anjem Choudary was sentenced to ten years in prison for supporting the Islamic State after he had sworn allegiance to ISIS. He preached to his supporters to obey Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and to go to Syria to support ISIS and the Caliphate (The Guardian, October 16, 2016). In October 2018 he was released from prison. Usman Kahn was described as a "student and personal friend" of Choudary (Sky News, December 2, 2019). Apparently Anjem Choudary was linked to the terrorist network exposed in 2010, to which Usman Kahn belonged.
Appendix

ISIS attacks carried out in Europe in 2019

The attack in London was the only ISIS-inspired attack carried out in the West in 2019 for which ISIS claimed responsibility. Since the shooting attack in Strasbourg, France (December 11, 2018) for which ISIS claimed responsibility, no terrorist attacks have been carried out by ISIS or inspired by ISIS in Europe of any other Western country.

Decline in number of attacks in Europe and other Western countries (most of the ISIS-inspired)

1 In April year a series of attacks were carried out against churches and hotels in Sri Lanka. Most of the victims killed (253) were local residents. Among those killed were four foreign nationals from the West (for further information see the April 29, 2019 bulletin, The Terrorist Attack in Sri Lanka: Overview and Significance (full version)."

2 As of December 1, 2019.
The almost total absence of terrorist attacks in Europe and the Western countries in 2019 was continued the steady decline in the number of ISIS attacks since their height in 2016. The decline was primarily the result of the crushing blows to ISIS in Syria and Iraq: the fall of Mosul; the collapse of the Islamic State; the fall of al-Raqqa, ISIS's "capital" in Syria; the fall of Baghouz and ISIS's strongholds in the Euphrates Valley; and the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. One blow after another lowered both the attraction of the ISIS brand and the operational capabilities of its operatives, and as a result, the motivation of its supporters to carry out ISIS-inspired attacks (despite ongoing encouragement for attacks in the West).

However, the recent attack in London shows that in Britain and other European countries the potential exists for ISIS-inspired attacks, which is liable to be expressed more fully in the future. That is because Salafist-jihadist ideology is rooted in the Muslim communities in several European countries. To the ideological dimension, human potential must be added, which may try to put jihadist ideology into practice. Potential terrorists include released prisoners who return to society who have been radicalized in prison; terrorist operatives who in one way or another manage to return to their countries of origin from Syria and Iraq (despite the difficulties those countries place in their path); the families of ISIS operatives (women and children), who absorbed ISIS ideology, who are also liable to try to return to their countries of origin.