

ANNUAL THREAT ASSESSMENT

Global Threat Assessment

Southeast Asia

Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Singapore

South Asia

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

Central Asia

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

The Middle East

Africa

Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Nigeria

Key Trends in Digital Extremism 2024

Reintegrating Extremists in Southeast Asia:
Lessons in Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation

Assessing the Extreme Right in the West in 2024



ADVISORY BOARD

Dr. Jolene Jerard

*Adjunct Senior Fellow,
International Centre for Political
Violence and Terrorism Research,
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*

Dr. Rohan Gunaratna

*Professor of Security Studies,
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*

Dr. Kumar Ramakrishna

*Professor of National Security Studies; and
Provost's Chair in National Security Studies
Dean of S. Rajaratnam School of
International Studies; and Research Adviser
to International Centre for Political Violence
and Terrorism Research*

Dr. Marcin Styszyński

*Assistant Professor,
Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies
Adam Mickiewicz University*

Dr. Stephen Sloan

*Professor Emeritus,
The University of Oklahoma
Lawrence J. Chastang,
Distinguished Professor, Terrorism Studies,
The University of Central Florida*

Dr. Fernando Reinares

*Director, Program on Global Terrorism,
Elcano Royal Institute Professor of Security
Studies Universidad Rey Juan Carlos*

Dr. John Harrison

*Associate Editor,
Journal of Transportation Security*

Dr. Hamoon Khelghat-Doost

*Assistant Professor of Political Science,
Üsküdar University*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Senior Editorial Advisor	Noorita Mohamed-Noor
Chief Editor	Amresh Gunasingham
Senior Editor	Abdul Basit
Assistant Editor	Abigail Leong
Assistant Editor	Veera Singham Kalicharan
Assistant Editor	Rueben Ananthan Santhana Dass
Copyeditor	Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah
Design and Layout	Okkie Tanupradja

The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and not of ICPVTR, RSIS, NTU or the organisations to which the authors are affiliated. Articles may not be reproduced without prior permission. Please contact the editors for more information at ctta@ntu.edu.sg.

The editorial team also welcomes any feedback or comments.

SOUTHEAST ASIA MILITANT ATLAS



Our centre has launched the **Southeast Asia Militant Atlas**, a dynamic and growing interactive map designed to provide researchers with a consolidated visual database of ISIS and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist-related incidents in Southeast Asia. Please access it via <https://tinyurl.com/ru8mjwbd>

Global Threat Landscape in 2024

Kumar Ramakrishna

This overview will selectively draw upon the detailed regional analyses in the current volume, to cover the following three broad themes: significant global developments and trends; notable operational trends and developments; and, finally, the enduring salience of a holistic, integrated approach in dealing with violent extremism.

Significant Global Developments and Trends

Israel's War with the "Axis of Resistance" and the Wider Repercussions

By the first anniversary of the October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, the strongly right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had aggressively taken the fight to the so-called Axis of Resistance (AOR) forces backed by Iran. Apart from Hamas in Gaza, the AOR comprises other armed groups such as Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, the Houthis based in Yemen and "various Shi'ite Muslim armed groups in Iraq and Syria".¹ Despite numerous strategic AOR leadership losses at the hands of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), the armed groups remained resilient. Hence, rocket and drone attacks by Hamas, Hezbollah and their Houthi AOR allies "have yet to subside in the wake of these key losses" despite "continued Israeli assaults on both groups".² Nevertheless, the IDF's leadership decapitation strategy clearly weakened AOR "command structures", prompting suggestions that the Axis "faces an unclear future".³ Reinforcing this sense of an Axis under significant stress was the sudden collapse in early December of the AOR-affiliated Assad regime in Syria, in the face of an onslaught spearheaded by a rebel coalition led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham – a jihadist group previously linked with both Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS). At the time of writing, this was a fast-evolving situation warranting close watching in 2025.⁴

Beyond Syria, the wider psychological effect of the IDF attacks on Hamas and Hezbollah was the further sharpening of anti-Israel sentiment in the larger Muslim world. Both groups saw "their messaging and their worldviews mainstreamed in the wake of the conflict".⁵ The Israel-AOR conflict certainly sparked considerable online debate in Southeast Asia, "with many users in the region expressing sympathies for Hamas" as a "legitimate resistance movement"; the conflict also fuelled both "anti-Semitic tropes" and "Islamophobic sentiments".⁶ In Singapore, a 33-year-old former public servant was hauled up by the authorities for actively participating in several pro-AOR online forums and promoting "violence against Jews and Israelis".⁷

The Resilient Global and Regional Challenge of the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda (AQ)

In 2024, the resilient global and regional challenge posed by both IS and its older Sunni Islamist ideological rival AQ was apparent. Both networks experienced "strategic successes" in Central Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa, with AQ restarting training camps in Taliban-run Afghanistan. At the same time, IS launched "persistent attacks across the Sahel and West Africa".⁸ The expansion of IS across Africa highlighted its capacity for "strategic adaptation" and its ability to "leverage local conflicts and weak governance to consolidate power".⁹ While targeted strikes by the United States (US), Turkey and Iraq may "have likely tempered" some IS capabilities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region,¹⁰ on the whole, there was still a noticeable "uptick in IS attacks in Syria since March 2024".¹¹

The Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK)

Notably, the IS affiliate operating in Afghanistan, the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK), concerningly expanded its international operational footprint. ISK remained active in Afghanistan itself, engaging in small but bloody guerrilla attacks against what it considers an apostate Taliban regime, as well

as in assassinations, particularly of Shia civilians. ISK seemed keen to “generate, through the media, the impression of a powerful organisation that can hit anywhere”.¹² While most ISK-linked attacks since 2015 have targeted Afghanistan and Pakistan, it has also more recently “conducted attacks in Moscow, Iran and Turkey”.¹³ Additionally, the thwarted terror plots in India in May 2024 suggest additional evidence of ISK’s transnational aspirations.¹⁴ Operational coordination between IS and ISK was also observed in the Crocus City Hall attack in Russia in March 2024, which killed 150 civilians. While ISK did not explicitly claim the attack, internal sources confirmed that “it was involved alongside the central organisation of IS”.¹⁵ Closer ISK cooperation with the IS central structure – and other branches of IS, such as “the Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi branches” – is thus another concerning trend. Thus far, ISK’s international operations have been directed by “IS central, which presumably has little interest in ISK gaining autonomy”.¹⁶

The Central Asian Factor

ISK and IS notably attempted to recruit Central Asians for operations both within and beyond Afghanistan. ISK carried out several attacks within Afghanistan using its Central Asian fighters.¹⁷ At the same time, for external attacks outside Afghanistan, ISK relied on Central Asian members based in Turkey and “on Central Asian cells that it coordinates with remotely from north-eastern Afghanistan”.¹⁸ In early 2024, for instance, Tehran uncovered a major ISK network in the country, spanning Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, involving Afghans and Tajiks. In 2024, Central Asian nationals – largely Uzbeks and Tajiks – were “responsible for some of the major terrorist attacks carried out in multiple countries in the Middle East, Asia and Europe, most of them claimed by IS and also ISK”.¹⁹ The aforementioned March 2024 Crocus City Hall attack in Russia was executed by a “four-member IS cell of Tajik citizens”.²⁰

The IS Footprint in Africa and South and Southeast Asia

In 2024, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) maintained a potent presence in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin. The Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) reportedly intensified efforts to consolidate its strength in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, while the Islamic State Sinai Province (IS-SP) launched attacks on Egyptian security forces. In essence, the emergence of these IS provinces demonstrated a “strategic shift from centralised operations in the Middle East to more decentralised, localised insurgencies across Africa”, where IS embedded itself in the region by “integrating with or absorbing pre-existing groups and exploiting regional instabilities”.²¹

In Bangladesh, the Islamic State Bengal, or Neo-JMB, remained a key threat in 2024, “notwithstanding disruptions to its operations, especially since the 2016 Dhaka Holey Artisan Bakery attack”.²² A key reason was the ouster of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who resigned abruptly in the wake of student protests.²³ Sheikh Hasina’s cooperation had helped Indian security forces crack down on IS-linked Bangladeshi militant groups operating along the India-Bangladesh border.²⁴ IS’ strategic intentions for Bangladesh were made very clear in a September 2024 editorial in its *al-Naba* newsletter, which called for the establishment in Bangladesh of “governance based on Islamic law”, while urging “Bangladeshi youth” to “reject tyranny and take collective action against injustices”.²⁵

In Indonesia, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), Indonesia’s largest pro-IS network, and “other pro-IS individuals” remained unable to decisively rebuild “their operational capacities following the mass arrests of key leaders in 2018”.²⁶ Pro-IS networks in Indonesia still largely took the form of “decentralised cells, with activities being unilaterally conducted by insulated local units” comprising one or two individuals.²⁷ Given the discussion above, it is worth noting that in recent times, IS-related Central Asian jihadist signatures have been detected in Southeast Asia. In March 2023, Indonesian authorities detained four Uzbek citizens associated with the Syria-based Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ). While KTJ is linked to AQ, these four Uzbeks had “met with an Indonesian ISIS sympathiser” who suggested they become religious teachers to encourage individuals to travel abroad to support IS. Given the growing global IS-Central Asian nexus, potential further IS-Central Asian jihadist activity in Southeast Asia is not improbable.²⁸

AQ's African and South and Southeast Asian Affiliates

In 2024, the AQ-affiliated Al-Shabaab continued to “exert control over parts of south and central Somalia”, despite ongoing counter terrorism efforts by Somali forces and international allies. At the same time, another AQ affiliate, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), a “prominent jihadist group” based in Mali and operating in Burkina Faso and Niger, remained active. These AQ affiliates successfully exploited “political grievances” and “local clan dynamics” to remain resilient.²⁹

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the country has once again become a sanctuary for terrorist strikes against its neighbours.³⁰ The Taliban regime has provided sanctuaries to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other like-minded militant groups to plan and execute attacks inside Pakistan, in a quest to create a “Taliban-like theocracy” there.³¹ In this connection, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) was “almost exclusively busy supporting the TTP in Pakistan” by providing advisors and training.³² AQIS did not confine its focus to Pakistan, either. While not successful in launching attacks within India “barring a few minor incidents”,³³ AQIS – like IS – paid close attention to the ouster of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose security cooperation with the Indian authorities had helped curtail the operations along the India-Bangladesh border of the AQ-linked Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT).³⁴ Notably, AQIS leader Usama Mahmood heralded the fall of Sheikh Hasina, lauding the “resistance against corruption and secularism”, while “advocating for an Islamic system and unity against oppression”.³⁵ Going into 2025, the political and security situation in Bangladesh bears watching for signs of deeper exploitation by both IS and AQIS.

In Indonesia, Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah (JAS), a pro-AQ splinter group of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), “re-emerged on Indonesia's threat horizon in 2024” after JAS member Yudi Lukito Kurniawan was arrested in late August 2024. Kurniawan was reportedly affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, which he had visited in January 2014. Significantly, during his Yemen visit, Kurniawan “claimed to have received an order from a senior AQAP figure to target the Singapore stock exchange building”.³⁶ In short, AQAP considered Singapore as a proxy for the “distant enemy” – that is, the US and its allies. JAS is a small network that has not been implicated in violent actions in the 10 years of its existence. That said, the “strong community base” enjoyed by JAS, its ties with AQAP and speculation that it is “still sending members abroad for jihad”, raises questions about its true nature.³⁷

2024 was also marked by the surprising public announcement in late June by senior leaders of the Indonesia-based, transnational AQ-oriented Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) network, of their decision to disband the organisation. Some analysts have expressed wariness about JI's motives,³⁸ and in any case, much depends on whether JI members would embrace the decision and whether there would be violent splinter cells forming in a show of rank-and-file defiance. That said, “multiple respected JI figures have also supported the decision” and “between July and September, over 4,000 JI members declared their support for the seniors' decision to disband”.³⁹ In any case, given JI's demonstrated resilience and its ability to adapt to changing political and security circumstances, the JI disbandment issue bears close monitoring going forward.

The Intensifying Extreme Right Challenge

The extreme right as a movement espouses “at least three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and strong state advocacy”, while the far right can be regarded as referring to the “political manifestation of the extreme right”.⁴⁰ Put slightly differently, extreme-right social movements are generally rooted in the “definitional foundations of othering, nativism and authoritarianism”.⁴¹ The year 2024 clearly evinced the intensifying mainstreaming of extreme-right ideologies – expressed in both the electoral success of far-right political parties and an uptick in extreme right-fuelled violence against minorities.

While the centrist coalition led by the European People's Party (EPP) won the European Union (EU)'s parliamentary election in June 2024, equally apparent was “a significant rise in support for far-right parties and coalitions, which collectively gained a third of the seats in the EU Parliament”.⁴²

Far-right parties also did well at the national level. In Austria, for instance, the “far-right Freedom Party” won “the largest percentage of vote shares” in the September election, while the “far-right Alternative for Germany” secured victory in the “eastern German state of Thuringia” and did well in other East German states. Notably, “far-right politicians and groups in the West” have largely backed Russian President Vladimir Putin, viewing him as a “strong and conservative leader”, while also decrying their “governments’ support for Ukraine in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war”.⁴³

Intensifying societal mainstreaming of white supremacist extreme-right ideologies also fuelled a worrying uptick in violence: throughout 2024, “neo-Nazi groups and other white supremacists engaged in a stream of violence”, mainly in Europe and the US, targeting Jewish communities, Muslims, non-whites and migrants.⁴⁴ Worryingly, newer groups emerged, like the Active Club in the United Kingdom (UK), a “neo-Nazi and white supremacist militia-like group” that attempted to ally with the like-minded Rise Above Movement to possibly prepare for “organised violence”.⁴⁵

The 2024 general election in India resulted in a lukewarm performance by the far-right “Hindu nationalist” Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), compelling the “formation of a coalition government at the centre”.⁴⁶ The BJP’s electoral travails did not curb wider Hindutva extreme right-fuelled violence, however. From June 2024, there was an uptick of “cow vigilantism” incidents, in which Hindutva mobs lynched Muslims in the northern part of India “on suspicions of illegally transporting beef”.⁴⁷ The increased Islamophobic violence in the wake of the election was possibly due to “the Hindu right wing’s frustrations towards Muslims for voting against the BJP”.⁴⁸ Judging from the “consistent pattern of hate speech directed at Muslims by BJP politicians”, the coming year is unlikely to see a decline in Hindutva extreme right-inspired anti-Muslim violence.⁴⁹

The Social Media Factor

Throughout the year, Islamist and extreme-right groups propagandised across “mainstream social media platforms”, while regional affiliates attempted to “localise narratives, maximising their reach and appeal”.⁵⁰ In the Islamist extremist space, IS maintained an “extensive and sophisticated digital ecosystem”, while AQ employed an “open-source jihad” strategy, relying on established platforms such as “Telegram, Facebook, and Chirpwire” to constantly push out large volumes of content.⁵¹ The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict continued to fuel propaganda by AQ and IS. IS, in particular, exploited the conflict to promote “its narratives and inspire lone-wolf attacks”.⁵² IS supporters “emerged as the main vitalising force in IS propaganda”, constantly adapting “central IS propaganda to correspond with local contexts” to reach a wider audience.⁵³ For instance, in Malaysia, “mainstream platforms such as Facebook” remained the “primary online social media” used by Malaysian Islamist extremists, but “alternative platforms such as Rocket.Chat, TamTam, Threema, Hoop and Element” were also actively employed by “IS and its supporters”.⁵⁴

Notable was the emerging importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in the Islamist extremist social media space. IS reportedly used AI-generated videos to radicalise its followers and may also be using “AI-powered chatbots for recruitment”.⁵⁵ Certainly, “ISK’s AI-generated videos are full of technical glitches”, but its propaganda came across as neutral and unbiased. For example, rather than “using offensive expletives to describe its opponents”, ISK deliberately employed “non-offensive language”.⁵⁶ Through the use of such neutral language, ISK sought to “exploit platform moderation gaps” to enhance its online presence, ensuring “longer shelf-life and wider dissemination on larger social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X and TikTok”.⁵⁷

AI was also employed in the white supremacist extreme-right social media space, with “generative AI” being used by some groups “for purposes like propaganda and image creation, and to formulate recruitment methods”.⁵⁸ Observers have commented more generally that “Western far-right groups have increased their production of ‘grey-area’ content on mainstream social media”, so as to broaden their audience and increase support.⁵⁹ The effectiveness of this tactic was seen in August, when “decentralised Telegram channels” were used to disseminate anti-immigrant and Islamophobic content, inspiring riots in over 20 cities across the UK. This came after a mass stabbing attack in the town of Southport, in which three young girls were killed. The rioters were

enraged by online disinformation about the identity of the attacker, including falsehoods that he was an asylum seeker.⁶⁰

In India, despite the ruling BJP's electoral travails, Hindutva extreme-right online communities remained active, "illustrating that Hindutva as a movement transcends BJP's political confines".⁶¹ Hindutva Islamophobic online chatter fed upon anti-Muslim violence. For instance, following the ousting of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August, violence against Bangladeshi Hindus for their support of Hasina's Awami League party was exploited by pro-Hindutva online communities. The latter "doctored footage and recycled images to frame the violence" as part of a "broader Hindu 'genocide' perpetrated by 'Islamists'".⁶² Notably, pro-Hindutva and Western white supremacist online connections were forged during the August 2024 riots in the UK, as "both groups mobilised digitally around shared Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments, using misinformation to incite further violence".⁶³

The inter-mixing – and localisation – of extreme-right ideological strands was evidenced in Asia in 2024. For example, the Austronesian supremacist community⁶⁴ on TikTok adapted "the Western far-right extremism (FRE) playbook", localising interpretations of "Western FRE narratives" – such as the Great Replacement conspiracy theory – to "demonise local Rohingya refugees and other perceived non-indigenous communities", promoting calls for "Total Rohingya Deaths" or "Total Chinese Deaths".⁶⁵ The Austronesian supremacist online community is hardly monolithic, as within its ranks is a "hybridised subgroup that draws influence from both far-right and Islamist extremism".⁶⁶ This ideological inter-mixing of online extreme right and Islamist extremist narratives, and their geographical localisation, is a phenomenon worth watching.

The Grey Zone: Non-Violent Islamist Extremism

In 2024, as previously, subtle evidence of a continuing blurring of lines between putatively constitutional, non-violent Islamist political parties/civil society groups and violent Islamist actors, remained apparent.

In Central Asia, authorities in Kyrgyzstan mounted crackdowns on not merely militant cells, but also members of officially proscribed, ostensibly non-violent religious organisations, including Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) and Yakyn Inkar – related to the Tablighi Jamaat Islamic missionary movement, which originated in India but whose members have sometimes been implicated in violent extremist activity elsewhere.⁶⁷ In Kyrgyzstan itself, arrests were made not just of individuals implicated in criminal activities, but also of "ordinary people following conservative religious movements".⁶⁸ In a drive to deal with religious extremism, Kyrgyzstan authorities appeared to some observers to desire "direct control over the practice of religion within the country", unsurprisingly sparking "resistance from the more traditionalist fringes of society" – illustrating the political complexities of dealing with the non-violent extremism phenomenon.⁶⁹

In Bangladesh, HT, despite being banned, re-emerged in 2024, "actively conducting rallies and recruiting students from prestigious schools and colleges amid significant political changes", as mentioned earlier.⁷⁰ Linked to HT chapters overseas, including in Southeast Asia, HT in Bangladesh has been "trying to infiltrate the bureaucracy and military and, more recently, civil society", causing anxiety amongst law enforcement officials concerned about the group's strategy of stealthily subverting various societal and public sectors to ultimately "establish a so-called caliphate governed by *shariah* law", discarding the democratic system as "un-Islamic".⁷¹

In Southeast Asia, some conservative Islamist groups, though operationally non-violent, nonetheless harboured "sympathies for extremist ideologies" and exploited "mainstream discontent", pushing narratives fostering "social division and exclusivism".⁷² Concerningly, such groups called for "the overthrow of Western democratic systems and the installation of a transnational Islamic caliphate" – evincing a "dangerous overlap with extremist narratives".⁷³ In Indonesia, for instance, while the AQ-oriented JAS continued to portray itself as a "non-violent Islamist organisation committed to social services", there was "speculation" that JAS was still sending its members abroad for jihad.⁷⁴ Additionally, the so-called Abu Oemar network that had

planned to attack the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, did not comprise just individuals from “actual terrorist groups” such as Darul Islam and pro-IS elements, but tellingly also “non-violent radical Islamic organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)”.⁷⁵

Notable Operational Trends/Developments

In terms of more narrowly focused operational trends and developments, as in the previous year, three key themes continued to stand out in the 2024 survey.

A Wide Range of Attack Modalities and Targets

As previously, threat and armed groups employed a very wide variety of attack modalities against a range of diverse targets.

In Pakistan, for instance, the TTP-allied Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGBG) targeted military facilities and transport, while the TTP itself limited its attacks to security forces and law enforcement agencies and made an effort to “spare civilians”.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Pakistan’s Baloch insurgents “stormed security checkpoints, military camps and other high-profile targets” including China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-related projects, in multiple coordinated attacks, while also searching public transport on Balochistan’s main highways to target “ethnic Punjabi drivers and passengers”.⁷⁷ The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) warned China to leave Balochistan or face additional attacks, continuing a trend of targeting Chinese nationals and interests in Karachi since 2018. Attack modalities included the use by the HGBG of explosive-laden commercially available quadcopters as well as the use of suicide bombings by the BLA.⁷⁸ In India, meanwhile, a “new trend” was observed where “insurgent groups targeted the Hindu-majority region of Jammu at a proportionally greater rate than attacks in the Muslim-majority Kashmir”, targeting both combatants and non-combatants.⁷⁹

In Borno State in Nigeria in June, Boko Haram – from which ISWAP split in 2016 – “targeted high-profile civilian locations” including “wedding ceremonies, a funeral and a hospital”, employing female suicide bombers in coordinated attacks.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, IS-Sahel attacks reflected a “strategic modus operandi” that included “ambushes on military convoys, assaults on outposts and kidnappings”.⁸¹ IS-SP targeted Egyptian military and police forces as well as pipelines supplying natural gas to Israel and Jordan – highlighting a penchant for attacking both military and economic assets. Al-Shabaab and JNIM, meanwhile, attacked both military and civilian targets.⁸²

Indonesian pro-IS elements were discovered to have planned a “double suicide bombing against worship houses” in East Java, while another pro-IS suspect arrested in West Java was detained following an online comment which stated “Bomb!” in relation to Pope Francis’ visit to Jakarta’s Istiqlal Mosque in September.⁸³ In Malaysia, a police station in Ulu Tiram, Johor, was targeted by a lone male individual radicalised by IS ideology, who knifed to death one officer, seized his weapon and shot dead a second policeman, before being shot dead himself. Another six men and two women linked to IS were arrested for threatening “the King of Malaysia, the prime minister and other dignitaries, including members of the police”.⁸⁴ In the Thai Deep South, civilians – including women and children – were targets of Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) insurgent attacks, where Buddhists were “proportionally more targeted” than Muslims.⁸⁵ In March, the BRN mounted 44 coordinated bombing and arson attacks targeting “convenience stores, petrol stations and public infrastructure across Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla provinces”.⁸⁶

In Myanmar, local People’s Defence Force (PDF) militias – mostly under the direction of the National Unity Government (NUG) – continued to attack ruling military junta troops, employing guerrilla warfare tactics, including improvised explosive device (IED) bombings and drone attacks – with the latter emerging as “a key factor in the Myanmar conflict”.⁸⁷ Additionally, the anti-junta resistance forces “continued to produce and use 3D-printed firearms in 2024”, largely for training purposes as well as in raids to “obtain commercial firearms”.⁸⁸ In the coming year, 3D-printing may well be further used by the anti-junta groups to manufacture bomblets for drone attacks as well as parts for IEDs.⁸⁹

Youth and Family Networks

A second key operational trend that stood out was the continuing salience of youth and family networks in terrorist plots. In Bangladesh, Ansar al Islam (AAI) – also known as the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) or Al-Qaeda Bangladesh – remained resilient despite security force pressure, not just because of its decentralised cell structure, but also “by recruiting tech-savvy youth” to help it stay ahead of the authorities.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, HT in Bangladesh expanded its outreach “to include younger demographics, prompting worries about the group’s influence on youth”.⁹¹ In Southeast Asia, including in Singapore, “youth radicalisation” remained a key challenge.⁹² In June 2024, a 14-year-old boy became the youngest individual to be issued a Restriction Order (RO) under Singapore’s Internal Security Act (ISA). This case, together with other recent cases of youth radicalisation, reinforced the need to “better identify, deter and rehabilitate radicalised youth”.⁹³ A further layer of complexity was added in early 2024, when it was announced that an RO had been imposed on a Singaporean Chinese teenager, who – counterintuitively – self-identified as a white supremacist and sought to conduct attacks overseas to further this cause.⁹⁴

Finally, the aforementioned Ulu Tiram case in May 2024 squarely highlighted the “continued regional threat of family radicalisation”, a phenomenon also seen in several Indonesian cases, “particularly the 2018 Surabaya bombings”.⁹⁵ What was striking about the Ulu Tiram episode was the “radicalisation of an entire family network where both parents and children were radicalised” into the violent IS ideology.⁹⁶ The drivers of family radicalisation deserve closer analysis going forward.

The Lone Actor Threat

A third key operational trend that persisted in 2024 was that of lone-actor incidents. The ongoing Gaza conflict was exploited by both IS and AQ to “inspire lone actors” via their “numerous official and unofficial propaganda arms”.⁹⁷ Similarly, in the wake of the October 2023 Hamas attacks in Israel, AQAP’s leadership called for “lone-actor attacks in the West, and specifically the US”, declaring the Hamas attacks to be as significant as “the 9/11 attacks”.⁹⁸ IS, likewise, in March, in response to the Gaza conflict, called upon its “lone lions” to “strive intensely to target the Crusaders and Jews in every place”.⁹⁹ In Bangladesh, the pro-IS Neo-JMB were busy on social media promoting “lone-actor attacks”.¹⁰⁰

Throughout the year, six “pro-IS individuals” were detained in “unrelated” arrests in Indonesia.¹⁰¹ Four of these individuals had made IEDs, though “not in coordination with one another”, and were found to have “no links to one another” – hinting strongly that they were likely lone actors.¹⁰² In Malaysia, “most” of the cases in 2024 were IS-inspired, involving “self-radicalised individuals”.¹⁰³

The Enduring Need for a Holistic, Integrated Approach in Dealing with Violent Extremism

Finally, the year’s developments showed once again that a judicious mix of hard and soft approaches, involving calibrated application of force together with serious efforts to address the underlying conditions that drive violent extremism, remained crucial.

The “Hard” Approach: Strengths and Limitations

Legislation/Policy Measures

Legal and administrative policy measures remained pertinent in 2024. Some were relatively constructive. For instance, the EU banned The Base, a US neo-Nazi group with an active overseas presence. The Base seeks the violent replacement of the US government with “a white ethno-state” and is banned in other Western countries, but the EU ban in 2024 was the “largest in terms of geographical coverage”.¹⁰⁴ The Base is the “first far-right entity to be banned by the EU”, underscoring growing official recognition of the “threat posed by such groups”.¹⁰⁵ German lawmakers, meanwhile, intensified efforts to ban the “partially right-wing extremist Alternative for

Germany” party¹⁰⁶ – which has been accused of entertaining a “willingness to use violence” amongst its members.¹⁰⁷

In August, Thai legislators passed a law facilitating the restoration of the Advisory Council of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC). Set up in 2010 under the Southern Border Provinces Administration Act of that year, the Advisory Council had comprised representatives from various social groups and had served as a platform for people to voice their grievances to the SBPAC – a central agency that coordinated government projects promoting development and justice in the Thai Deep South. The Advisory Council, however, was suspended for a decade after the 2014 military coup. The return of the Council could therefore hopefully “enhance public participation in addressing problems in the Deep South”.¹⁰⁸

Conversely, other legal/policy measures seemed less helpful. Tajikistan, for example, inaugurated a “new dress code which virtually banned some Islamic attires, such as the hijab”. While this new legislation was not fully enforced, it was exploited by AQ and ISK, “transforming the new law into a potential catalyst for a new radicalisation process”.¹⁰⁹

Counter Terrorist Operational Capabilities

The importance of effective counter terrorist operational capacities was further reinforced in 2024. In India, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) claimed to have dismantled “all remaining IS cells” in the country, and hence, “no significant activity linked to the group was observed”.¹¹⁰ Conversely, a lack of sufficient Indian military force in Jammu to effectively deal with insurgent activities was observed. This was because “much of the army” had been “redeployed to areas bordering China since the 2020 India-China border skirmishes”.¹¹¹ To rectify matters, apart from redeploying more troops back to Jammu, Indian forces revitalised the Village Defense Guards (VDG), a strategy first tried in the 1990s. Concerns were raised, however, about possible “human rights violations” by these non-professional VDG militia.¹¹²

Effective counter terrorist capabilities were also evident in Indonesia. Not only were terrorist attacks successfully prevented throughout 2024, but the authorities also “managed to arrest individuals who held key positions in their respective networks and organisations”.¹¹³ For instance, while only 19 JI members were arrested in 2024, more than half of them had held strategic roles within the JI network. Similarly, while only two JAD members were arrested in 2024, one was a key recruiter and the other a cell leader.¹¹⁴

Moreover, following the May 2024 Ulu Tiram attack, the Royal Malaysian Police successfully executed nationwide raids which thwarted several terrorist plots in the country.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) effectively managed the maritime terrorist and cross-border crime threat, and was also exploring integrating “advanced technological equipment” including “drones, speedboats, long-distance cameras, and sensor and radar systems” to improve its regional surveillance coverage.¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Singapore Police Force, the Singapore Civil Defence Force and the Singapore Armed Forces continued to mount “regular joint counter terrorism exercises to test and strengthen operational readiness in the event of a terror attack”, while, like Malaysia, the Singaporean authorities also invested in technology to further enhance the state’s counter terrorist capabilities. For instance, to strengthen border security, in May, automated immigration lanes were introduced at Singapore’s Changi Airport, allowing immigration officers to “run data analytics and conduct risk assessments on inbound travellers” and flag high-risk individuals for further checks before entry is permitted.¹¹⁷ In the southern Philippines, the declaration of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)-free zones in Mindanao and the “paralysis” of the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute Group, pointed to the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The AFP achieved these successes through a judicious combination of leadership decapitation, encouraging surrender and territorial denial.¹¹⁸

Operational shortcomings were also observed, unfortunately. Despite US military aid to support counter terrorism efforts in Africa, operations in the Sahel remained “severely hindered by insufficient military resources and logistical support”.¹¹⁹ Bangladesh's “response to terrorism and extremism” was also negatively impacted during the year’s political upheaval and a “breakdown of law and order” – a situation necessitating the diversion of “law enforcement efforts toward restoring stability”.¹²⁰ Unsurprisingly, terrorist groups scaled up their activities. Additionally, overcrowded jails, security lapses and the absence of rehabilitation initiatives created “an environment conducive to radicalisation”.¹²¹

“Softer” Approaches Needed As Well

As in previous surveys, the importance of meshing the abovementioned “harder”, including kinetic, elements of national power, with “softer” measures dealing with the underlying conditions that give rise to violent extremist attacks, was clear throughout 2024.

Holistic National Action Plans

Pakistan recognised the above point, announcing a new more holistic counter terrorism strategy in June by revamping its erstwhile National Action Plan “to focus on kinetic and non-kinetic domains”.¹²² The new strategy will combine “ongoing intelligence-based operations” with “counter ideology efforts [to] improve governance and foster a culture of tolerance, peaceful co-existence and diversity”.¹²³ Moreover, Kyrgyzstan, similar to other Central Asian countries, “set up a new action plan” within the Interior Ministry to “prevent the spread of extremist ideologies, specifically in the online realm, stretching to 2027”.¹²⁴

Indonesia, meanwhile, completed the first five years of its own National Action Plan Against Extremism. A notable outcome was the “decentralisation of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies”, as eight provinces and eight districts established more geographically focused Regional Action Plans for Preventing Extremism. Civil society organisations also “filled in some of the gaps in P/CVE infrastructure”, underscoring the “‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ principles in Indonesia’s P/CVE approach”.¹²⁵ The Malaysian Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (MyPCVE) was also launched in September.¹²⁶ MyPCVE takes a “holistic approach in tackling violent extremist ideologies” and comprises a “mix of hard and soft strategies” that emphasise “multi-stakeholder and inter-agency cooperation”.¹²⁷

Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes

The year underscored the importance of successful rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. These should aim to provide “former terrorist detainees with the tools and support necessary to rebuild their lives and become productive members of society”.¹²⁸ The 2024 survey of several regions in this volume confirm that several elements should be involved. First is psychological and religious support, as many individuals involved in terrorism have experienced some form of trauma or manipulation leading to their radicalisation. Second, educational and vocational training is needed to assist former terrorist detainees in reintegrating into society. Third, community acceptance is also a key component of effective reintegration, as a “community-centric approach” can help prevent recidivism by “addressing the social isolation and alienation” that fuels radicalisation.¹²⁹ Finally, familial and social networks should also be brought into rehabilitation efforts, as engaging families can help “rebuild trust” and “provide a strong support system for former terrorists”.¹³⁰

Addressing Medium- to Longer-Term Structural Grievances

Finally, the 2024 survey reinforced once again the recurring theme that addressing underlying political and socioeconomic structural grievances simply has to be part of the overall mix in dealing with the terrorism/extremism challenge.

In Pakistan, to illustrate, the “ethno-separatist insurgency in Balochistan is rooted in decades of ethnic discrimination, political exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation”.¹³¹ Hence, addressing the “genuine grievances” of the Baloch community would be “essential to isolate the militant groups”.¹³² In India, the violence in Kashmir is “not a military issue but a political response to the disenfranchisement of the region”, the high unemployment rate and several big infrastructure projects threatening “village geographies”.¹³³ Moreover, Indian government “excesses” in governing the region through force have “increased the trust deficit between India and the local population”.¹³⁴

In Bangladesh, while the Sheikh Hasina government before its ouster had mounted “some major infrastructure projects and made strides to maintain a zero-tolerance policy against militancy”, the public had called it out for “authoritarianism, corruption, cronyism, youth unemployment and economic mismanagement”.¹³⁵ Worse, efforts by her regime to forcibly suppress dissent by “deploying the police and paramilitary forces” was a strategy that backfired, inciting public rage.¹³⁶ In Africa, without a “comprehensive approach” addressing not just “immediate security concerns” but also “underlying socioeconomic grievances”, the Islamist terrorism challenge on that continent is “likely to persist and even escalate, posing profound implications for regional and global security”.¹³⁷

In the Thai Deep South in 2024, “attempts to ensure legal accountability for the 2004 Tak Bai protest failed”, undermining the credibility of the judicial system and “reaffirming the perceived culture of impunity in Thailand” amongst southern Thai Muslims.¹³⁸ More fundamentally, the BRN’s aspiration for “recognition of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic identities of the Patani community, freedom to uphold and practise their religious beliefs, ability to manage the region’s natural resources and freedom from political intimidation” – demands which resonate in the Deep South – can be achieved through some form of “self-governance” within the framework of the unitary Thai state.¹³⁹ However, if the new Paetongtarn Shinawatra government remains “swayed by hawkish advisors” seeking to “crush the BRN militarily and politically”, any new peace talks would unlikely be geared toward “addressing the root causes of the conflict”.¹⁴⁰ In the southern Philippines, despite the steadily improving security situation, “many of the homes destroyed during the Marawi Siege in 2017 have still not been rebuilt”, while “living conditions in the temporary shelters remain abysmal”.¹⁴¹ Such conditions can readily be “exploited” for extremist propaganda purposes, impacting the “future trajectory of Islamist radicalisation and terrorism in the Philippines”.¹⁴²

Finally, in the coming year, addressing underlying structural factors are needed to deal not just with the Islamist extremist challenge. While “hard responses are used to control the threat” of the extreme right in the West, “underlying grievances” such as “lack of employment, the rising cost of living, demographic changes owing to rapid immigration” as well as “evolving value systems” that conservative groups find difficult to accept,¹⁴³ will also be equally important to address. This would be all the more so given the clear political swing towards the far right in Western countries in 2024 – exemplified most clearly by Donald Trump’s victory in the November 2024 US presidential election. Tellingly, Trump’s impending return to the White House in January 2025 has been “hailed from the streets of European capitals to nationalist circles in India”.¹⁴⁴

About the Author

Kumar Ramakrishna is the Dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He was previously Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) and is currently its Research Advisor. He can be reached at iskumar@ntu.edu.sg.

Citations

¹ “What is Iran’s ‘Axis of Resistance’?” *Reuters*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-is-irans-axis-resistance-2024-08-05/>.

- ² See Moustafa Ayad, "Assessing the Gaza War's Impact on Salafi-Jihadist Messaging in MENA, Following Resistance Axis Losses," in this volume.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Mina Al-Lami, "From Syrian Jihadist Leader to Rebel Politician: How Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani Reinvented Himself," *BBC News*, December 9, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0q0w1q8zqvo.amp>.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ See Ahmad Helmi bin Mohamad Hasbi, Nurrisha Ismail and Saddiq Basha, "Key Trends in Digital Extremism 2024: The Resilience and Expansion of Jihadist and Far-Right Movements," in this volume.
- ⁷ See Kalicharan Veera Singam and Abigail Leong, "Singapore," in this volume.
- ⁸ Ayad, "Assessing the Gaza War's Impact."
- ⁹ See Atta Barkindo, "Africa," in this volume.
- ¹⁰ Ayad, "Assessing the Gaza War's Impact."
- ¹¹ See Rueben Dass, "Malaysia," in this volume.
- ¹² See Antonio Giustozzi, "Afghanistan," in this volume.
- ¹³ See Amresh Gunasingham, "Sri Lanka," in this volume.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Giustozzi, "Afghanistan."
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ See Riccardo Valle, "Central Asia," in this volume.
- ¹⁸ Giustozzi, "Afghanistan."
- ¹⁹ Valle, "Central Asia."
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Barkindo, "Africa."
- ²² See Iftekharul Bashar, "Bangladesh," in this volume.
- ²³ See Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "India," in this volume.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Bashar, "Bangladesh."
- ²⁶ See Alif Satria and Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah, "Indonesia," in this volume.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Alif Satria, "Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2024), pp. 12-13.
- ²⁹ Barkindo, "Africa."
- ³⁰ Ayaz Gul, "UN: Afghan Taliban Increase Support for Anti-Pakistan TTP Terrorists," *VoA*, July 11, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-afghan-taliban-increase-support-for-anti-pakistan-ttp-terrorists/7694324.html>.
- ³¹ See Abdul Basit, "Pakistan," in this volume.
- ³² Giustozzi, "Afghanistan."
- ³³ Siyech, "India."
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Bashar, "Bangladesh."
- ³⁶ Satria and Sjah, "Indonesia."
- ³⁷ Noor Huda Ismail, "Disbandment of Jemaah Islamiyah: The Impact on Militant Groups," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 129 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/disbandment-of-jemaah-islamiyah-the-impact-on-militant-groups/>.
- ³⁸ Kumar Ramakrishna, "The Dissolution of Jemaah Islamiyah: Genuine Change or Tactical Switch?" *RSIS Commentary*, No. 105 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/the-dissolution-of-jemaah-islamiyah-genuine-change-or-tactical-switch/>. See also Noor Ismail, "Is the Dissolution of Jemaah Islamiyah a Victory or a Strategic Deception?" *East Asia Forum*, September 14, 2024, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/09/14/is-the-dissolution-of-jemaah-islamiyah-a-victory-or-a-strategic-deception/>.
- ³⁹ Satria and Sjah, "Indonesia."
- ⁴⁰ Julia Ebner, *Going Dark: The Secret Social Lives of Extremists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 288.
- ⁴¹ Claudia Wallner and Jessica White, *Global Violent Right-Wing Extremism: Mapping the Threat and Response in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and South Africa* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2022), p. 42, https://ctmorse.wpenginpowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/global-vrwe-threat-and-response-mapping_think-piece_final-17022022.pdf.
- ⁴² See Kalicharan Veera Singam, "Assessing the Extreme Right in the West in 2024," in this volume.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Siyech, "India."
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Hasbi et al., "Key Trends in Digital Extremism."
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Dass, "Malaysia."

- ⁵⁵ See Mohamed Feisal Mohamed Hassan and Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hassan, “Reintegrating Extremists in Southeast Asia: Lessons in Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation,” in this volume.
- ⁵⁶ Basit, “Pakistan.”
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Singam, “Assessing the Extreme Right.”
- ⁵⁹ Hasbi et al., “Key Trends in Digital Extremism.”
- ⁶⁰ Singam, “Assessing the Extreme Right.”
- ⁶¹ Hasbi et al., “Key Trends in Digital Extremism.”
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ The Austronesian supremacist community advocates for the ethnic superiority of Austronesians – an ethno-linguistic group comprising significant populations in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. See also Saddiq Basha, “The Creeping Influence of the Extreme Right’s Meme Subculture in Southeast Asia’s TikTok Community,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, April 8, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/04/08/the-creeping-influence-of-the-extreme-rights-meme-subculture-in-southeast-asias-tiktok-community/>.
- ⁶⁵ Hasbi et al., “Key Trends in Digital Extremism.”
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Giovanni Giacolone, “The Tablighi Jamaat in Europe,” *Trends Research & Advisory*, August 22, 2023, <https://trendsresearch.org/publication/the-tablighi-jamaat-in-europe/>.
- ⁶⁸ Valle, “Central Asia.”
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Bashar, “Bangladesh.”
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Hasbi et al., “Key Trends in Digital Extremism.”
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Satria and Sjah, “Indonesia.”
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Basit, “Pakistan.”
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Siyech, “India.”
- ⁸⁰ Barkindo, “Africa.”
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Satria and Sjah, “Indonesia.”
- ⁸⁴ Dass, “Malaysia.”
- ⁸⁵ See Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat, “Thailand,” in this volume.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ See Benjamin Mok and Iftekharul Bashar, “Myanmar,” in this volume.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid.
- ⁹⁰ Mahmudul Hasan, “8 Years of Holey Artisan Attack: Ansar Al Islam Still Active,” *The Daily Star*, July 1, 2024, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/pi4wsmcc72>.
- ⁹¹ Bashar, “Bangladesh.”
- ⁹² Hassan and Hassan, “Reintegrating Extremists in Southeast Asia.”
- ⁹³ Singam and Leong, “Singapore.”
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Dass, “Malaysia.”
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Ayad, “Assessing the Gaza War’s Impact.”
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰ Bashar, “Bangladesh.”
- ¹⁰¹ Satria and Sjah, “Indonesia.”
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Dass, “Malaysia.”
- ¹⁰⁴ Singam, “Assessing the Extreme Right.”
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ Marcel Fürstenau, “Germany’s Far-Right AfD Under Mounting Pressure,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 14, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-far-right-afd-under-mounting-pressure/a-69078624>.
- ¹⁰⁸ Chalermripinyorat, “Thailand.”
- ¹⁰⁹ Valle, “Central Asia.”
- ¹¹⁰ Siyech, “India.”
- ¹¹¹ Ibid.

- ¹¹² Ibid.
- ¹¹³ Satria and Sjah, "Indonesia."
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁵ Dass, "Malaysia."
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁷ Singam and Leong, "Singapore."
- ¹¹⁸ See Kenneth Yeo, "Philippines," in this volume.
- ¹¹⁹ Barkindo, "Africa."
- ¹²⁰ Bashar, "Bangladesh."
- ¹²¹ Ibid.
- ¹²² Basit, "Pakistan."
- ¹²³ Ibid.
- ¹²⁴ Valle, "Central Asia."
- ¹²⁵ Satria and Sjah, "Indonesia."
- ¹²⁶ Dass, "Malaysia."
- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
- ¹²⁸ Hassan and Hassan, "Reintegrating Extremists in Southeast Asia."
- ¹²⁹ Ibid.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid.
- ¹³¹ Basit, "Pakistan."
- ¹³² Ibid.
- ¹³³ Siyech, "India."
- ¹³⁴ Ibid.
- ¹³⁵ Bashar, "Bangladesh."
- ¹³⁶ Ibid.
- ¹³⁷ Barkindo, "Africa."
- ¹³⁸ Chalermripinyorat, "Thailand."
- ¹³⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁴¹ Yeo, "Philippines."
- ¹⁴² Ibid.
- ¹⁴³ Singam, "Assessing the Extreme Right."
- ¹⁴⁴ Ashok Swain, "Trump Victory Energises Global Far-Right, Will Accelerate Anti-Democratic Trend", *Scroll.in*, November 23, 2024, <https://scroll.in/article/1075467/trump-victory-energises-global-far-right-will-accelerate-anti-democratic-trend>.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore

INDONESIA

Alif Satria and Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah

As in previous years, the overall threat posed by Indonesia's terrorist organisations declined in 2024. Notably, the number of reported terrorist plots dropped compared to 2023. While there were seven plots recorded in 2023, only three were planned in 2024.¹ Additionally, for the second consecutive year, Indonesia experienced zero terrorist attacks – signalling the decreased operational capability of these organisations. However, Indonesia's terrorism landscape is undergoing significant changes. While the organisational dynamics of pro-Islamic State (IS) groups like Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) remained consistent in 2024, other groups experienced significant shifts with Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Indonesia's largest pro-Al-Qaeda (AQ) group, declaring its dissolution in mid-2024, and police investigations uncovering international networks of another pro-AQ group, Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah (JAS).

Trends in Organisational Dynamics and Plots

Jamaah Islamiyah

Jamaah Islamiyah (JI)'s operational capacities continued to weaken in 2024 – despite its persistent attempts to rebuild. This was largely the result of two factors. The first was Indonesia's counter terrorist operations' increased focus on JI. Notably, in the past three years, JI members have increasingly become the Special Detachment (Detasemen Khusus, or Densus) 88's primary target of arrests. In 2022, for example, JI members represented 36.3 percent of all arrested terrorist suspects. In 2023, this number increased to 37.4 percent and, in 2024, it increased again to 51.3 percent. While the number of JI members arrested in 2024 was small (19) compared to previous years, they mostly came from Central Java and Central Sulawesi – two JI strongholds that have historically been important to the organisation's recruitment and training programmes. Significantly, the individuals arrested also held crucial positions in JI's structure, including in the *dakwah* (preaching), recruitment, training and fund-raising divisions.²

The second factor that resulted in JI's weakened operational capacity was its senior leader's announcement in late June 2024 that the organisation was "ready to disband". Made by JI senior member Abu Rusydan, the announcement also stated that JI intends to "return to the Republic of Indonesia", become actively involved in promoting the country's independence, abide by all the nation's laws, and ensure its *madrassas*' teaching materials are free from *tatharuf* (extremism). The significance of these statements was bolstered by the fact that 16 other JI seniors were listed as having approved and supported the decision. These included two former JI *emirs* (leaders), Para Wijayanto and Mbah Zarkasih, and the head of Tim Lajnah (JI's contingency leadership structure)³ Arif Siswanto and member Dr Sholahuddin.⁴

Following this announcement, JI leaders conducted several concrete actions to indicate their commitment to the organisation's disbandment. Beginning from late July, for example, JI seniors cooperated with Densus 88 to hold over 35 seminars aimed at explaining the reason for disbandment to other members. As a result, over 4,000 JI members declared their support for the disbandment and pledged loyalty to the Indonesian Republic.⁵ Additionally, in early September, former JI seniors reiterated their call for members to surrender any hidden firearms. By mid-September, JI members from North Lombok, Central Java and Central Sulawesi handed over a total of six firearms, including one M-16 assault rifle; seven crossbows; over 900 rounds of ammunition; and over 4 kilogrammes worth of explosive chemicals.⁶

Jamaah Ansharut Daulah and Other Pro-Islamic State Groups

Both *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD), Indonesia's largest pro-Islamic State (IS) organisation, and other pro-IS individuals, have made little headway in rebuilding their operational capacities following the mass arrests of key leaders in 2018.⁷ Continuing with the trends of the past five years, police arrests indicate that pro-IS networks in Indonesia still largely comprise of decentralised cells, with activities being unilaterally conducted by insulated local units that may consist of only one or two individuals. As a result, the number of arrested pro-IS individuals decreased relative to members of other terrorist organisations. Notably, in 2023, pro-IS individuals comprised 43.5 percent of all arrested terrorist suspects. In 2024, with just 11 pro-IS individuals arrested, they made up only 27.5 percent of all arrested terrorist suspects.

Similar to 2023, most pro-IS individuals who were arrested were unaffiliated to any organisation. Notably, out of the 11 pro-IS individuals arrested in 2024, only five were affiliated with JAD. Two of these JAD members were arrested in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, in early September. One was a regional emir responsible for organising physical training and *halaqah* units (Quranic study circles) for members in Bima, West Sumbawa and Lombok.⁸ The second suspect was responsible for JAD cadre recruitment and physical training.⁹ Another cluster of three was arrested in Central Java in early November. One was arrested in Kudus, Central Java, and was suspected to have planned attacks. Another member was arrested in Karanganyar, Central Java, for spreading online propaganda for JAD. The last member was arrested in Demak, Central Java, for leading a JAD Quranic study circle.¹⁰

Besides JAD affiliates, six other pro-IS individuals were detained in unrelated arrests in Karawang, West Java; Kota Batu, East Java; Solo, Central Java; West Jakarta, Jakarta; and Bekasi, West Java, in 2024. Four of the suspects had made improvised explosive devices (IEDs), seemingly in preparation for an attack, though not in coordination with one another. The police reported that one suspect had planned a double suicide bombing against worship houses in Kota Batu, East Java. Another pro-IS suspect was arrested in Bekasi, West Java, after the police found his online comment which simply stated "Bomb!" in response to a post about Pope Francis' visit to Istiqlal Mosque in September 2024.¹¹ This latter arrest was made alongside six other arrests linked to Pope Francis' visit. Importantly, the police reported that the suspects had no links to one another, and, besides the IS supporter, the remaining were not reported to be affiliated to a group.¹²

Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah

Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah (JAS), a pro-Al-Qaeda (AQ) splinter group of *Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid* (JAT), re-emerged on Indonesia's threat horizon in 2024 after member Yudi Lukito Kurniawan was arrested in Gorontalo City, Gorontalo, in late August.¹³ Indonesian police reported that Kurniawan was affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, where he had travelled to in January 2014.¹⁴ While in Yemen, Kurniawan claimed to have received an order from a senior AQAP figure to target the Singapore stock exchange building as a form of attack against the "distant enemy", referring to the United States (US) and its allies.¹⁵ The plot, however, was ultimately unsuccessful as he was deported by Singaporean authorities to Batam when he attempted to enter Singapore in 2015 via sea.

Kurniawan's arrest followed the capture of seven JAS members in 2023, whom investigations revealed were linked to foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) activity in Yemen and Syria.¹⁶ In response to these arrests, JAS released public statements denying they were involved in any form of terrorism.¹⁷ However, a recent report by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) confirmed that at least seven JAS members, including Kurniawan, had travelled to Yemen in 2014 to train with AQAP, and that JAS had also facilitated other training contingents' travels to Syria in 2014 and 2015.¹⁸ It is important to note, however, that despite the existence of JAS' global jihad programme, in practice, these international travels appeared to be driven more by the members' desire to train as opposed to a top-down organisational initiative. Indeed, most JAS members who travelled to Yemen and Syria had nominated themselves to go.¹⁹

While JAS does not pose as big a threat as other Islamist militant groups in Indonesia due to its smaller network size and lower propensity for conducting attacks – the arrests over the past year were the first instances of violent activity connected to JAS in its 10 years of existence – its strong community base and relationships with terrorist networks abroad indicate a need to continue monitoring the group’s future direction. Indeed, while JAS continues to claim that they are a non-violent Islamist organisation committed to social services, there has been speculation that JAS is still sending members abroad for jihad.²⁰ JAS’ humanitarian organisation, Medis dan Aksi Kemanusiaan (Me-Dan), which was previously used as a cover for FTF travels, also remains active on social media platforms.²¹

Counter Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism

Counter Terrorism Developments

Indonesia’s counter terrorism capacities remained consistently high in 2024, as demonstrated by the absence of any successful terrorist attack throughout the year. However, the annual number of terrorist suspects arrested in Indonesia in 2024 was the lowest of the past five years. Whereas 131 terrorist suspects were apprehended in 2023, already reflecting a 47.1 percent decrease from the number of arrested terrorist suspects in 2022, only 40 terrorist suspects were arrested from January to November 2024. This marked a 69.4 percent decrease compared to 2023 and an 88.1 percent decrease from 2021, in which the highest number of arrests of the past five years occurred. These arrests largely targeted members of JI, constituting 47.5 percent of all arrests, as well as pro-IS individuals, accounting for 27.5 percent of all arrests.

This reduction in the number of arrests targeting terrorist suspects, however, does not necessarily signal a weakening of Indonesia’s counter terrorism capacities. Not only have existing operations, as mentioned above, successfully prevented all terrorist attacks throughout 2024, the authorities also managed to arrest individuals who held key positions in their respective networks and organisations. While counter terrorism operations only managed to arrest 19 JI members, for example, more than half of those arrested held important roles within the structure of JI’s Eastern *Qodimah* (regional subdivision) – including fund-raising, firearms procurement, training and assisting in the hiding of fugitive senior members.²² Similarly, while counter terrorism operations only arrested two JAD members in 2024, one of them was responsible for recruitment and the other was a cell leader responsible for organising the group’s activities.²³

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Developments

In 2024, Indonesia completed the first term of its National Action Plan Against Extremism (RAN PE), covering the 2020-2024 period.²⁴ A notable outcome of RAN PE has been the decentralisation of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies, as eight provinces – East Java, Central Java, West Java, Banten, Aceh, Lampung, South Kalimantan and Central Sulawesi – and eight districts²⁵ established Regional Action Plans for Preventing Extremism (RAD PE), while other areas are in the process of developing them.²⁶ Information sharing and coordination between P/CVE stakeholders has also been boosted through the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT)’s online platform, the Indonesia Knowledge Hub (I-KHub).²⁷ While these developments mark a significant improvement in the formulation and enforcement of P/CVE policies, programmes still face the challenges of being de-prioritised, uncoordinated and under-resourced.²⁸ Civil society organisations (CSOs) have filled in some of the gaps in P/CVE infrastructure with over 440 initiatives between 2020 and 2022, underlining the “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” principles in Indonesia’s P/CVE approach.²⁹

One upcoming challenge for P/CVE will be managing the return of Indonesians affiliated with FTFs – one of BNPT’s priorities for 2024.³⁰ Indonesia had implemented a moratorium on ex-ISI repatriation from Syria in 2020, but plans to recommence repatriation began in 2023 with the issuance of the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal and Security Affairs’ Ministerial Decree No. 90/2023, which established a task force for managing overseas Indonesians associated with FTFs. The task force, which is led by the head of BNPT and includes 13 other ministerial-level

bodies,³¹ is reportedly preparing to first repatriate children under 18, women and elderly men.³² The task force has formed subdivisions in line with the three phases of repatriation: Before Border, At Border and After Border, which largely represent the respective processes of data verification, individual screening, and finally law enforcement, rehabilitation and reintegration. Once repatriated, individuals are screened at the border for medical and psychological conditions as well as their degree of radicalisation. Confirmed participants of violence and terrorism are imprisoned, while others go to rehabilitation centres for up to one year.³³

Outlook

Risk of JI Splinters

While JI's senior members' decision to disband is a welcome development, its long-term impact largely depends on whether the organisation's members acquiesce. Most JI members, particularly those recruited during Para Wijayanto's leadership, would likely support the decision as they would have had to undergo strict disciplinary programmes which would habituate them to follow the central leadership's orders.³⁴ This is made more likely by the fact that multiple respected JI figures have also supported the decision.³⁵ Indeed, as noted above, between July and September, over 4,000 JI members declared their support for the seniors' decision to disband.³⁶ Moreover, senior JI figure Abu Rusydan also stated that JI's four main divisions, namely, Tajhiz (logistics and training), ALWI (intelligence), Forum Komunikasi Pondok Pesantren (education) and 3T (*dakwah*), have also expressed support for the disbandment.³⁷

There is, however, still a risk of some dissenting JI senior members disagreeing with the decision and splintering off. Notably, splinters are more likely to be formed by experienced group members, as splintering is a risky endeavour that militants would only choose to do if they believe they would be successful.³⁸ In the past, JI splinters were formed by high-ranking individuals, such as Al-Qaeda in the Malay Archipelago, which was formed by top recruiter and strategist, Noordin M Top.³⁹ More recently, JI factions were also all initiated by senior members such as Imaruddin, who led a faction of his own to plan attacks against Chinese-Indonesian stores.⁴⁰ Indeed, there have been some reports of members not wanting to disband in West Nusa Tenggara and South Sumatra.⁴¹ In Central Java, senior JI figure Usman bin Sef said the response has been 95 percent positive⁴² – indicating some residual discontent with the disbandment move.

Inter-Organisational Terrorist Cooperation

The Abu Oemar network discovered in 2023 and investigated last year revealed the development of a multi-organisational terrorist network that had planned to attack Indonesia's 2024 presidential election. In total, the network consisted of 194 members spread across 14 halaqah units in West Java, Jakarta and Banten. Most of the members were affiliated with an array of extremist milieus, including non-violent radical Islamic organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) as well as actual terrorist groups such as Darul Islam (DI), Khilafatul Muslimin (KM), Fikroh Abu Hamzah (FAH) and Anshor Daulah (AD) – the latter being the name used to reference pro-IS individuals who are unaffiliated to JAD. Interestingly, membership affiliations were often mixed within a single halaqah. Indeed, six of the 14 halaqah had members from more than one terrorist organisation.⁴³

This development has highlighted the potential risk of cross-organisational terrorist cooperation in Indonesia. Indeed, the multi-affiliate nature of Abu Oemar's network – notably consisting of both pro-IS groups such as AD and anti-IS groups such as DI – is rare. The last instance of such cooperation was seen in 2011 with Tanzim Aceh, when members from various terrorist organisations such as JI, Mujahidin KOMPAK and DI, along with militant Islamic groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, or FPI), came together in Aceh for a year-long military training programme.⁴⁴ Moreover, the network's diverse affiliations was only made possible due to Abu Oemar's charismatic personality and his extensive social ties, which crossed traditional organisational boundaries.⁴⁵ That said, Abu Oemar's network does highlight that such cross-organisational cooperation is possible under specific circumstances and thus should be closely monitored.

Repatriation

In May 2024, BNPT formally submitted a proposal to President Joko Widodo to recommence repatriation of around 400 Indonesian citizens residing in the Syrian camps.⁴⁶ As of now, no decision has been announced by the President. Possibly hampering the policy implementation is a change in leadership in BNPT – former head Rycko Amelza Dahniel retired in September 2024 and was replaced by Eddy Hartono.⁴⁷

There are two main challenges concerning the repatriation process. The first, related to the Before Border phase, is verifying the data of Indonesians stuck in Syria, as many no longer have identity documents.⁴⁸ The second is ensuring there is sufficient space and capability for the returnees' deradicalisation and rehabilitation, as the centre in charge of the After Border process has not yet been determined.⁴⁹ One option is the Handayani Center, which, together with the Protection House and Trauma Center (RPTC), was responsible for the rehabilitation of IS returnees in the past. However, officials have voiced concerns that the Handayani Center is not equipped to handle highly radicalised individuals.⁵⁰ Back in 2017, two individuals rehabilitated at Handayani, Khalid Abu Bakar and Anggi, joined JAD groups to plot attacks shortly after their release.⁵¹ An integrated policy which brings in the rehabilitation expertise of more experienced agencies, such as BNPT's Deradicalisation Center or CSOs that are part of the C-SAVE (Civil Society Against Violent Extremism) Indonesia network, is thus needed.⁵²

About the Authors

Alif Satria and **Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah** are Associate Research Fellows with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. They can be reached at isalifsatria@ntu.edu.sg and isadlini.sjah@ntu.edu.sg, respectively.

PHILIPPINES

Kenneth Yeo

The terrorism threat in the Philippines has decreased significantly since 2020. The frequency of attacks in the country has reduced and there were no major attacks conducted by the communist and Islamist terrorist groups over this period. From the declaration of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)-free zones in the restive Mindanao region, to the paralysis of the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute Group (DIMG), the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has made significant progress in their counter terrorism and peace-building efforts in Mindanao, southern Philippines. This has been achieved through three primary strategies: 1) leadership decapitation; 2) encouraging surrender; and 3) territorial denial.

Trends

Decline of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

In September 2023, the entire administrative region of Sulu in the southern Philippines was declared an ASG-free zone. Over the following year, the AFP's efforts to reduce the ASG's presence in the region's communities then expanded into neighbouring Basilan. Both areas were longtime hotbeds of activity for the Islamic State (IS)-linked group, who had for decades terrorised the southern Philippines with kidnappings, beheadings and, more recently, a spate of bombings. Essentially, three critical policies by the AFP have contributed to the weakening of the ASG and its splinters, which has in turn led to them being squeezed out of their longtime strongholds.

First, the government's Executive Order 70 (EO70), implemented in 2018, allowed for terrorists to surrender to the authorities. In exchange for surrendering their arms and actionable intelligence, the authorities committed to providing them with protection, financial support and an opportunity to reintegrate into society. EO70 was first implemented to demobilise the communist terrorist groups (CTGs) who have waged a decades-long insurgency and was subsequently adopted to demobilise other local terrorist groups (LTGs) in the Philippines. However, unlike in recent years, the number of ASG surrenders between 2018 and 2019 was negligible. Back then, the ASG went by the slogan "no surrender" and escalated the conflict in Sulu instead.

Second, the AFP embarked on a leadership decapitation campaign against the ASG's key leaders. In particular, the killing of Hajan Sawadjaan, the leader of an IS-aligned ASG splinter, led to the number of surrenders increasing significantly. For example, 110 persons were reported as having surrendered in the months following the passing of Sawadjaan in July 2020.⁵³ The ASG did not recover from this setback. AFP forces subsequently continued their targeted strikes against successive leaders of ASG-linked groups, including Furuji Indama (October 2020), Mannul Sawadjaan (November 2020), Pasil Bayali (October 2023)⁵⁴ and Mundi Sawadjaan (December 2023). These relentless assaults from the AFP left the ASG's splinters leaderless and demoralised.

An added blow to the ASG has been the extensive community engagement efforts executed by local government units (LGUs) within the Sulu and Basilan region, in collaboration with the AFP. Many acronyms have been used to describe the various local efforts, like PAVE⁵⁵ and BRAVE.⁵⁶ However, one of the most significant efforts on the ground has been the "Balik Barangay" (return home) programme, which was first launched in Sulu.⁵⁷

After the 2019 heavy fighting between the AFP and ASG forces in Patikul, Sulu, many Tausugs, one of the largest ethnic Muslim groups in Mindanao, evacuated their homes and moved into temporary shelters. Balik Barangay was an initiative by LGUs and the AFP to bring displaced Tausugs back to their home villages. The Balik Barangay campaign has allowed the AFP to achieve two key objectives: 1) to win the hearts and minds of the local Tausug communities; and 2) to squeeze the ASG out of the occupied villages. Despite the animosity between the locals and the military, assurances to bring them back to their villages paved the path towards cooperation. The locals depended on the military to provide them with security as they migrated back to their home villages. In turn, displaced ASG forces fled out of the villages and into the mountains.

Through these three policies, the AFP has been able to demobilise the ASG from its rank and file, paralyse the ASG's leadership, and win the hearts and minds of the local communities. The operationally and psychologically weakened ASG has therefore been unable to contest the AFP's territorial advances, resulting in the territorial squeeze out of Sulu and some parts of Basilan.

Paralysis of the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute Group (DIMG)

The DIMG has also suffered significantly in recent years. After a four-year pursuit, DIMG leader Abu Zacariah was killed by the AFP in June 2023.⁵⁸ According to the Al-Faris Media group (the unofficial IS media centre in the Philippines), the DIMG blamed local Maranao (a native ethnic Muslim group in Lanao province) for providing local authorities with a tip-off on Abu Zacariah's location, and vowed vengeance by attacking Marawi. While there were attempts to retaliate against the Maranao community, they were not sustained.

Notably, the December 2023 bombing of the Mindanao State University (MSU)'s gymnasium, which killed four people, was an attempt to retaliate against the Maranao community.⁵⁹ Notwithstanding this, analysts would acknowledge that the terrorism threat in Lanao has subsided significantly since 2019. With the loss of Abu Zacariah, the remnants of the DIMG are leaderless and directionless. The heavy military pressure asserted on the group has driven the remnants of the DIMG into hiding.

Beyond military action, the rehabilitation of Marawi City is an area of concern. After the five-month-long armed conflict in 2017 that led to widespread destruction, the Philippine government

established the Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) to oversee the recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation of the city. In the seven years since its enactment, the TFBM built sports facilities and an exhibition hall. However, many of the homes destroyed during the Marawi Siege in 2017 have still not been rebuilt. Moreover, living conditions in the temporary shelters remain abysmal. While residents of the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps dotted around the region are not at risk of radicalisation, they continue to suffer from a lack of basic necessities such as water, electricity and internet access.

There have been significant challenges in the reconstruction of homes in Marawi after the conflict. First, the authorities have had to deconflict claims around landownership by the residents.⁶⁰ Second, there were significant challenges in convincing local Maranaos to allow the TFBM to demolish existing properties in order to build new homes, amidst fears that the government would reclaim their land after the demolition. Finally, the TFBM's reconstruction work was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic because of safe distancing measures and budget cuts. Additionally, the TFBM was dissolved in March 2024, while policy changes by the Marawi Compensation Board (MSB) resulted in a reduction in the amount of money promised to property owners who had lost their homes.⁶¹

Demobilisation of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)

Today, the BIFF is the largest Islamist terrorist group in Mindanao, primarily because of its appeal to the local Maguindanao population – a significantly larger population compared to the Maranao, Tausug and Yakan people who are also native to the region.

The BIFF also suffers from high rates of surrender through EO70, primarily from the Bongos and Karialan factions.⁶² Similar to the ASG and the DIMG, the AFP's strategy against the BIFF has also focused on leadership decapitation to demoralise the group, including the killing of leaders Hassan Salahuddin (October 2021)⁶³ and Kagi Karialan (April 2024).⁶⁴ Nevertheless, unlike the other Islamist terror groups operating in Mindanao, the BIFF is not leaderless. Emarudin Kulaw (alias Alpha King) has been identified as a potential leader of the BIFF.⁶⁵ Not much is known about Alpha King as there have been no significant activities attributed to him.

BIFF militants who surrender are housed in an AFP camp, while the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) processes the profile of each individual. However, there are significant complications in profiling the BIFF members. As both the BIFF and the MILF share the same support base (i.e., the Maguindanao people), the affiliation of a militant is often unclear. Moreover, there is potential for deception among some members of the public, who, despite having no affiliation to militancy, still choose to surrender to the authorities for the financial incentives provided to surrendered militias. Therefore, the Bangsamoro authorities have developed the "Joint AFP PNP Intelligence Certification" (JAPIC) to verify the membership of surrendered militias.⁶⁶

After the profiling and sentencing of militants are completed, reintegration programmes are then offered to the surrendered personnel (returnees). These include vocational training and financial aid to allow them a fresh start in life. Shelter is provided to the returnees, and the AFP, the Philippines National Police (PNP) and the MILF jointly monitor the returnee population. However, there are problems with the provision of shelter. Due to pre-existing landownership rights, it is difficult to find space to develop shelters, particularly in the Maguindanao region.⁶⁷ This presents a challenge for the authorities in upholding their commitment to reintegrating surrendered BIFF members.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Overall, much has been done to demobilise militants in Mindanao. Alongside efforts to demobilise militants in Mindanao, there are highly localised efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate the surrendered militants. Today, the implementation of the government's National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP P/CVE) is highly decentralised in the Philippines. The AFP and the PNP work closely with LGUs to implement localised policies to

reintegrate surrendered militants. The inclusion of LGUs as security partners is a significant shift from the military-centric approach that the Philippines practised for many years.

One of the key reasons for this decentralised approach to rehabilitation and reintegration is the recruitment mechanisms of Islamist terrorist groups in Mindanao. The recruitment of militias is highly correlated with their ethnolinguistic communities.⁶⁸ Therefore, a localised approach would allow actors to consider the socio-cultural nuances in the implementation of national policies. Hence, even the implementation of common national initiatives is highly dependent on local community actors. The AFP, the PNP and LGUs also engage local and international civil society organisations (CSOs) to offer localised expertise in various aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration.

One of the key practices of the Philippines' whole-of-nation efforts to reintegrate former combatants is to avoid referring to them as "former combatants", "former violent extremists" or "former terrorists".⁶⁹ This is to reduce the opportunity for structural stigmatisation from the community. Instead, the community has adopted terms like "returnees" or "rescued friends" to destigmatise the process of reintegration while preserving the dignity of the surrendered personnel. Ultimately, the goal is to provide returnees with the opportunity to start their lives afresh. Nevertheless, there are locals who oppose this initiative as they have questioned the genuineness of the surrenders, claiming that returnees surrender only because of the financial incentives provided by the Philippine government.

Spotlight on the Bangsamoro Election 2025

A crucial event of significance is the upcoming Bangsamoro parliamentary election in 2025. Today, the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP), which is the political party representing the MILF, runs the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).⁷⁰ Sixteen local political parties have registered to contest in the first Bangsamoro election upon the completion of the BTA's term in 2025.⁷¹

The UBJP is now confronted with the realities on the ground. In particular, it remains to be seen how the party maintains political power amidst the complex dynamics between feuding clans and political dynasties.⁷² Locals have criticised the UBJP for being a party that only represents the Maguindanao, not the entire Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). With a stronghold in Cotabato City and the broader Maguindanao region, it is unlikely for the UBJP to win seats from areas where ethnic Maguindanao are not the majority. Moreover, there is a political alliance between traditional politicians campaigning on ethnic grounds. Notably, the BARMM Grand Coalition (BGC), comprising groups from various regions of BARMM,⁷³ has declared its intention to contest against the UBJP to run the BARMM.⁷⁴ The BGC has endorsed Sulu's governor, Sakur Tan, to be the chief minister of BARMM. Overall, the UBJP will face a tough election in 2025.

While these parties have committed to uphold a peaceful election in 2025,⁷⁵ Sidney Jones, a seasoned observer, notes that "violence is a near certainty" in elections within the Philippines.⁷⁶ This is because political clans are likely to deploy "guns, goons, and gold" to coerce or compensate their potential voters into supporting them, as seen at the non-partisan barangay elections in 2023.⁷⁷

Not the End of Structural and Organised Violence

While the threat outlook for terrorism has reduced significantly, it does not mean the end of structural and organised violence in the Philippines. The Philippines continues to suffer from inter-clan wars, *rido* (revenge culture) and organised crime. The accessibility of guns on the black market and the densely forested terrain allows illicit organisations to operate comfortably within Mindanao. Hence, despite the declaration of ASG-free areas in Basilan, bombings continue to occur occasionally.⁷⁸

The reduction of terrorism in Mindanao also does not signify the end of terrorism in the Philippines. Certainly, the security agencies have succeeded in reducing the threat of terrorism, and there is little expectation for the ASG or the DIMG to re-emerge as a significant force in the foreseeable future, as during the height of their activities between 2014 and 2019. However, the population of Mindanao continues to suffer from poor living conditions, which can be exploited for political mobilisation and radicalisation propaganda. In the immediate term, it is the domestic environment which will impact the future trajectory of Islamist radicalisation and terrorism in the Philippines.⁷⁹

About the Author

Kenneth Yeo is an Associate Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at iskennethyeo@ntu.edu.sg.

MALAYSIA

Rueben Dass

Malaysia experienced an uptick in terrorism-related activity in 2024, the highest since 2020. In May, the country experienced its second successful Islamic State (IS)-related attack since 2016. Following the attack, there was a wave of IS-related arrests and several plots were subsequently uncovered. The uptick in IS-related activity highlights the group's persistent threat to the country and wider region.

Domestic Threat Landscape

Heightened Terrorist Activity

On May 17, 2024, Malaysia suffered its second Islamic State (IS)-related attack after the 2016 Movida Bar bombing. The pre-dawn attack was carried out by 21-year-old Radin Luqman, who attacked a police station in Ulu Tiram, Johor.⁸⁰ Luqman stabbed a police officer to death, before confiscating the latter's weapon and fatally shooting another cop. He was killed in an ensuing firefight with a third police officer.

Luqman and his family, comprising his mother, two sisters and brother, were found to have been radicalised by his father, Radin Imran. Imran had previously been investigated for his links to Indonesian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), before pledging his allegiance to IS in 2014.⁸¹ The entire family of five was arrested and charged with terrorism offences in June.

Imran, the patriarch of the family, was charged with encouraging terrorist acts by promoting IS' violent ideology among his family, storing four homemade air rifles for IS activities, pledging loyalty to IS and possessing a book written by Aman Abdurrahman, the former leader of Indonesian pro-IS group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD).⁸² Luqman's brother, Radin Romyullah, 34, was charged for pledging allegiance to IS and possessing IS-related materials on a hard drive. Meanwhile, the three female family members – Luqman's mother and two sisters – were charged with deliberately omitting to provide information regarding crimes related to terrorism.⁸³

The attack was followed by a wave of IS-related arrests, comprising multi-state operations and arrests of at least 20 people. Among these, six men and two women linked to IS were apprehended for threatening attacks against the King of Malaysia, the prime minister and other dignitaries, including members of the police.⁸⁴ The eight suspects were aged between 25-70 and came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, including a housewife, a construction worker and a former university lecturer.⁸⁵

Another case of interest was the arrest of 28-year-old factory operator, Aabid Zarkasi. He was charged with the possession and preparation of explosive materials with the intent of carrying out attacks as well as the possession of IS-related propaganda.⁸⁶ Zarkasi had previously been arrested and jailed in 2018 for the possession of IS-related materials.⁸⁷

At least 13 (including the Ulu Tiram attacker's family) of the reported terrorism arrests involved the possession of IS-related materials.⁸⁸ This seemed to be the most common offence among the recent wave of arrests. Another interesting trend from the recent arrests was that of recidivists. At least six of the cases involved repeat offenders – four had previously been arrested and jailed for links to IS, while two, including Radin Imran, were suspected to have been former members of JI.⁸⁹

The recent uptick in IS-related terrorism cases in Malaysia is a noteworthy trend. Most of the cases, including the Ulu Tiram attack, seemed to involve self-radicalised individuals who were inspired by the group's ideology. This trend is similar to previous years; the only difference being the fact that individuals arrested in the past had been radicalised via social media by high-profile Malaysian fighters linked to IS in Iraq and Syria when the group was active there. While recent cases highlight the continuing importance of social media as a mode of extremist influence, especially for individuals looking for radical direction, the role of kinship and peer networks also remain key radicalisation drivers in Malaysia.

IS Returnees

There are currently more than 40 Malaysian nationals known to reside in Syria. The Malaysian government maintains an open-door policy towards repatriation and continues to engage in efforts to repatriate Malaysians from the theatre.⁹⁰ However, the Malaysian government faces several challenges. The first is the unwillingness of some individuals who are in Syria to return. This may be due to fear of arrest and prosecution upon return. The second is the fact that the Malaysian government does not recognise the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who oversee the refugee camps like al-Hol and al-Roj. This adds a diplomatic complication to the process of repatriation.

The threat posed by returning foreign fighters, particularly those who have had militant training and experience, is substantial. Refugee camps in Syria such as al-Hol and al-Roj, where most of the individuals formerly linked to IS are being held, currently suffer from poor conditions and abuse.⁹¹ The camps are also said to be hotbeds for radicalisation, particularly among children.⁹²

IS in Syria and Iraq remains resilient, with its fighting capacity estimated at between 3,000-5,000 members in January 2024 and an uptick in IS attacks in Syria since March 2024.⁹³ The presence of former IS members there who may have been operational and may have the potential to import expertise and networks to Malaysia to carry out attacks is of concern and must be dealt with carefully. Also, in this regard, the threat of radicalisation among the spouses and children of Malaysian former IS fighters who were in Syria and Iraq and other terrorist detainees remains a cause for concern.

East Malaysia – Sabah

Terrorist activity in Sabah remains low. The activity of groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), JAD and Darul Islam Sabah (DIS), who previously operated in Sabah, remains muted. This is largely due to the degradation of pro-IS groups in the southern Philippines, such as the ASG, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute Group (DIMG).⁹⁴ Pro-IS groups in the southern Philippines have suffered from significant militant surrenders and have been weakened as a result of counter terrorism efforts by the Filipino security services.⁹⁵

Separatist groups such as the Royal Sulu Force (RSF), however, remain a concern. The RSF is linked to the Sulu Sultanate based in the southern Philippines, who claim that parts of Sabah belong to them. The group was involved in the Lahad Datu invasion in 2013, when they laid siege

on the district for slightly over a month. One of its founders, Fuad A. Kiram, was declared a terrorist by the Malaysian government in 2023.⁹⁶

Since 2019, Malaysia has continued to face several claims from Filipino citizens asserting themselves as heirs of the Sulu Sultanate amid claims that parts of the land belong to them.⁹⁷ These claims have led to legal cases in countries such as France, Spain, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.⁹⁸ In 2023, a French court and the International Court of Justice in the Hague ruled in favour of the Malaysian state putting a tentative end to the Filipinos' claims on the land.⁹⁹ However, several legal appeals by the Sulus are still ongoing.

Sabah continues to suffer from cross-border criminal activities such as illegal immigration and cross-border smuggling of goods such as oil, contraband, drugs and firearms.¹⁰⁰ This is due to the porous maritime borders it shares with Indonesia and the Philippines. These borders pose a significant challenge for security services to monitor and patrol due to the landscape. The possibility of linkages forming between criminal and terrorist networks is present and needs to be monitored closely.¹⁰¹

Online Radicalisation

Social media continues to play a key role in the radicalisation of some Malaysians. At least six cases out of the 2024 wave of arrests involved the use of social media, particularly Facebook.¹⁰² For example, Muhammad Sani Mahdi Sahar was charged with supporting IS via his Facebook account and for the possession of IS-related materials.¹⁰³ He had already been arrested and jailed twice previously for the possession of IS-related materials in 2016 and 2018.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, a 57-year-old woman named Fauziahanim Abdullah was found to have been in possession of IS-related materials on her handphone and pendrive, having declared support for the group on Instagram.¹⁰⁵ While mainstream platforms such as Facebook have remained the primary online social media used by Malaysians linked with extremism, alternative platforms such as Rocket.Chat, TamTam, Threema, Hoop and Element have also been used actively by IS and its supporters, and thus warrant attention.¹⁰⁶

Responses

The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) has remained vigilant and proactive in dealing with the heightened terrorist activity in the region. Following the Ulu Tiram case, the RMP carried out several nationwide operations which led to the arrests of several suspects and the thwarting of terrorist plots in the country. These included an operation to arrest eight individuals who had threatened attacks against the King, the prime minister and other dignitaries, spanning several states including Johor, Kelantan, Penang and Selangor. Another operation saw more than 20 individuals linked to IS from various states including Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Selangor and Perak being nabbed.¹⁰⁷ Apart from these two multi-state operations, several individual operations were carried out, leading to the arrests of several individuals linked to IS, as mentioned above.

On the country's east coast, the Malaysian security services, particularly the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM), remain vigilant in dealing with the maritime terrorist and cross-border crime threat. ESSCOM's Operasi Sanggah resulted in the arrest and deportation of 233 illegal immigrants and the seizure of contraband and drugs amounting to RM15 million and RM3.3 million, respectively.¹⁰⁸ ESSCOM is also planning to incorporate advanced technological equipment such as drones, speedboats, long-distance cameras, and sensor and radar systems to improve its surveillance capabilities in the region.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, the government is working on constructing several new control posts in Sabah to control illegal immigration and tighten border control.¹¹⁰

The Malaysian government has also collaborated with international partners on the issue of counter terrorism. In April 2024, the European Union (EU) delegation to Malaysia, in collaboration with the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), a constituent unit

under the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conducted a cross-thematic training seminar on counter terrorism and maritime security, specifically designed for security practitioners operating in the tri-border area (TBA) between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.¹¹¹ The main aim of the seminar was to further EU-Malaysia collaboration on security, defence and counter terrorism, and encourage cooperation.¹¹²

Outlook

Recent developments in Malaysia bring to light several noteworthy trends. First is the threat of self-radicalised, “isolated actors”.¹¹³ These can be individuals or small cells who are inspired by a group’s ideology and who carry out attacks independently as opposed to being centrally directed by the group. They may or may not have limited links – either physical or virtual – to other extremists who may assist them in the planning of attacks. However, the execution of attacks is largely independent.

An example of this is the Ulu Tiram case. The attacker and his family can be considered an isolated cell which was self-radicalised. There has been no evidence thus far that they were in touch with other extremists. The family was found to have kept to themselves and were cut off from other members of the public.¹¹⁴

The Ulu Tiram case also brings to light the continued regional threat of family radicalisation. This has been seen in several cases in Indonesia, particularly the 2018 Surabaya bombings.¹¹⁵ More specifically, the Ulu Tiram case witnessed the radicalisation of an entire family network where both parents and children were radicalised. The exact operational roles of the father, Radin Imran, and the other family members in the attack are unclear at the moment. However, Imran’s actions of spreading IS’ ideology to his family may have had a direct or indirect impact on the attacker Radin Luqman’s actions.

The recent developments also highlight the threat of recidivists. At least six of the reported terrorism cases in 2024 (including the Ulu Tiram case) involved recidivists.¹¹⁶ Several individuals were previously charged and jailed for terrorism offences, including Mohammad Aabid Zarkasi and Muhammad Sani, as mentioned above. Most of the recidivist cases involved individuals who were previously jailed for either possessing IS-related materials or pledging allegiance to IS.

However, two cases also involved the shifting of allegiance of individuals formerly linked with JI to IS. One was Radin Imran, the father of the Ulu Tiram attacker, who had previously been affiliated with JI. The other involved a 70-year-old former lecturer who was arrested in July 2024. He was charged for possessing IS-related materials, promoting IS ideology and allowing his house to be used as a facility to support terrorist acts.¹¹⁷ He is believed to have previously been linked to Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) in the early 2000s.¹¹⁸

Social media continues to play an important role in the terrorism landscape in Malaysia. The platforms on which extremist activity has been detected thus far are Facebook, Telegram and Instagram. Almost half of the reported cases (six out of 13) involved the use of social media.¹¹⁹ Social media has been crucial in the radicalisation of Malaysians in the recent past. During the height of IS between 2012-2019, most of the recruitment, travel facilitation and attack planning by Malaysians were carried out by charismatic fellow Malaysians based in Syria and Iraq through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Telegram.¹²⁰ The current trends show that social media remains an effective radicalisation driver among Malaysians.

On the whole, while the recent increase in terrorist activity cannot necessarily be viewed as a revival or re-emergence of IS in the country, it proves that the threat of IS remains pertinent and is one that must be monitored closely. Persistent detection and disruption actions by the authorities must be complemented by rehabilitation efforts and resources to break the cycle of radicalisation within families and reduce recidivist tendencies. In this respect, Malaysia continues to engage in a holistic counter terrorism strategy that involves various measures, including the monitoring of social media, former detainees and transnational activities in order to keep the terrorist threat at bay.

About the Author

Rueben Dass is a Senior Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at isrdass@ntu.edu.sg.

MYANMAR

Benjamin Mok and Iftekharul Bashar

In 2024, Myanmar's conflict settled into a new stalemate, characterised by an urban-rural strategic divide, technological competition and internal friction among both regime and rebel forces. This new paradigm follows significant territorial advancements made by the anti-junta resistance, comprising the shadow National Unity Government (NUG), the People's Defence Force (PDF) militias and the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), in late 2023 and early 2024.¹²¹ The major EAOs, particularly those in the Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Shan and Rakhine States, have continued to play key roles in shaping the conflict.

Trends

The ruling military junta, though still controlling key urban centres, has been unable to decisively quash the resistance, due to the decentralised nature of opposition forces and their growing use of advanced technologies and effective guerrilla warfare tactics. Meanwhile, the anti-junta resistance remains unable to make significant inroads into seizing key urban regions. Fierce clashes have continued throughout the country, especially in rural areas where the military has been leveraging its superiority in air and artillery power to conduct strikes against anti-junta forces. Civilian casualties and displacement remain high, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict.

Three key trends are evident: 1) the strategic landscape's shift along an urban-rural territorial divide; 2) the growing importance of technological innovation; and 3) increasing fragmentation and morale challenges within both the junta and resistance forces. These dynamics will be crucial in determining how the conflict evolves in 2025.

Evolving Strategic Landscape due to Territorial Shifts

Anti-Junta Resistance's Expanded Operational Territory

According to the Myanmar Conflict Map¹²² published and updated by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), regions in the country that have seen a significant increase in conflict events¹²³ in 2024 include: South Rakhine, North Bago, Northwest and Southwest Shan, and North Mandalay. Regions maintaining a high frequency of conflict events include Central Tanintharyi, Central and North Mon, Central Kayin, East Bago, South Kachin, Central Mandalay, North Magway, South and West Sagaing, and North and Central Rakhine. In contrast, regions which have seen reduced conflict frequency include South Mon, North Kayah, Northeast Shan, West Sagaing and Central Chin.¹²⁴

While the frequency of clashes does not necessarily correlate to territorial control, the expansion of heightened conflict regions aligns geographically with the anti-junta resistance's claimed territorial gains over the past year. These claims include widely reported territorial gains, such as in the northern areas of Shan State by the Brotherhood Alliance as part of Operation 1027 in October 2023¹²⁵, as well as gains made by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Kachin PDF in Kachin State throughout March 2024.¹²⁶ The expansion of heightened conflict regions also aligns

with more recent claims by the NUG that the junta government's territorial control has been reduced from 198 out of 330 townships in January 2023, to 98 townships in August 2024.¹²⁷ Most notable amongst the military's territorial losses include the Shan State capital of Lashio as well as several townships in the vicinity of Mandalay City.¹²⁸

At the same time, in regions ostensibly under the junta government's control, localised PDF militias – mostly operating under the NUG's banner – continue to conduct guerrilla warfare against a wide range of military targets via armed clashes,¹²⁹ bombings,¹³⁰ improvised explosive devices (IEDs)¹³¹ and drone attacks.¹³²

Strategic Shifts Amidst Stalemate

At present, both sides have been entrenching themselves in the territories they currently control, with anti-junta forces consolidating recent gains by conducting ambushes against military reinforcements headed to key cities such as Lashio¹³³ as well as along routes leading to ongoing conflict zones such as Momauk,¹³⁴ Myawaddy¹³⁵ and Tamakhan village.¹³⁶

The military has mostly focused its efforts on defending central territories, banking on its traditional military superiority in artillery and air power to project force into anti-junta controlled areas.¹³⁷ The military's use of heavy artillery has allowed it to retain control over many urban centres in contested regions.¹³⁸ At the same time, it has stepped up air power operations, conducting a total of 1,098 reported air/drone attacks between January to July 2024, as opposed to 790 air/drone attacks between June to December 2023.¹³⁹ Such a shift in the military's strategy has paid off in conflict zones such as Pauktaw in Rakhine State, Taze in Saigang and most notably in Loikaw, the capital of eastern Karenni State, where "lightly armed (anti-junta) fighters have been thrown into battles against heavy artillery and unremitting air strikes".¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, the military has reportedly adopted anti-guerrilla strategies in some contested regions. An official in the Tanintharyi Region PDF noted in November 2023 that the military has begun employing troops drawn from local villages, who possess "better knowledge about the territory and access to information".¹⁴¹ These local troops have also reportedly been utilised in other conflict regions, including Yangon, Bago and Mon.¹⁴² Another anti-junta resistance member in the region also noted that the military has continued to implement a "Four Cuts" strategy,¹⁴³ aimed at disrupting the resistance's access to food, funds, information and recruits via setting up checkpoints, enacting travel restrictions and conducting mass arrests.¹⁴⁴ While not new within the ongoing conflict,¹⁴⁵ the "Four Cuts" doctrine has also reportedly been expanded in Mon State¹⁴⁶ and may see further expansion as the conflict develops.

Western Myanmar

Arakan Army's Territorial Expansion

In 2024, the Arakan Army (AA) escalated its conflict with the military, seizing control of 10 out of 17 townships in Rakhine State by September, including crucial infrastructure such as an airport¹⁴⁷ and a naval base¹⁴⁸ in Thandwe. Its influence also spread to Paletwa in neighbouring Chin State,¹⁴⁹ which borders India's Mizoram province. Significant gains were also made in townships near the Bangladesh border.¹⁵⁰ Previously untouched southern Rakhine also saw rising conflict, marking a significant shift in the dynamics of the area.¹⁵¹ Additionally, these clashes have impacted neighbouring Bangladeshi islands, such as Saint Martin, disrupting transportation and essential supply routes.

This surge in violence followed the collapse of a three-year ceasefire in late 2023. The AA's offensive against the military junta aims to achieve total control over Rakhine, a strategically important region rich in resources. The exact strength of the group cannot be confirmed, but, in May 2024, the AA claimed that it has nearly 40,000 standing troops, excluding several thousand auxiliary members.¹⁵² AA spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha stated that the ethnonationalist armed

group seeks self-determination for the ethnic Rakhine people, but does not aim for full independence, instead advocating for a political status that is "no lower than confederate".¹⁵³

The breakdown of the ceasefire in November 2023, following the military coup of 2021, catalysed the AA's substantial battlefield advances across Rakhine.¹⁵⁴ While some observers suggest the AA might become a proto-state, the group's spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha reiterated that they do not plan to secede from the Myanmar state. Meanwhile, non-Rakhine ethnic groups remain apprehensive about the AA, particularly considering its role in recent incidents in Buthidaung and Maungdaw,¹⁵⁵ provocative anti-Rohingya rhetoric,¹⁵⁶ failure to protect civilians in clashes and a lack of support for credible investigations into reported abuses.

Rohingyas in a New Crisis

The Rohingya situation in Myanmar drastically worsened in 2024, with violence in Rakhine State at its peak since 2017, when over 750,000 fled to Bangladesh.¹⁵⁷ Today, only 636,000 Rohingya remain in Rakhine State, where they face intense violence, including military airstrikes and attacks from the AA. Reports suggest that Myanmar's military is forcibly conscripting Rohingya men in response to pressure from the AA.¹⁵⁸ In 2024, there were accounts of the military coercing vulnerable Rohingya individuals to fight against the AA, promising them legal status and financial incentives in return. Many marginalised and stateless Rohingya undergo military training under threat of violence, leading to high casualty rates and their use as human shields in combat. Rohingya groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) are also accused of kidnapping Rohingya youth from refugee camps in Bangladesh and sending them back to Myanmar to undergo training with the military.¹⁵⁹

This forced recruitment exacerbates the ongoing humanitarian crisis, deepening societal rifts and heightening communal tensions.¹⁶⁰ In retaliation for perceived collaboration with the military, the AA has reportedly targeted Rohingyas. The AA is accused of burning a major town and entire villages, and conducting summary executions.¹⁶¹ Around 20,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh, adding to the strain on overcrowded refugee camps there that house over 1.2 million people.

An August 2024 drone attack on Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar resulted in multiple fatalities, including families with children, as they sought to cross into Bangladesh. The Rohingyas accused the AA of the attack, but the latter denied involvement, blaming Myanmar's military instead. This incident is among the deadliest assaults on civilians in Rakhine State to date. According to some reports, over 200 Rohingyas died in the incident.¹⁶² The Rohingyas have also accused the AA of burning Buthidaung town in Rakhine State in mid-May, with the United Nations (UN) noting at least four beheadings attributed to the AA.

Meanwhile, the RSO, another significant ethnic armed group in Myanmar, has reached an informal ceasefire agreement with the military as both face threats from the advancing AA. This cooperation is unexpected, given the military's historical stance on the Rohingya insurgency as a threat. The RSO operates independently, but has opted out of combat to protect civilians following a deadly August 5 attack in Maungdaw. Tensions remain high, particularly with the AA's targeting of the Rohingya community, underscoring the ongoing ethnic and political conflicts in the region.¹⁶³ The AA has also accused Rohingya ethnic armed groups such as ARSA and the Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA) of collaborating with the military.

Overall, the Myanmar military's heavy-handed tactics and the AA's retaliatory actions have fuelled a cycle of violence, resulting in significant civilian casualties and a deteriorating security situation in the region. The ongoing hostilities suggest a turbulent future for Rakhine State, as the AA's advances challenge military authority and threaten further ethnic conflict.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, the evolving dynamics between factions in Western Myanmar are likely to further fragment the political landscape, with shifting alliances, such as between the RSO and the military, altering power balances and increasing tensions. With the potential for large-scale violence and instability, the situation calls for urgent international attention and humanitarian support.

Technological Trends

Drone Warfare

The use of drones has emerged as a key factor in the Myanmar conflict.¹⁶⁵ Anti-junta forces in 2024 demonstrated increasing adoption and sophistication of drone warfare tactics. This included drone strikes against military leaders – including a notable incident targeting the military’s stronghold of Naypyidaw¹⁶⁶ – as well as ambushing reinforcements and logistics convoys.¹⁶⁷ This trend parallels the NUG’s decision in May 2023 to increase its focus on drone warfare, allocating a portion of its budget towards procurement and training for its specialised PDF drone unit, the Federal Wings.¹⁶⁸ According to the IISS Conflict Map, 556 drone strikes were conducted by anti-junta forces between May 2023 to July 2024, as opposed to 332 drone strikes between February 2022 to April 2023.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, anti-junta forces have reportedly deployed “sophisticated armed quadcopters”, and demonstrated their familiarity with advanced swarm tactics to devastating effect during Operation 1027.¹⁷⁰

Unsurprisingly, the military in 2024 also chose to step up its procurement and adoption of drones. The military has reportedly expanded its drone fleet with both modified commercial drones as well as relatively advanced models such as armed CH-3 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), allegedly sourced from China and Russia.¹⁷¹ Reports also indicate that the military has “become better at using” these drones.¹⁷² This represents a shift in the conflict towards leveraging technological advancements in order to break the ongoing stalemates.¹⁷³

3D-Printed Firearms

The anti-junta resistance continued to produce and use 3D-printed firearms in 2024. As noted by experts, these firearms are generally not used in major operations – rather, they are used in training as well as in raids in which anti-junta forces attempt to obtain commercial firearms.¹⁷⁴ Going forward, one trend to look out for is the opportunity for anti-junta forces to expand 3D-printing operations to other equipment that might be in short supply, such as modifications and bomblets for drone warfare¹⁷⁵ as well as parts for IEDs.¹⁷⁶

Morale and Internal Dynamics

Junta Governance and Morale

With military forces stretched thin, the junta government in 2024 began conscription efforts to shore up its manpower losses. In February 2024, it introduced a new draft law mandating that all men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 must serve mandatory military service.¹⁷⁷ This draft law was subsequently bolstered by similar legislation, including a separate conscription effort in which men up to the age of 65 are forcibly recruited to serve in local militia groups.¹⁷⁸

This development has caused an increase in public grievances against the junta government, with those affected by the conscription laws seeking ways to evade the draft.¹⁷⁹ Some analysts have also pointed to the conscription efforts as an indicator of the military’s increasing loss of control and a contributor to its image as a “source of instability” within the country.¹⁸⁰ In an indication of shifting sentiments, a previously pro-military monk, Pauk Ko Taw, took the step of publicly criticising the military for its forced recruitment.¹⁸¹ However, it should be noted that some EAOs have also allegedly engaged in forced recruitment, with accusations naming the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the AA as perpetrators.¹⁸²

With regards to military morale, there have been reports – mainly from anti-junta media sources – of defections within the lower ranks, allegedly due to loss in morale, poor training and disregard from the military leadership.¹⁸³ However, there remains no concrete indication of imminent collapse within the military structure, or of soldier-led mutinies or a coup. This aligns with long-standing assessments by experts on the military, who point to its general cohesive structure and

internal loyalty, particularly amongst veterans who have been a part of its culture for decades, as well as the economic interests of higher-ranking military members who serve as a privileged class within Myanmar's society.¹⁸⁴

Inter-Group Cooperation and Coordination in the Anti-Junta Resistance

Among the NUG and the PDFs it established following the 2021 military crackdown, there have been major indicators that coordination and structural cohesion have increased in 2024. In April 2024, a Dawei-based PDF engaged in the killing of civilian informants, contravening NUG directives. This elicited not only strong condemnation, but also promises of prosecution from the NUG.¹⁸⁵ This stands in contrast to past incidents in which the NUG remained unable to enforce its own internal rules against civilian killings.¹⁸⁶

However, inter-group cooperation and coordination within the anti-junta resistance remain questionable, especially on a wider strategic level. While the formation of the Brotherhood Alliance – which consists of the AA, the MNDAA and the TNLA – prior to Operation 1027 highlights a significant case of inter-group strategic cooperation within the anti-junta resistance, it should be noted that the EAOs involved have been operating closely together since 2014. As such, the formation of the Brotherhood Alliance was “unquestionably unique in Myanmar's context”.¹⁸⁷

Meanwhile, the NUG and the various EAOs have yet to reach any significant progress in the realisation of its stated goal for a federal democratic system, largely due to a lack of trust between the EAOs themselves as well as between the EAOs and the NUG, which many ethnic minorities still see as “Burma-centric”.¹⁸⁸ As such, most EAOs remain focused on consolidating themselves within their traditional territories, rather than taking part in operations outside of these territories.¹⁸⁹ Many experts have pointed to a growing risk of balkanisation, or territorial fragmentation, within Myanmar, especially as the various EAOs manoeuvre within the current strategic landscape to maximise the gains for their ethnic communities.¹⁹⁰

Economic Impact and Supply Chains

Myanmar's economic situation remains in dire straits due to the ongoing conflict and trade instability. Key sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing in particular have been severely disrupted.¹⁹¹ With increasing inflation due to disrupted supply chains,¹⁹² the public is facing skyrocketing prices for basic goods such as food and fuel, resulting in significant economic hardship.¹⁹³ Efforts by the junta government to stabilise the currency through price controls have thus far been unsuccessful, further exacerbating the issue.¹⁹⁴

Trade has been similarly affected, largely due to the loss of border trade crossings in parts of the country. With the seizure of many of these border crossings by the EAOs, trade relations have fragmented due to a lack of overall coordination, leading to an overall reduction in trade volume.¹⁹⁵ It should be noted, however, that the junta government is still reportedly receiving imports of jet fuel, allowing it to conduct airstrikes. Such importation suggests that current international sanctions on the junta government are possibly being evaded, raising questions of complicity by various foreign powers and private sector intermediaries.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

The conflict in Myanmar remains locked in a stalemate that continues to fuel ongoing violence across the country. The anti-junta resistance has expanded its operational territory, especially through the efforts of the EAOs, while the military government retains control over key urban centres, bolstered by its air and artillery superiority. Both sides have adopted emerging tactics, particularly with regard to drone warfare.

Both camps, however, remain stymied by complex internal dynamics. The junta's conscription policies have exacerbated civilian grievances and fuelled tensions, while resistance forces struggle to unify politically, with ethnic divisions complicating broader cooperation. Economic instability and

collapsing trade networks further complicate the situation, pushing Myanmar closer to economic collapse.

In 2025, key features of the conflict will likely be technological innovation, the cohesion or fragmentation of resistance forces, and how effectively international pressure can be applied to restrict the junta's access to military supplies. Without significant shifts in these areas, Myanmar's conflict is likely to continue, prolonging the humanitarian crisis and regional instability.

About the Authors

Benjamin Mok is an Associate Research Fellow and **Iftekharul Bashar** is a Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. They can be reached at isbenjaminmok@ntu.edu.sg and isiftekharul@ntu.edu.sg, respectively.

THAILAND

Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat and Dhiramedhist Lueng Ubon

The level of violence in Thailand's Deep South in 2024 saw a slight uptick compared with the previous year. As of September, 475 incidents were recorded, resulting in 93 deaths and 272 injuries. Deaths accruing from soft targets were twice as high as hard targets. There were 73 explosions, including three car bombs. The military also continued to press charges against Malay-Muslim activists engaged in activities deemed as threats to national security. Separately, the peace dialogue between Bangkok and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front, or BRN) resumed in February with discussions on the "Joint Comprehensive Plan towards Peace (JCPP)", a draft framework that both sides agreed to use as a basis for future discussions – though the BRN also proposed a parallel draft. The abrupt change of prime minister in August could also strike a serious blow to the peace dialogue, as it enables the hawkish elements in government circles to gain more dominance. Taken together, the prospects for the peace process appear to be dim, and the BRN has stated that it will return to armed conflict if the negotiations fail.

State of the Conflict in Thailand's Deep South

2024 marked the third decade of a renewed violent insurgency in Thailand's southernmost provinces. Since 2004, over 22,700 violent incidents have been recorded, resulting in more than 7,600 deaths and 14,000 injuries (as of September 2024), according to the Deep South Watch. Since the launch of a formal peace dialogue in 2013, the number of violent incidents and casualties has significantly declined. Compared with 2023, however, there was a slight increase in attacks and casualties last year. From January to September 2024, 475 incidents were recorded, leaving 93 deaths and 272 injuries. The monthly average of violence and casualty rates was also higher than in 2023, during which 481 violent incidents took place, leaving 116 dead and 217 injured.¹⁹⁷

Indiscriminate attacks affecting civilians continued in 2024, albeit at a significantly lower rate than a decade ago. Among the victims classified from January to September, soft targets (unarmed civilians) accounted for 67 deaths and 124 injuries, slightly higher than hard targets (armed combatants), which contributed 25 deaths and 148 injuries. During the same period, there were 73 explosions, including three car bombs. On June 30, a car bomb exploded in front of a residential block near a police station in Yala's Bannang Sata district, killing a Muslim teacher who was riding by on a motorcycle. Sixteen people, including six police officers, were also injured.¹⁹⁸ On September 29, a car bomb exploded in the border district of Tak Bai in Narathiwat, injuring two

soldiers and causing damage to nearby houses. Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said that it was “possible” the incident was linked to the Tak Bai court case (see below).¹⁹⁹

Women and children aged under 18 were among the victims of violent attacks; women accounted for seven deaths and 24 injuries, and children two deaths and 30 injuries. Buddhists were also proportionally more targeted than Muslims. The former constitute about 20 percent of the population of the three southernmost provinces.²⁰⁰

A wave of cross-province coordinated attacks during the holy month of Ramadan demonstrated the resilience and continued presence of BRN fighters on the ground. These fighters are usually “invisible”, as the BRN does not have a demarcated military base and fighters have blended themselves in with villagers. On March 22, 44 coordinated bombing and arson attacks took place, targeting convenience stores, petrol stations and public infrastructure across Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla provinces, resulting in the death of a Myanmar migrant worker.²⁰¹ Coordinated attacks are primarily aimed at demonstrating the capacity and boosting the morale of militants rather than causing casualties. Violence often spikes during the Ramadan period, as fighters are encouraged to double their efforts in waging the struggle against the Thai “colonialists”.

The southernmost region has been under a state of exception for more than two decades, with the enforcement of martial law and an emergency decree. This has enabled security forces to operate with little judicial checks and balances. Martial law authorises the military to detain suspects for up to seven days without a court warrant. On October 18, the cabinet approved the 78th extension of the state of emergency in the conflict zone from October 20, 2024, until January 19, 2025. The emergency decree remains imposed in 18 out of 33 districts in the three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.²⁰² Additionally, the emergency decree grants security forces the authority to hold suspects for up to 30 days without formal charges. The security forces have frequently exploited these two special laws to extend detentions of suspected insurgents for as long as 37 days.

The military has also continued to press charges against Malay-Muslim activists engaged in activities deemed as threats to national security. In January, nine activists were charged for incitement and partaking in clandestine activities. The military stated that the charges were related to the gathering of Malay Muslims in traditional Malay dress to mark the 2022 Hari Raya celebrations, during which the offenders were involved in the display of BRN flags and the reading of a poem. These acts were interpreted by the authorities as a call for young Malay Muslims to sacrifice their lives to fight for independence. From 2018 to 2024, there were at least 14 legal cases lodged against Malay-Muslim activists in the Deep South. Human rights activists view these legal cases as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), aimed at silencing dissenting voices.²⁰³

In August, the Senate passed a law proposed by the House of Representatives to nullify the Order of the Chief of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) No. 14/2016, paving the way for the resurrection of the Advisory Council of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC).²⁰⁴ Set up under the Southern Border Provinces Administration Act B.E. 2553 (2010), the Advisory Council was suspended by the NCPO's Order for a decade following the country's 2014 military coup. It comprises representatives from various social groups and has served as a platform for people to voice their opinions and concerns to the SBPAC, which is a central agency coordinating government works on development and justice in the southernmost region. This development is expected to enhance public participation in addressing problems in the Deep South.

An ad-hoc committee, set up by the House of Representatives in October 2023 to explore ways to enhance the peace process in southern Thailand, is expected to provide recommendations to Parliament by late 2024. This is an attempt to enhance the role of the legislative in pushing forward the peace process. Lawmakers could potentially play an important role in supporting the peace process, but their engagement has been limited, particularly since the 2014 coup. The 35-member ad-hoc committee, comprising members of parliament, academics and civil society organisations

(CSOs), is likely to present a progressive view focusing on addressing the conflict's root causes and enhancing the peace process as a core mechanism for conflict resolution.²⁰⁵

In 2024, attempts to ensure legal accountability for the 2004 Tak Bai protest failed, undermining confidence in some quarters in the judicial system and reaffirming the perceived culture of impunity in Thailand. In August, the Narathiwat Criminal Court accepted a lawsuit filed by the families of 48 victims of the Tak Bai incident, just 63 days before the expiry of the statute of limitations. On October 25, 2004, thousands of protesters had demonstrated in front of a police station in Narathiwat's border district of Tak Bai. Seven protesters were killed by gunfire at the protest site and 78 more were suffocated to death as they were piled on top of one another in military trucks during transport to a detention site. An arrest warrant was later issued for six defendants as they failed to appear at a scheduled preliminary hearing.²⁰⁶

The Court issued a summons for General Pisarn Wattanawongkiri, a former commander of the Fourth Army Region and previously a member of the House of Representatives with the ruling Pheu Thai Party. It later issued an arrest warrant, but the retired general had reportedly travelled abroad for medical treatment.²⁰⁷ On October 14, General Pisarn resigned from the Pheu Thai Party amid mounting pressure for the party to bring its member to justice.²⁰⁸ The Office of the Attorney General also charged six soldiers and two civilians for their roles in the Tak Bai crackdown in a separate case in September. The offenders included General Chalermchai Wirunphet, who was then commander of the Fifth Infantry Division, which supervised the transportation of the protesters.²⁰⁹ The statute of limitations for the legal cases to proceed expired on October 25 without any of the suspects being taken into custody.²¹⁰

Peace Dialogue Under the Pheu Thai-Led Government

The dynamics of the southern conflict have significantly evolved since the launch of the peace dialogue in 2013, facilitated by Malaysia under the then Yingluck Shinawatra government. The battle has over the past decade increasingly shifted from the military to political terrain.²¹¹ The peace dialogue continued under the post-coup government led by coup leader-turned-prime minister General Prayut Chan-ocha, although discussions did not produce any substantial results. The BRN refused to take part in the military-led peace talks and, hence, Majlis Syura Patani (MARA Patani) – the then newly formed umbrella grouping of the liberation movement – took its place as a dialogue partner in the peace talks.²¹² While a few BRN members joined MARA Patani, they did not receive a clear mandate from the BRN leadership, which significantly undermined the umbrella organisation's legitimacy.²¹³

Dubious about MARA Patani's ability to control fighters on the ground, the National Security Council (NSC) began to hold backchannel talks with the BRN, later known as the "Berlin Initiative", in 2018 in parallel with the Kuala Lumpur-facilitated process.²¹⁴ After General Prayut won a second term in the 2019 general election, the BRN decided to return to the dialogue table. The Berlin Initiative developed into the "General Principles of the Peace Dialogue Process" (GPDP), which was formally agreed upon by Bangkok and the BRN during a formal meeting facilitated by Malaysia on March 31 to April 1, 2022. The GPDP outlined three substantive matters: 1) the reduction of violence; 2) public consultation; and 3) the search for a political solution. The Thai peace dialogue panel subsequently proposed a dialogue framework called the "Joint Comprehensive Plan towards Peace" (JCPP) in February 2023, which focused on the reduction of violence and public consultation. The consultation was expected to cover six key areas: 1) form of governance; 2) recognition of the Patani community, identities and cultures; 3) human rights, justice and legal matters; 4) economic development; 5) education; and 6) others.

Following the 2023 general election, the Pheu Thai Party managed to form a coalition government led by property tycoon-turned-politician Srettha Thavisin. The prime minister appointed Chatchai Bangchud, the then NSC's deputy secretary-general, to head the peace dialogue panel. He is the first civilian to hold the post, as the previous heads were all army generals. Apart from the NSC, the dialogue panel comprises representatives from five government agencies, i.e., the SBPAC, the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Justice Ministry and the military-led Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).²¹⁵

The peace talks resumed in early February 2024 with discussions on the JCPP, yet it had a rocky start. In late February 2024, a draft JCPP document was leaked apparently by the BRN to the media, and the group at the same time presented a parallel draft.²¹⁶ Patani Notes, an alternative media platform running on Facebook, compared the two versions of the proposed plan of the peace process.²¹⁷ Conflicting details around what the BRN called “reduction of armed action” and the Thai peace dialogue panel referred to as a “reduction of violence” was a notable point of contention.²¹⁸ Whereas the draft JCPP only proposed to remove checkpoints on main roads and revoke the state of emergency in districts in which security situations had improved, the BRN called for a more drastic scale-down of military operations, such as the removal of all checkpoints and the revocation of all security laws in the conflict areas. Nevertheless, both sides agreed on setting up an independent monitoring team.²¹⁹ The BRN’s proposal of a parallel draft came as a surprise to the Thai peace dialogue panel, which stated that the JCPP had been jointly developed by both parties over approximately a year.²²⁰ A source close to the BRN said that the group’s leaders, who only learned about the draft JCPP later, had disagreed with some points in the draft and, hence, wanted to propose alternatives.²²¹ Both sides later agreed to use the two drafts as a basis for further discussion.

The leaked draft JCPP has provoked sustained criticisms on the trajectory of the peace dialogue by hawkish elements on the Thai side. Prominent hardliners have, for example, publicly opposed the signing of the JCPP, charging that the BRN has used the peace dialogue to push forward its political agenda and delegitimise the Thai government. They have added that following the path laid out in the JCPP would put Bangkok at a disadvantage, which could lead to a loss of control over some territory or, worse still, secession.²²²

The heated controversy over the draft JCPP prompted the four independent observers of the peace dialogue – one Thai and three international – to issue a statement in early March to reaffirm that the Thai government and the BRN have engaged in substantive discussions and are seeking political solutions in accordance with “the will of the Patani community”, within the framework of the unitary state of Thailand and according to the Thai constitution.²²³ Nevertheless, the hawkish view is increasingly gaining ground, particularly within ruling Pheu Thai Party circles.²²⁴

There was also a change of facilitator for the peace dialogue in July 2024, amid criticism over the harsh approach taken by General Zulkifli Zainal Abidin.²²⁵ Kuala Lumpur appointed Mohd Rabin Basir, former director general of the Malaysian National Security Council, as the new facilitator.²²⁶ This took place a few days after the meeting of the Joint Technical Committee in June, after which General Zulkifli, the then facilitator, issued a statement expressing positive sentiments that the JCPP might soon be endorsed by both sides.²²⁷ However, his role as the facilitator ended shortly afterwards.

On August 14, the Constitutional Court dismissed former Premier Srettha for ethical violations in connection with his appointment of Pichit Chuenban as a minister attached to the Prime Minister’s Office. Pichit had been charged for bribery in 2008. The House of Representatives on August 16 voted for Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the youngest daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin, to become the 31st prime minister of Thailand. Phumtham, the deputy prime minister, has been tasked to take charge of key government agencies, namely the NSC, SBPAC and ISOC.

Having the key government agencies under the supervision of one political leader, which was lacking in the Srettha government, seems to be a positive development in terms of streamlining government policies. Nevertheless, Phumtham seems to be influenced by the hawkish advisors around him, including security experts and former generals of the “Red Beret” Special Warfare Command who previously worked in the Deep South.²²⁸ The mandate of the Thai peace dialogue panel led by Chatchai automatically ended following Srettha’s removal, and it is likely that the new peace dialogue panel could comprise more security-minded hardliners.²²⁹ According to a senior NSC official, the talks will be reconvened and a new peace dialogue panel set up. However, it

remains unclear whether the JCPP will remain as a central framework for negotiations in light of the recent criticisms.²³⁰

Outlook

The ruling Pheu Thai Party, which initiated the formal peace dialogue in 2013, seemingly lacks both an adequate understanding of and the will to use the peace process as a means to achieve a negotiated political settlement. Due largely to the missteps made in the Tak Bai crackdown in 2004, the Thaksin-allied political parties have never regained popularity in the southernmost provinces. The low-intensity conflict in the country's Deep South may not currently pose a serious threat to the Thai state and it is thus not at the forefront of the government's priorities.

Considering these factors, the prospects for the peace dialogue appear to be dim. The lack of a meaningful peace process could plunge the southernmost region into a state of intensifying armed conflict. The Paetongtarn government appears to be swayed by hawkish advisors seeking to pursue a hardline approach to crush the BRN militarily and politically. If a new peace dialogue panel is set up and led by security-minded hardliners, the talks are likely to focus more on reducing physical violence rather than addressing the root causes of the conflict. This was the approach taken during the post-coup government, particularly when General Aksara Kerdphol led the peace dialogue panel, during which the BRN refused to participate in the talks. If the BRN rejects the opportunity to take part this time around, violent confrontations would likely increase.²³¹

Fears of secession have arguably been blown out of proportion. The fact that the BRN has agreed to engage in the peace dialogue under the framework of the Thai constitution, which stipulates that Thailand is an indivisible unitary state, arguably demonstrates the BRN's willingness to make some concessions. The BRN aspires for recognition of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic identities of the Patani community, freedom to uphold and practise their religious beliefs, ability to manage the region's natural resources and freedom from political intimidation.²³² A form of self-governance that addresses these concerns can be negotiated under the framework of a unitary state.

Global research has shown that ending secessionist conflicts through a negotiated settlement is more sustainable than military suppression or political co-optation. Curtailing political space for defiant Malay-Muslim minorities and the refusal to genuinely address the root causes of the conflict will only prolong, if not exacerbate, the long-standing problems. To achieve a political solution through a peace process, a determined political will is required of the country's leaders, and this is inextricably linked to the democratisation process in Thailand.

About the Author

Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat (PhD) is a lecturer at the Institute for Peace Studies, Prince of Songkla University (Hat Yai Campus), Thailand. She obtained a PhD from the Australian National University. Her areas of research interest and expertise include Thailand's southern insurgency, ethnic conflicts, peace processes, religion, and conflict in Southeast Asia. **Dhiramedhist Lueng Ubon** is an MA student at the Institute for Peace Studies, Prince of Songkla University.

SINGAPORE

Kalicharan Veera Singam and Abigail Leong

As in previous years, the Internal Security Department (ISD) has assessed the terrorism threat to Singapore as high.²³³ In 2024, the threat picture was characterised by a few long-standing trends and new developments. While there were no terrorist attacks or imminent security threats, cases of self-radicalisation persisted in Singapore, with one case described by the authorities as having come the closest to being executed in recent times. International developments such as the

ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict that has spilled over into other parts of the Middle East as well as threats from extreme right ideologies in the West and other parts of the world, also pose radicalisation risks which could impact Singapore's national security and social harmony.

Israel-Hamas Conflict

The terrorist threat in Singapore increased following the onset of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) said in its annual report released in July 2024. Terror groups such as the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda (AQ) have used the conflict to recruit into their ranks, calling on Muslims worldwide to support the Palestinian cause. There has also been an attendant uptick in anti-Singapore sentiments on social media among some regional extremist actors, who perceive Singapore as being pro-Israel.²³⁴

The Israel-Hamas conflict, which has sparked hate crimes and religiously motivated attacks worldwide, has also led to the radicalisation of some individuals in Singapore in 2024. These cases highlight the potential risk posed by foreign extremist narratives to Singapore's security and communal harmony. One of the cases involved a 14-year-old boy, who in June became the youngest individual to be issued a Restriction Order under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in Singapore. His detention follows other cases of youth radicalisation in recent years and has led to increased focus from security agencies and the wider community to better identify, deter and rehabilitate radicalised youth.

The Secondary 3 student aspired to fight for a group known as the Black Flag Army (BFA). He took steps to be ready to physically fight for the BFA and planned to work part time to save funds to travel to Afghanistan. If his plan to travel to join the BFA proved unsuccessful, the youth was also willing to carry out terrorist attacks in Singapore on the BFA's instructions. He also unsuccessfully attempted to radicalise some of his schoolmates.²³⁵ A second self-radicalisation case involved a 33-year-old former public servant. The ISD said that An'nadya binte An'nahari supported a network of militant and terrorist organisations called the Axis of Resistance (AOR) – which comprises groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and others – and actively participated in several pro-AOR social media groups. In these forums, she supported the AOR and their violent operations. Additionally, An'nadya promoted violence against Jews and Israelis.²³⁶

Additionally, a 17-year-old youth radicalised by IS propaganda online was detained in August, just weeks before he could carry out a stabbing attack on non-Muslims in various public spaces in the Tampines neighbourhood. The youth had also planned to travel to Syria to fight for IS there. But, given the difficulties in travelling to Syria, he subsequently decided to engage in violence in Singapore and fulfil his aspirations of becoming a martyr. Singapore's Minister for Home Affairs noted publicly that given the extensive preparation and commitment of the youth, this case contained plans that came closest to being executed compared to previous ones.²³⁷

Impact of Regional Developments on Singapore

The regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)'s announcement in June that it was disbanding received a mixed response across the region. While the announcement was largely welcomed, some observers remain sceptical of the group's intentions. Regardless, JI's disbanding may not necessarily suggest a decline in terrorism in the region. Other terrorist groups such as pro-IS networks, along with defected and former members of JI, continue to pose terrorism concerns for Singapore.

In May, an attack at a police station in Ulu Tiram in Johor,²³⁸ just across the Malaysian state's border with Singapore, led to the killing of two police officers. The attacker's father had previously been associated with JI, but later influenced the entire family into supporting IS. The close geographical proximity of the attack to Singapore heightened security concerns.²³⁹ Singapore also raised the security alert at the causeway checkpoints following the attack and the ensuing slew of IS-linked arrests in Malaysia.²⁴⁰

Political volatility in other neighbouring regions also impacted Singapore's security. On August 9, Amir Hamza, a Bangladeshi preacher known for his extremist proclivities, entered Singapore using a passport bearing a different name and conducted an illegal sermon at a foreign workers' dormitory in Tuas. The security authorities stated that while they were aware of the preacher's background, they did not have his biometric information which would have enabled them to deny him entry into Singapore.²⁴¹ His entry and illegal sermon, in which he referred to non-Muslims as infidels, came in the wake of significant political upheaval in Bangladesh following the ouster of the country's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and growing concerns that Bangladesh-based extremist networks may get emboldened amidst the political uncertainty.²⁴²

Radicalisation and extremist activities in the sizeable diaspora communities in Singapore remain an area of key concern. There are, for example, sizeable Bangladeshi and Indonesian migrant communities in Singapore. The vast majority are law-abiding, although fringe groups have in the past been associated with extremist activities.²⁴³

The Extreme Right

In the West, the threat from the extreme right has grown in the past few years.²⁴⁴ Such extremism justifies violence to safeguard ethnic purity or achieve political objectives. There are concerns that extreme-right ideologies are becoming more prominent globally and thus posing an increasingly worrying terror threat across most of the West.²⁴⁵ While extreme-right ideologies may not have a direct resonance and appeal in the Singapore context, their advocacy of violence risks societal polarisation and deepens communal fault lines, including in the near region.

Vulnerable youth in particular can be influenced by the sense of belonging and identity that extreme-right movements provide.²⁴⁶ In November 2023, the ISD issued a Restriction Order to a Singaporean teenager of Chinese ethnicity. He identified as a white supremacist and aspired to conduct attacks abroad to further the white supremacist cause.²⁴⁷ The-16-year old also aspired to commit a mass shooting in the United States (US) in 10 years' time. This was the second case of a local youth having been self-radicalised by extreme right ideologies, mirroring a wider global trend of the growing participation of non-whites in extreme-right spaces.²⁴⁸

Responses

Singapore maintains a combination of 'hard' and 'soft' measures to prevent radicalisation, deter and disrupt individuals planning violent acts, and counter the proliferation of extremist ideas both online and offline.

A cornerstone of these efforts is the SGSecure national movement. Launched in 2016 and refreshed in 2023, SGSecure adopts a community-centric approach in the ongoing fight against terrorism and extremism.²⁴⁹ Outreach to schools, workplaces and the wider community is conducted via roadshows, house visits, resilience-building programmes and emergency preparedness exercises, among others.²⁵⁰ In 2024, in view of the persistent problem of online radicalisation, particularly among youth, SGSecure rolled out several enhanced digital strategies to reach a wider audience and increase public engagement.²⁵¹

The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) remains a pillar of Singapore's counter-ideology and counter-extremism endeavours. A community-based initiative that relies on a network of volunteer Islamic scholars and teachers, the RRG provides counselling and other support to ISA detainees and their families, and conducts public outreach to promote religious moderation and intercommunal tolerance.²⁵² The RRG released a new counselling manual in 2024 – its fourth such publication – intended as a roadmap for mentors working with at-risk youth.²⁵³ The manual highlights the importance of addressing not only the ideological, but also the psychological, emotional and social factors which contribute to youth radicalisation, through a range of engagement strategies aside from direct ideological confrontation.

The RRG also maintains a regular presence on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, with posts and videos covering various topics such as how youths can protect themselves from online extremism, how to identify signs of radicalisation in loved ones and how to respond to the suffering of others.²⁵⁴ Moreover, following the illegal sermon at a Tuas dormitory by extremist Bangladeshi preacher Amir Hamza in August 2024, the RRG worked in tandem with the ISD and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to carry out a series of engagement sessions with migrant workers to raise awareness of the dangers of the extremist and segregationist teachings propagated by such preachers.²⁵⁵

Singapore has also put in place comprehensive legal frameworks and strong regulatory regimes to combat the financing of terrorism. In April 2024, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) debuted a centralised digital platform called Cosmic to facilitate the voluntary sharing of information among banks in Singapore regarding suspicious customers and transactions, in order to mitigate the risks of illicit activities including the financing of terrorism and the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.²⁵⁶ In the same month, MAS also amended the Payment Services Act to strengthen regulatory control over digital payment token (DPS) service providers to guard against terrorism financing and money laundering.²⁵⁷ Additionally, following the release of the latest Terrorism Financing (TF) National Risk Assessment (NRA) report in July 2024, which identified money remittance services as a sector of high vulnerability to terrorism financing, MAS and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced that they would run outreach and education programmes with community partners and migrant worker dormitories to emphasise the importance of using licensed remittance agents for money transfers, as well as step up dialogue with banks on trends in terrorism financing.²⁵⁸

Moreover, to streamline immigration processes and enhance border security, in May 2024, automated immigration lanes were introduced at Singapore's Changi Airport for all foreign travellers entering the country.²⁵⁹ The new automated system allows the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) to run data analytics and conduct risk assessments on inbound travellers, screening them against a watch list of persons of interest and a biometrics database to flag individuals deemed of higher risk for further checks before entry is allowed or denied.²⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the Singapore Police Force (SPF), the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) continue to hold regular joint counter terrorism exercises to test and strengthen operational readiness in the event of a terror attack. In a first, one such drill held in August 2024 was observed by foreign police officers from countries including the US, the Netherlands, Hong Kong and Rwanda.²⁶¹ Last year, the MHA also announced plans to build a new operations centre, slated to open in 2032, which will bring together officers from SPF, SCDF, ICA and the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) to enable them to respond to threats more quickly and effectively.²⁶²

Outlook

Although there are no specific or imminent security threats to Singapore at present, the threat from terrorism is likely to remain high given the volatile international environment and the prevalence of self-radicalisation cases. Islamist terrorism continues to pose the greatest security threat to Singapore, particularly in light of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. However, the potential for sentiments and beliefs associated with the extreme right to gain further traction among a fringe of the community also bears watching, given the discord such exclusivist ideologies could sow in the diverse social fabric of Singapore. The steady though small number of cases of self-radicalised individuals detected and detained each year under the ISA also highlights the risks posed by the proliferation of radical content in the digital space, especially among vulnerable youth, and the need for timely and effective interventions on a whole-of-society basis.

About the Authors

Kalicharan Veera Singam and Abigail Leong are Senior Analysts with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. They can be reached at jsveera@ntu.edu.sg and isabigailleong@ntu.edu.sg, respectively.

Citations

- ¹ Alif Satria, "Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/counter-terrorist-trends-and-analyses-cta-volume-16-issue-01/>.
- ² Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah, "Central Sulawesi and Central Java Continue to be JI Strongholds," *The Diplomat*, June 14, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/06/central-sulawesi-and-central-java-continue-to-be-ji-strongholds/>.
- ³ Tim Lajnah is a contingency JI leadership structure established by Arif Siswanto following the arrest of Para Wijayanto. The team's main responsibility is to appoint a new leader and act as a caretaker of the organisation until such a leader is appointed.
- ⁴ Arif Siswanto was mentioned in the video under his alias Abu Mahmudah.
- ⁵ Rizky Armanda, "Breaking News: Seratusan Eks Anggota Jamaah Islamiyah di Riau Deklarasi Pembubaran, Kembali ke NKRI," *Tribun Pekanbaru*, September 26, 2024, <https://pekanbaru.tribunnews.com/2024/09/26/breaking-news-seratusan-eks-anggota-jamaah-islamiyah-di-riau-deklarasi-pembubaran-kembali-ke-nkri>.
- ⁶ Gita Irawan, "EKSKLUSIF: Eks Bos Jamaah Islamiyah Ungkap Bahan Peledak dan DPO Telah Diserahkan ke Densus 88," *TribunNews*, September 16, 2024, <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2024/09/16/eksklusif-eks-bos-jamaah-islamiyah-ungkap-bahan-peledak-dan-dpo-telah-diserahkan-ke-densus-88>.
- ⁷ Satria, "Indonesia."
- ⁸ Arnol Saudila, "Densus 88 Antiteror Polri Tangkap Dua Teroris JAD Bima," *Radio Republik Indonesia*, September 7, 2024, <https://www.rri.co.id/nabire/kriminalitas/964067/densus-88-antiteror-polri-tangkap-dua-teroris-jad-bima>.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Dede Leni Mardianti, "Densus 88 Sebut Terduga Teroris JAD yang Ditangkap Kemungkinan Bertambah," *Tempo*, November 6, 2024, <https://www.tempo.co/arsip/densus-88-sebut-terduga-teroris-jad-yang-ditangkap-kemungkinan-bertambah-1164877>.
- ¹¹ The complete comment was ".BBBOOMMM...!!!" See Ady Anugrahadi, "Amankan 7 Terduga Pelaku Teror Saat Paus Fransiskus Datang, Densus 88 Temukan Logo ISIS," *Liputan 6*, September 6, 2024, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/5695443/amankan-7-terduga-pelaku-teror-saat-paus-fransiskus-datang-densus-88-temukan-logo-isis>.
- ¹² Kiki Safitri and Dani Prabowo, "Fakta Penangkapan 7 Pelaku Teror Paus Fransiskus: Bergerak Sendiri, Ditangkap di Lokasi Berbeda," *Kompas*, September 6, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/09/06/23101521/fakta-penangkapan-7-pelaku-teror-paus-fransiskus-bergerak-sendiri-ditangkap>.
- ¹³ Wahyuudi Soeriaatmadja, "Indonesia Arrests Terrorist Who Had Planned to Attack Singapore in 2014," *The Straits Times*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-arrests-terrorist-who-had-planned-to-attack-singapore-in-2014>.
- ¹⁴ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Indonesians with Al-Qaeda in Yemen," *IPAC Report*, No. 95 (2024), p. 8.
- ¹⁵ Soeriaatmadja, "Indonesia Arrests Terrorist"; Stefani Wijaya, "Indonesian Terror Suspect YLK Targeted Singapore Stock Exchange in 2014," *The Jakarta Globe*, September 3, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/indonesian-terror-suspect-ylk-targeted-singapore-stock-exchange-in-2014>.
- ¹⁶ "Polri Ungkap 142 Tersangka Teroris JAD, JAS, JI dan NII di Tahun 2023," *Media Hub Humas Polri*, December 20, 2023, <https://mediahub.polri.go.id/image/detail/33978-polri-ungkap-142-tersangka-teroris-jad-jas-ji-dan-nii-di-tahun-2023>; Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Indonesians with Al-Qaeda."
- ¹⁷ "Press Release: Tersangka Terorisme yang Ditangkap di Gorontalo Bukan Anggota Jamaah Ansharu Syariah," *Jamaah Ansharu Syariah*, September 7, 2024, <https://ansharusyariah.com/press-release-tersangka-terorisme-yang-ditangkap-di-gorontalo-bukan-anggota-jamaah-ansharu-syariah/>.
- ¹⁸ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Indonesians with Al-Qaeda," pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁹ ICPVTR internal report.
- ²⁰ Noor Huda Ismail, "Disbandment of Jamaah Islamiyah: The Impact on Militant Groups," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 129 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/disbandment-of-jamaah-islamiyah-the-impact-on-militant-groups/>.
- ²¹ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Indonesians with Al-Qaeda," p. 9; Forum Me-Dan's Facebook page has 3,600 followers and the last post was on August 28, 2024.
- ²² "Densus 88 Kembali Tangkap 2 Terduga Teroris Terkait Kasus di Solo Raya," *CNN Indonesia*, January 31, 2024, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240131115905-12-1056637/densus-88-kembali-tangkap-2-terduga-teroris-terkait-kasus-di-solo-raya>.
- ²³ Saudila, "Densus 88 Antiteror."

²⁴ “Implementasi RAN PE Pertama Berjalan Baik, BNPT Berikan Apresiasi Kepada Pemangku Kepentingan Dalam RAN PE Awards 2024,” *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT)*, August 20, 2024, <https://www.bnpt.go.id/implementasi-ran-pe-pertama-berjalan-baik-bnpt-berikan-apresiasi-kepada-pemangku-kepentingan-dalam-ran-pe-awards-2024>.

²⁵ This includes the Central Lampung district, Lampung; Surakarta city, Central Java; Bandung city, West Java; Bandung district, West Java; Garut city, West Java; Bogor district, West Java; Purwakarta district, West Java; and Sukoharjo district, Central Java.

²⁶ *Laporan RAN PE 2023* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Bersama RAN PE, 2023), p. 4,

https://base.api.ikhub.org/assets/Organisasi/5fb83920-7bb0-4248-8b2a-3ab1164fea06/files/Sekretariat_Bersama_RAN_PE-Laporan_RAN_PE_2023.pdf.

²⁷ Cameron Sumpter, “Decentralising and Coordinating P/CVE through the Indonesia Knowledge Hub (I-KHub),” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/cta-newsarticle/decentralising-and-coordinating-p-cve-through-the-indonesia-knowledge-hub-i-khub/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Utami Nurhasanah, “K-Hub PCVE Outlook #1: Melacak Dampak OMS PCVE di Indonesia,” *KHub*, 2023,

<https://khub.id/outlook/melacakdampak>.

³⁰ “BNPT Ungkap Komitmen Lindungi Perempuan, Anak, dan Remaja di Rakernas 2024,” *Kompas TV*, February 20, 2024, <https://www.kompas.tv/advertorial/487034/bnpt-ungkap-komitmen-lindungi-perempuan-anak-dan-remaja-di-rakernas-2024>.

³¹ The 13 ministries/agencies are the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Law and Human Rights Ministry, the Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection Ministry, the Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, the Attorney-General, the Head of Police, the Head of the State Intelligence Agency, the Head of PPATK and the Secretary-General of LPSK.

³² Julie Chernov Hwang, “Failure Is Not an Option: Indonesia’s Repatriation Program,” *The Soufan Center Intelbrief*, August 22, 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-august-22/>.

³³ Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT), *7 Program Prioritas Tahun 2024* (Bogor: BNPT, 2024), p. 27, https://base.api.ikhub.org/assets/Organisasi/34edee04-2bb4-4e0a-93fa-dacc076e0665/files/Badan_Nasional_Penanggulangan_Terorisme-E-Book_7_Program_Prioritas_BNPT.pdf;

Chernov Hwang, “Failure Is Not an Option.”

³⁴ Alif Satria, “Indonesian Terrorist Group Jemaah Islamiyah Lays Down Arms,” *East Asia Forum*, September 13, 2024, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/09/13/indonesian-terrorist-group-jemaah-islamiyah-lays-down-arms/>.

³⁵ Reza Gustav Pradana, “Tobat Massal Ratusan Anggota JI di Kabupaten Semarang, Pernah Latihan Militer di Timur Tengah,” *TribunBanyumas*, September 13, 2024, <https://banyumas.tribunnews.com/2024/09/13/tobat-massal-ratusan-anggota-ji-di-kabupaten-semarang-terima-latihan-militer-di-timur-tengah>; Mutia Yuantisya, “Petinggi dan Ratusan Anggota Jamaah Islamiyah Ikrar Kembali Setia ke NKRI,” *Tempo*, September 8, 2024, <https://video.tempo.co/read/39303/petinggi-dan-ratusan-anggota-jamaah-islamiyah-ikrar-kembali-setia-ke-nkri>.

³⁶ Armanda, “Breaking News: Seratusan.”

³⁷ Gita Irawan, “Eksklusif Eks Pendiri Jamaah Islamiyah: 4 Organisasi Besar di Bawah Pusat Terhubung ke Densus 88,” *TribunNews*, September 17, 2024, <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2024/09/17/eksklusif-eks-pendiri-jamaah-islamiyah-4-organisasi-besar-di-bawah-pusat-terhubung-ke-densus-88>; Fariz Fardianto, “Ikut Arahan Senior, Ratusan Anggota Alwi Jamaah Islamiyah Bubarkan Diri,” *IDN Times Jateng*, September 12, 2024, <https://jateng.idntimes.com/news/jateng/fariz-fardianto/ikut-arahan-senior-ratusan-anggota-alwi-jamaah-islamiyah-bubarkan-diri>.

³⁸ Kaitlyn Robinson and Iris Malone, “Militant Splinter Groups and the Use of Violence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 68, No. 2-3 (2024), pp. 9-10.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 26; Zachary Abuza, “JI’s Moneyman and Top Recruiter: A Profile of Noordin Mohammad Top,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 29 (2006), <https://jamestown.org/program/jis-moneyman-and-top-recruiter-a-profile-of-noordin-mohammad-top/>.

⁴⁰ Verdict of Usman Bin Sef alias Fahim alias Sobron alias Abu Umar Bin Hedar, West Jakarta District Court, 2022, No. 950/Pid.Sus/2021/PN Jkt.Br. pp. 10-12; Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, “The Decline of ISIS in Indonesia and the Emergence of New Cells,” *IPAC Report*, No. 69 (2021), pp. 16-19.

⁴¹ Mutia Yuantisya, “Eks Pimpinan Jamaah Islamiyah Akui Ada Anggota yang Menolak Bubarkan Diri dan Kembali ke NKRI,” *Tempo*, September 9, 2024, <https://satu.tempo.co/hukum/eks-pimpinan-jamaah-islamiyah-akui-ada-anggota-yang-menolak-bubarkan-diri-dan-kembali-ke-nkri-42180>;

M Imam Pramana, “56 Mantan Anggota Jamaah Islamiyah di Sumsel Ikrar ke NKRI,” *ANTARA News*, September 20, 2024, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4346995/56-mantan-anggota-jamaah-islamiyah-di-sumsel-ikrar-ke-nkri>.

⁴² Merawati Sunantri, “Jamaah Islamiyah Klaten Resmi Bubar, 500 Anggota Gelar Deklarasi,” *Suara Merdeka Solo*, August 12, 2024, <https://solo.suamerdeka.com/solo-roya/0513320506/jamaah-islamiyah-klaten-resmi-bubar-500-anggota-gelar-deklarasi>.

⁴³ Based on ICPVTR research.

⁴⁴ Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E Schulze, “Indonesian Jihadi Training Camps: Home and Away,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2024), p. 12; International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh,” *Asia Report*, No. 189 (2010), p. 7.

⁴⁵ Yandi M Rofiyandi, “Silsilah Pelaku Teror Solo,” *Tempo*, September 4, 2012.

⁴⁶ The exact number of Indonesians in Syria’s IS camps vary between reports. The Deputy for BNPT’s Law Enforcement Division Police Inspector General Ibnu Suhaendra mentioned in May 2024 that there were 375 verified Indonesians in Syria’s IS camps. A report from academic Julie Chernov Hwang mentioned in August

- 2024 that there were at least 493 Indonesian in Syria's al-Hol and al-Roj camps. See Rio Feisal, "BNPT Sebut Telah Usulkan Repatriasi WNI Terasosiasi FTF ke Presiden," *ANTARA News*, May 16, 2024, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4106856/bnpt-sebut-telah-usulkan-repatriasi-wni-terasosiasi-ftf-ke-presiden>; Chernov Hwang, "Failure Is Not an Option."
- ⁴⁷ Kiki Safitri and Ihsanuddin, "Resmi Jabat Kepala BNPT, Ini Profil Irjen Eddy Hartono," *Kompas*, September 11, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/09/11/09561591/resmi-jabat-kepala-bnpt-ini-profil-irjen-eddy-hartono>.
- ⁴⁸ Chernov Hwang, "Failure Is Not an Option."
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Humas Sentra Handayani Jakarta, "Sentra Handayani dan BNPT Persiapkan Repatriasi Anak Korban Radikalisme di Camp Suriah," *Kementerian Sosial Republik Indonesia*, October 25, 2023, <https://kemensos.go.id/sentra-handayani-dan-bnpt-persiapkan-repatriasi-anak-korban-radikalisme-di-camp-suriah>.
- ⁵¹ IPAC, "Managing Indonesia's Pro-ISIS Deportees," *IPAC Report*, No. 47 (2018), p. 11.
- ⁵² Chernov Hwang, "Failure Is Not an Option."
- ⁵³ Jim Gomez, "Army Chief: Militant Leader Likely Killed in Philippines," *The Associated Press*, August 25, 2020, <https://apnews.com/general-news-d4595e2a569618d3f7abb3dd10aa30f7>.
- ⁵⁴ "Death of ASG Leader Leads to Surrender of 14 followers," *SunStar*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/zamboanga/local-news/death-of-asg-leader-leads-to-surrender-of-14-followers>.
- ⁵⁵ Maja Halilovic Pastuovic et al., *Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism: A Conceptual Framework* (Berlin: Trinity College Dublin and Berghof Foundation, 2021), https://www.pave-project.eu/publications/PAVE_870769_Preventing_and_Adressing_Violent_Extremism_A_Conceptual_Framework_k.pdf; "Advancing and Sustaining the Gains of Good Governance (BasilanProvince) 2022," *Galing Pook*, YouTube video, February 8, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5lgAyNABtg>; "Basilan Program Helps Reintegrate Rebel Returnees | The Final Word," *NewsWatch Plus PH*, YouTube video, December 16, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VSVL1bJUM4>.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Abdul-Mughni A. Adju, Masnona S. Asiri and Charisma S. Ututalum, "Effects of Balik Barangay Program to the Livelihood, Peace and Order, Public Safety, and Education in Patikul, Sulu," *Environment and Social Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (2024).
- ⁵⁸ Bianca Dava, "ISIS-Southeast Asia Leader Killed in Marawi: Military," *ABS-CBN News*, June 14, 2023, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/06/14/23/isis-southeast-asia-leader-killed-in-marawi-military>.
- ⁵⁹ Joel Guinto and Virma Simonette, "Mindanao: Four Killed in Explosion at Catholic Mass in Philippines," *BBC News*, December 3, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67604592>.
- ⁶⁰ The Maranao people traditionally live in communities of large extended families and do not delineate landownership cleanly between their extended families. As a result, a significant amount of time has been spent deconflicting landownership claims between family members.
- ⁶¹ Froilan Gallardo, "Compensation Board Struggles as Marawi Siege Claims Exceed Budget," *Rappler*, August 7, 2023, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/marawi-compensation-board-struggles-funds-residents-claims-exceed-budget/>.
- ⁶² There are three original factions of the BIFF, led by Ismael Abubakar (Commander Bongos), Mohiden Alimodin Animbang (Kagi Karialan) and Esmael Abdulmalik (Abu Turaife). Only the Turaife faction pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.
- ⁶³ "Philippine Govt Forces Kill Top IS Militant, Wife in Mindanao Raid," *Benar News*, October 29, 2021, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/militant-killed-10292021134428.html>.
- ⁶⁴ Drema Quitayen Bravo and Edwin O. Fernandez, "12 Militants Killed in Philippines' Maguindanao del Sur," *Asia News Network*, April 24, 2024, <https://asianews.network/12-militants-killed-in-philippines-maguindanao-del-sur/>.
- ⁶⁵ Anti-Terrorism Council (Philippines), *Designating the 20 Individuals Affiliated with the Local Terrorist Groups, which are Designated under Anti-Terrorism Council Resolution No. 13 (2020), as Terrorists* (Manila: Anti-Terrorism Council, 2021), https://atc.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SGD_ATC-Resolution-No.-20_Designating-20-LTG-Affiliated-Individuals.pdf.
- ⁶⁶ Surrendered militias are not free from prosecution. Instead, pro bono lawyers from the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP)'s chapter in Mindanao would attempt to reduce their sentences in return for their cooperation with the authorities. Department of National Defense (Philippines), *Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations of Administrative Order No. 10, s. 2018 (A.O. No. 10, s. 2018) as Amended By Administrative Order No. 25, s. 2020 (A.O. No. 25, s. 2020)* (Quezon City: Department of National Defense, 2021), <https://law.upd.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Revised-IRR-Administrative-Order-No-10-Series-of-2018-as-Amended.pdf>.
- ⁶⁷ Dahlia Simangan, "Challenges and Prospects for Urban Peacebuilding in Post-Siege Marawi City, Philippines: People, Places, Practices," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034241251864>.
- ⁶⁸ Kenneth Yeo, "Geography, Governance, Guns: Characterising Islamist Terrorist Sanctuaries in Maritime Southeast Asia (2014-2021)," *Asian Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2022.2132854>.
- ⁶⁹ Nurhati Tangging and Kenneth Yeo, "Reintegrating Former Terrorist Combatants in Mindanao," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2023), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/counter-terrorist-trends-and-analyses-ctta-volume-15-issue-03/>.

⁷⁰ The BTA is the interim local government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

⁷¹ Sherrie Ann Torres, "16 local parties, 1,500 Sectoral Groups Eye 2025 Bangsamoro Polls," *ABS-CBN News*, July 2, 2024. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/regions/2024/7/2/16-local-parties-1-500-sectoral-groups-eye-2025-bangsamoro-polls-1729>.

⁷² Georgi Engelbrecht, "Ballots and Bullets in the Bangsamoro," *International Crisis Group*, June 20, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/ballots-and-bullets-bangsamoro>.

⁷³ The BGC is a coalition of the most powerful parties in the major regions of BARMM, representing the major ethnic groups in the region. The coalition includes the Sulu-Tausug: Salaam Party; Basilan-Yakan: Bangsamoro People's Party (BPP); Cotabato City-Maguindanao: Al-Ittihad-Ungaya Sa Kawagib Nu Bangsamoro (Al-Ittigad-UKB); and Lanao-Maranao: Serbisyong Inklusibo Alyansang Progresibo Party (SIAP).

⁷⁴ Luisa Cabato, "BARMM Grand Coalition Endorses Sulu Governor Sakur Tan as Chief Minister," *INQUIRER.net*, May 19, 2024, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1942165/barmm-grand-coalition-on-sulu-governor-sakur-tan>.

⁷⁵ Filane Mikee Cervantes, "BARMM Political Parties Form Alliance to Ensure Peaceful 2025 Polls." *Philippine News Agency*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1223472>.

⁷⁶ Sidney Jones, "The 2025 Bangsamoro Elections: An Anti-Climax Waiting to Happen?" *Up Sa Halalan*, April 23, 2024, <https://halalan.up.edu.ph/the-2025-bangsamoro-elections-an-anti-climax-waiting-to-happen/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.; Georgi Engelbrecht, "Philippines: Bangsamoro's Village Elections Point to a Long Path to Peace," *International Crisis Group*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/philippines-bangsamoros-village-elections-point-long-path-peace>; "Return of the 3 Gs?" *INQUIRER.net*, April 23, 2022, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/152313/return-of-the-3-gs>.

⁷⁸ Teofilo P. Garcia Jr., "Bomb Goes Off in Lamitan Hours After Mayor Declares City Abu Sayyaf-Free," *Rappler*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/bomb-goes-off-lamitan-basilan-after-abu-sayyaf-free-declaration/>.

⁷⁹ This is not to understate the potential impact of external events or developments on the activities or behaviours of Filipino radical groups. For example, there has been widespread advocacy for the Palestinians arising from the suffering caused by the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. Nur Misuari, the leader of the MILF, has expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people, claiming that "we are like the Palestinians, while the Philippines are like the Israeli". Yet, despite support for the Palestinian cause in Muslim Mindanao, this has not manifested into terrorist activities thus far. This is primarily because active terrorist groups in the Philippines have been severely weakened by the AFP, and narratives emerging from terrorist-linked channels in the Philippines have generally focused on internal struggles and have yet to exploit the Palestinian struggle for their own purposes. As such, the Palestinian plight has been featured in civil advocacy but not terrorism thus far.

⁸⁰ Mohd Farhaan Shah, "Ulu Tiram Attack: Slain Suspect's Family Members Face Nine Charges Including Supporting Terrorism," *The Star*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/06/19/ulu-tiram-attack-slain-suspect039s-family-members-face-a-total-of-nine-charges-including-supporting-terrorism>.

⁸¹ Farik Zolkepli, "Ulu Tiram Attack: Suspect Not JI Member, Initial Link Made Due to Father's Past, Says IGP," *The Star*, May 18, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/05/18/ulu-tiram-attack-attacker-not-a-jemaah-islamiyah-member-says-igp>.

⁸² Shah, "Ulu Tiram Attack."

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Austin Camoens, "Eight Arrested Over IS-Linked Threats Against King, PM," *New Straits Times*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2024/06/1067761/updated-eight-arrested-over-linked-threats-against-king-pm>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ "Factory Operator Charged with Possession of Terrorism-Related Items," *New Straits Times*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2024/06/1062190/factory-operator-charged-possession-terrorism-related-items-watch>.

⁸⁷ Nurbaiti Hamdan, "Man Gets Two Years' Jail for Possessing IS-Related Items," *The Star*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/28/man-gets-two-years-jail-for-possessing-is-related-items>.

⁸⁸ Based on data collected by the author.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ahmad El-Muhamaddy, *Managing the Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families: Malaysian Experience* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2023).

⁹¹ Bernd Debusmann Jr, "US Repatriates 11 Americans and Six Canadian Children from Syria," *BBC News*, May 8, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68971030>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Devorah Margolin and Camille Jablonski, "Five Years After the Caliphate, Too Much Remains the Same in Northeast Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, PolicyWatch 3847, March 19, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/five-years-after-caliphate-too-much-remains-same-northeast-syria>.

⁹⁴ Kenneth Yeo, "Hungry and Tired: The Decline of Militancy in Mindanao," *The Strategist*, June 11, 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/hungry-and-tired-the-decline-of-militancy-in-mindanao/>.

⁹⁵ Jacob Zenn, "Brief: Maritime Threat Posed by Abu Sayyaf Curtailed by Philippine Counter-Piracy Efforts," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2024), <https://jamestown.org/program/brief-maritime-threat-posed-by-abu-sayyaf-curtailed-by-philippine-counter-piracy-efforts/>.

- ⁹⁶ Mohd Iskandar Ibrahim, "Fuad A Kiram Dikenal Pasti Pengasas Entiti Pengganas Royal Sulu Force – Khairul Dzaimie," *Berita Harian*, April 11, 2023, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/04/1088767/fuad-kiram-dikenal-pasti-pengasas-entiti-pengganas-royal-sulu-force>.
- ⁹⁷ Jason Santos, "Azalina Hopes for More Decisive Action on Sulu Claims Case," *The Vibes*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.thevibes.com/articles/news/102513/azalina-hopes-for-more-decisive-action-on-sulu-claims-case>.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ "Sulu Case: French Court Ends So-Called Heirs' Claims over Malaysia's Diplomatic Assets, Says Azalina," *The Star*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/11/09/sulu-case-malaysia-ends-purported-sulu-heirs039-claims-on-m039sian-assets-in-france-says-azalina>; "Malaysia Hails 'Victory' in Row with Sulu Sultan's Filipino Heirs," *Al Jazeera*, June 7, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/7/malaysia-wins-decisive-victory-in-row-with-sulu-sultans-heirs>.
- ¹⁰⁰ "Esscom Vows to Reduce Cross-Border Crimes," *The Star*, March 14, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/03/14/esscom-vows-to-reduce-cross-border-crimes>.
- ¹⁰¹ Khatijah Jistoh, "ESSCOM Boldly Confronts Security Challenges To Ensure Nation Stays Peaceful, Safe," *BERNAMA*, September 6, 2024, <https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2337467>.
- ¹⁰² Based on data collected by the author.
- ¹⁰³ Alias Abd Rani, "Oyen Ucuk' Didakwa Lagi Kes SOSMA, Kini 3 Pertuduhan Sokong IS," *Berita Harian*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/kes/2024/06/1258181/oyen-ucuk-didakwa-lagi-kes-sosma-kini-3-pertuduhan-sokong>.
- ¹⁰⁴ "Malaysia Man Gets 18 Months in Jail for Having ISIS Clips", *The Straits Times*, March 25, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-man-gets-18-months-in-jail-for-having-isis-clips>; Diyanatul Atiqah Zakarya, "Oyen Ucuk' Didakwa Kali Ketiga, Sokong Pengganas IS," *Kosmo*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.kosmo.com.my/2024/06/13/oyen-ucuk-didakwa-kali-ketiga-sokong-pengganas-is/>.
- ¹⁰⁵ Dawn Chan, "Unemployed Woman Charged with Supporting, Possessing Islamic State Items," *New Straits Times*, July 19, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2024/07/1078743/unemployed-woman-charged-supporting-possessing-islamic-state-items>.
- ¹⁰⁶ Bridget Johnson, "ISIS Cyber Group Launches Cloud, Chat Platforms to 'Close Ranks' Online," *Homeland Security Today*, April 6, 2021, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/isis-cyber-group-launches-cloud-chat-platforms-to-close-ranks-online/>.
- ¹⁰⁷ Camoens, "Eight Arrested Over IS-Linked Threats against King, PM"; "Polis M'sia Tangkap Lebih 20 Individu Disyaki Penyokong ISIS, Berita Malaysia," *Berita Harian Singapura*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.beritaharian.sg/malaysia/polis-msia-tangkap-lebih-20-individu-disyaki-penyokong-isis>.
- ¹⁰⁸ Olivia Miwil, "Esscom Boosts Confidence with 'Show of Presence' Strategy," *New Straits Times*, September 1, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/09/1099649/esscom-boosts-confidence-show-presence-strategy>; Stephanie Lee, "Esscom Raids Squatter Colonies in Sandakan," *The Star*, August 24, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/08/24/esscom-raids-squatter-colonies-in-sandakan>.
- ¹⁰⁹ Olivia Miwil, "Esscom Helps Keep Threats at Bay," *New Straits Times*, August 31, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2024/08/1099112/esscom-helps-keep-threats-bay>; "Use of Latest Technology Important to Enhance Security Level in ESSzone," *Borneo Post Online*, August 17, 2024, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2024/08/17/use-of-latest-technology-important-to-enhance-security-level-in-esszone/>.
- ¹¹⁰ Olivia Miwil, "Esscom Plays Crucial Role to Ensure Safety in Sabah, Says CM," *New Straits Times*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/04/1042225/esscom-plays-crucial-role-ensure-safety-sabah-says-cm>.
- ¹¹¹ "First EU-Malaysia Maritime Counterterrorism Training for Security Practitioners in Sabah, Followed by EU Delegation Visit to ESSCOM," *Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA)*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/Press%20release%20-%20Sabah%20Maritime%20CT%20training.pdf>.
- ¹¹² Olivia Miwil, "Furthering EU-Malaysia Collaboration in Security and Defence," *New Straits Times*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/04/1042608/furthering-eu-malaysia-collaboration-security-and-defence>.
- ¹¹³ Rueben Dass, "The IS Resurgence in Malaysia: Assessing the Threat and Implications," *The Diplomat*, July 3, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/the-is-resurgence-in-malaysia-assessing-the-threat-and-implications/>.
- ¹¹⁴ Charles Ramendran and Junaid Ibrahim, "Ulu Tiram Attacker's Family Isolated Themselves Due to Beliefs, Says Home Minister," *The Star*, May 23, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/05/23/ulu-tiram-attacker039s-family-isolated-themselves-due-to-beliefs-says-home-minister>.
- ¹¹⁵ Rueben Ananthan Santhana Dass, "The Use of Family Networks in Suicide Terrorism: A Case Study of the 2018 Surabaya Attacks," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2021), pp. 173-191, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2021.1906932>.
- ¹¹⁶ Based on data collected by the author.
- ¹¹⁷ Remar Nordin, "Former Lecturer, Contractor Charged in Johor with Possessing Islamic State Materials," *The Star*, July 21, 2024, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/07/21/former-lecturer-contractor-charged-in-johor-with-possessing-islamic-state-materials>.
- ¹¹⁸ Leong Kar Yen, "KMM Does Not Exist, Militant Group Suspect Tells Suhakam," *Malaysiakini*, June 18, 2002, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/11834>. KMM was known to have an indirect affiliation to JI. For more information, see Mohd Mizan Mohammad Aslam, "A Critical Study of Kumpulan Militan Malaysia, Its Wider

Connections in the Region and the Implications of Radical Islam for the Stability of Southeast Asia” (PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2009), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/41339479.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ Based on data collected by the author.

¹²⁰ Rueben Dass and Jasminder Singh, "Pathways to the Caliphate: Mapping Malaysian Foreign Fighter Networks in Iraq and Syria from 2012-2019," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 35, No. 7 (2022), pp. 1-34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2059352>.

¹²¹ "Myanmar's Ethnic Armies Consolidate Strongholds as Junta Weakens, Reports Say," *Reuters*, May 30, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-ethnic-armies-consolidate-strongholds-junta-weakens-reports-say-2024-05-30/>.

¹²² International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), *Myanmar Conflict Map*, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/>.

¹²³ Conflict events are defined by IISS as attacks/armed clashes, remote explosive/IED incidents, air/drone strikes, crackdowns and infrastructure destruction.

¹²⁴ IISS, *Myanmar Conflict Map*.

¹²⁵ Yun Sun, "Operation 1027: Changing the Tides of the Myanmar Civil War?" *The Brookings Institution*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/operation-1027-changing-the-tides-of-the-myanmar-civil-war/>.

¹²⁶ "KIA Launches Offensive to Drive Myanmar Military From Southern Tip of Kachin State," *The Irrawaddy*, May 29, 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/kia-launches-offensive-to-drive-myanmar-military-from-southern-tip-of-kachin-state.html>.

¹²⁷ "Junta Controls Fewer Than 100 of Myanmar's 350 Towns: NUG," *The Irrawaddy*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/junta-controls-fewer-than-100-of-myanmars-350-towns-nug.html>.

¹²⁸ These include Madaya, Taungtha and Thabeikkyin townships.

¹²⁹ "Five Myanmar Junta Soldiers Killed in Bank Ambush: Ye Urban Guerrillas," *The Irrawaddy*, September 27, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/five-myanmar-junta-soldiers-killed-in-bank-ambush-ye-urban-guerrillas.html>.

¹³⁰ "Myanmar Guerrilla Groups Claim Responsibility for Bombings," *Radio Free Asia*, April 29, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/yangon-bombings-04292024073055.html>.

¹³¹ Nicola Williams, "Lower Myanmar: Urban Guerrillas and New Patterns of Resistance," *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, May 31, 2023, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/lower>.

¹³² Jonathan Head and BBC Burmese, "Myanmar's Military-Ruled Capital Attacked by Drones," *BBC News*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68730993>.

¹³³ "MNDAA Ambushes Junta Reinforcement Convoy Heading to Lashio, Inflicts Heavy Casualties," *Burma News International*, July 31, 2024, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/mndaa-ambushes-junta-reinforcement-convoy-heading-lashio-inflicts-heavy-casualties>.

¹³⁴ Maung Shwe Wah and Min Maung, "Fighting Intensifies in Southern Kachin State as Myanmar Junta Attempts to Retake Momauk," *Myanmar Now*, September 4, 2024, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/fighting-intensifies-in-southern-kachin-state-as-myanmar-junta-attempts-to-retake-momauk/>.

¹³⁵ "Junta Reinforcements for Myawaddy Still Fail to Recapture KNLA's Control over Road Access from Kawkareik," *Burma News International*, May 24, 2024, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/junta-reinforcements-myawaddy-still-fail-recapture-knlas-control-over-road-access-kawkareik>.

¹³⁶ "Regime Reinforcements Ambushed as Fight for Tamakhan Military Camp Intensifies," *Kachin News Group*, March 6, 2024, <https://kachinnews.com/2024/03/06/regime-reinforcements-ambushed-as-fight-for-tamakhan-military-camp-intensifies/>.

¹³⁷ Morgan Michaels, "Myanmar's Regime Shrinks Further Towards the Centre," *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, March 2024, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/updates/2024-03>.

¹³⁸ "Military Shifts Strategy in Myanmar's Far South," *Radio Free Asia*, November 1, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/strategy-11012023112206.html>.

¹³⁹ IISS, *Myanmar Conflict Map*.

¹⁴⁰ Anthony Davis, "The Dangers of Guerrilla Triumphalism in Myanmar," *Asia Times*, December 6, 2023, <https://asiatimes.com/2023/12/the-dangers-of-guerrilla-triumphalism-in-myanmar/>.

¹⁴¹ *Radio Free Asia*, "Military Shifts Strategy in Myanmar's Far South."

¹⁴² "Review of Myanmar Army's Five Cut Strategy," *Security Risks Asia*, March 17, 2024, <https://www.security-risks.com/post/review-of-myanmar-army-s-five-cut-strategy>.

¹⁴³ Nai Aue Mon and Maggi Quadrini, "Return of the 'Four Cuts' in Myanmar's Mon State," *Asia Times*, December 5, 2023, <https://asiatimes.com/2023/12/return-of-the-four-cuts-in-myanmars-mon-state>.

¹⁴⁴ *Radio Free Asia*, "Military Shifts Strategy in Myanmar's Far South."

¹⁴⁵ Emily Fishbein, Nu Nu Lusan and Vahpual, "What is the Myanmar Military's 'Four Cuts' Strategy?" *Al Jazeera*, July 6, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/5/what-is-the-myanmar-militarys-four-cuts-strategy>.

¹⁴⁶ Nai Aue Mon and Quadrini, "Return of the 'Four Cuts' in Myanmar's Mon State."

¹⁴⁷ Roe Kyaw, "AA Seizes Thandwe Airport Near Rakhine's Ngapali Beach, Local Sources Say," *The Irrawaddy*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/aa-seizes-thandwe-airport-near-rakhines-ngapali-beach-local-sources-say.html>.

¹⁴⁸ "Rebel Army Captures Major Myanmar Navy Training Base," *Radio Free Asia*, September 9, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/aa-rakhine-navy-base-09092024072011.html>.

¹⁴⁹ "Myanmar Rebel Group Claims Control of Town Bordering India, Bangladesh," *Reuters*, January 15, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-rebel-group-claims-control-town-bordering-india-bangladesh-2024-01-15/>; Grant Peck, "Arakan Army Resistance Force Says It Has Taken Control of a Strategic

Township in Western Myanmar,” *The Associated Press*, <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-arakan-army-paletwa-chin-rakhine-e124bb0ff3dbfef6c84b39f141e972ca>.

¹⁵⁰ “AA Claims Seizure of Buthidaung Near Bangladesh Border,” *The Irrawaddy*, May 18, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240529073920/https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/aa-claims-seizure-of-buthidaung-near-bangladesh-border.html>; “Myanmar’s Junta Loses Another Town to Arkan Army in Rakhine State,” *The Irrawaddy*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/myanmars-junta-loses-another-town-to-arkan-army-in-rakhine-state.html>.

¹⁵¹ “In Myanmar, The War For Rakhine Has Reached Its Southernmost Tip,” *The Irrawaddy*, August 19, 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/in-myanmar-the-war-for-rakhine-has-reached-its-southernmost-tip.html>.

¹⁵² Ali M Latifi, “The Arakan Army Responds to Rohingya Abuse Accusations in Myanmar,” *The New Humanitarian*, May 29, 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2024/05/29/arkan-army-responds-rohingya-abuse-accusations-myanmar>.

¹⁵³ “Arakan Army Vows to Fight for Total Control of Myanmar’s Rakhine State,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 3, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/aa-03042024163837.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Latifi, “The Arakan Army Responds to Rohingya Abuse Accusations in Myanmar.”

¹⁵⁵ See Ruma Paul et al., “Myanmar’s Junta Terrorises, Then Rebels Burn a Rohingya Town,” *Reuters*, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/MYANMAR-CONFLICT/ROHINGYA/dwpkzqnwlvvm/>; Nathan Ruser, “They Left a Trail of Ash: Decoding the Arakan Army’s Arson Attacks in the Rohingya Heartland,” *The Strategist*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/they-left-a-trail-of-ash-decoding-the-arkan-armys-arson-attacks-in-the-rohingya-heartland/>; “Episode 345: ‘It Felt Like Hell on Earth’: Say Buthidaung Burning Eyewitnesses,” *Doh Athan*, YouTube video, August 4, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoxmtW_OXJQ.

¹⁵⁶ Morgan Michaels, “Threat of Communal Violence Grows in Western and Central Myanmar,” *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, May 2024, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/updates/2024-05>.

¹⁵⁷ Laetitia van den Assum, “Out of the Spotlight, Myanmar’s Rohingya Face Worst Violence in 7 Years,” *United States Institute for Peace*, September 25, 2024, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/09/out-spotlight-myanmars-rohingya-face-worst-violence-7-years>.

¹⁵⁸ “Myanmar: Caught in the Crossfire in Rakhine,” *NHK WORLD-JAPAN*, September 17, 2024, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20240917212618684/>.

¹⁵⁹ Suza Uddin and Abby Seiff, “Terror in Rohingya Refugee Camp as Boys Kidnapped to Fight in Myanmar,” *Radio Free Asia*, August 29, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/rohingya-refugee-camp-coxs-bazar-junta-arsa-rso-08282024143335.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Kyaw Lwin Oo, Sann Maw Aung and Khet Mar, “Rohingya Ordered by Myanmar Officer to ‘Fight for Our Faith’,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/rohingya-conscription-04092024152737.html>.

¹⁶¹ “Rohingya Villages Burned By AA in Maungdaw,” *Rohingya Vision*, August 29, 2024, <https://rohingyavision.com/rohingya-villages-burned-by-aa-in-maungdaw/>; “Arakan Army Forcibly Recruiting Youths in Arakan,” *Rohingya Vision*, September 22, 2024, <https://rohingyavision.com/arkan-army-forcibly-recruiting-youths-in-arakan/>.

¹⁶² “Drone Attack Kills Over 200 Rohingyas in Myanmar,” *New Age*, August 12, 2024, <https://www.newagebd.net/post/south-asia/242334/drone-attack-kills-over-200-rohingyas-in-myanmar>.

¹⁶³ Devjyot Ghoshal, “On Myanmar’s Frontline, Rohingya Fighters and Junta Face a Common Enemy,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-frontline-rohingya-fighters-junta-face-common-enemy-2024-09-06/>.

¹⁶⁴ The AA is also involved in intra-ethnic tensions in Chin State, supporting the Chin Brotherhood from southern Chin against the NUG-aligned Chin National Front which is based in the north of Chin. Ethnic Chins in AA-controlled Paletwa have also accused the AA of abuse and mistreatment. See Angshuman Choudhury, “‘Two Lions in a Cave’: Revolutionary Divisions in Chin State,” *Frontier Myanmar*, August 28, 2024, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/two-lions-in-a-cave-revolutionary-divisions-in-chin-state/>.

¹⁶⁵ Prior to 2024, drone strikes were already a long-standing response by the anti-junta resistance to the military’s air power superiority. Meanwhile, the military had by mid-2023 already issued drone jammers to its ground forces, which the anti-junta resistance claimed to have circumvented by September 2023. See “Myanmar’s Resistance Says It Has Cracked Junta’s Anti-Drone Jammers,” *Radio Free Asia*, September 27, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/anti-drone-jammers-09272023121251.html>.

¹⁶⁶ David Scott Mathieson, “Drone Strikes on Myanmar Military Capitol Signify Deteriorating Situation,” *Asia Sentinel*, <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/drone-strikes-myanmar-military-capitol>.

¹⁶⁷ “Myanmar Junta Loses Another Town, Dozens of Soldiers in Four Days of Resistance Attacks,” *The Irrawaddy*, January 15, 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/myanmar-junta-loses-another-town-dozens-of-soldiers-in-four-days-of-resistance-attacks.html>.

¹⁶⁸ “NUG to Assist Myanmar’s Federal Wings Drone Warfare,” *Mizzima*, May 14, 2023, <https://www.mizzima.com/article/nug-assist-myanmars-federal-wings-drone-warfare>.

¹⁶⁹ IISS, *Myanmar Conflict Map*.

¹⁷⁰ Davis, “The Dangers of Guerrilla Triumphalism in Myanmar.”

¹⁷¹ Morgan Michaels, “Uninhabited Inroads in Myanmar’s Civil War,” *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, September 23, 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2024/09/uninhabited-inroads-in-myanmars-civil-war/>.

- ¹⁷² “Insight: Learning From Myanmar’s Rebels, Junta Builds New Chinese Drone Fleet,” *Reuters*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/learning-myanmars-rebels-junta-builds-new-chinese-drone-fleet-2024-06-13/>.
- ¹⁷³ Zachary Kallenborn and Marcel Plichta, “Drone, Counterdrone, Counter-Counterdrone: Winning the Unmanned Platform Innovation Cycle,” *Modern War Institute at West Point*, September 23, 2024, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/drone-counterdrone-counter-counterdrone-winning-the-unmanned-platform-innovation-cycle/>.
- ¹⁷⁴ Manuel Nicola Primitivi, “Anti-Junta Rebels Resort to 3D-Printed Weapons in Myanmar,” *The Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 22, No. 7 (2024), <https://jamestown.org/program/anti-junta-rebels-resort-to-3d-printed-weapons-in-myanmar/>.
- ¹⁷⁵ Thomas Newdick, “Clandestine U.K. Program Developed 3D-Printed ‘Suicide’ Drone For Ukraine,” *The Warzone*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.twz.com/clandestine-u-k-program-developed-3d-printed-suicide-drone-for-ukraine>.
- ¹⁷⁶ Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, “Printing Terror: An Empirical Overview of the Use of 3D-Printed Firearms by Right-Wing Extremists,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (2024), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/printing-terror-an-empirical-overview-of-the-use-of-3d-printed-firearms-by-right-wing-extremists/>.
- ¹⁷⁷ “Myanmar’s Junta Declares It Will Enforce Military Service Laws for Young People,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/11/myanmars-junta-declares-it-will-enforce-military-service-laws-for-young-people>.
- ¹⁷⁸ “Myanmar Junta Begins Conscripting Men Up to Age 65 to Protect Towns Against Rebels,” *Radio Free Asia*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-junta-recruitment-public-security-09052024165521.html>.
- ¹⁷⁹ Kelly Ng, “Myanmar: Young People Attempt to Flee Ahead of Conscription Order,” *BBC News*, February 27, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68345291>.
- ¹⁸⁰ Ye Myo Hein, “Myanmar’s Fateful Conscription Law,” *United States Institute of Peace*, February 26, 2024, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/myanmars-fateful-conscription-law>.
- ¹⁸¹ Aung Zay and Nay Min Ni, “Monk Who Led Junta-Trained Militias Condemns Myanmar Junta’s Abductions for Forced Recruitment,” *Myanmar Now*, August 23, 2024, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/monk-who-led-junta-trained-militias-condemns-myanmar-juntas-abductions-for-forced-recruitment/>.
- ¹⁸² Naw Theresa, “Myanmar Ethnic Armed Groups Draw Allegations of Forced Recruitment,” *The Diplomat*, January 3, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/myanmar-ethnic-armed-groups-draw-allegations-of-forced-recruitment/>.
- ¹⁸³ “The Great Escape – Insight Into the Myanmar Military,” *Mizzima*, June 4, 2024, <https://eng.mizzima.com/2024/06/04/10519>.
- ¹⁸⁴ Bertil Lintner, “Why the Tatmadaw Won’t Crack in Myanmar,” *Asia Times*, April 20, 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/04/why-the-tatmadaw-wont-crack-in-myanmar/>.
- ¹⁸⁵ “Latest Killing of Suspected Junta Informant in Dawei Sparks Demand for Investigation,” *Myanmar Now*, April 19, 2024, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/latest-killing-of-suspected-junta-informant-in-dawei-sparks-demand-for-investigation/>.
- ¹⁸⁶ Benjamin Mok, “Pro-Democracy Violence: Myanmar’s Anti-Regime Movement,” *RSIS Commentary*, No. 002 (2022), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CO22002.pdf>.
- ¹⁸⁷ Davis, “The Dangers of Guerrilla Triumphalism in Myanmar.”
- ¹⁸⁸ Zsombor Peter, “Political Accord Evades Myanmar’s Resistance Groups Despite Battlefield Bonds, Gains,” *VoA*, April 20, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/political-accord-evades-myanmar-s-resistance-groups-despite-battlefield-bonds-gains/7578003.html>.
- ¹⁸⁹ “Ethnic Autonomy and Its Consequences in Post-Coup Myanmar,” *International Crisis Group*, Asia Briefing No. 180, May 30, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b180-ethnic-autonomy-and-its-consequences-post-coup-myanmar>.
- ¹⁹⁰ Ophelia Yumlembam, “Myanmar Is Slipping Towards Balkanisation,” *9DASHLINE*, August 27, 2024, <https://www.9dashline.com/article/myanmar-is-slipping-towards-balkanisation>.
- ¹⁹¹ “Myanmar Faces Economic Collapse Amid Renewed Military Offensives and Political Uncertainty,” *BowerGroupAsia*, July 24, 2024, <https://bowergroupasia.com/myanmar-faces-economic-collapse-amid-renewed-military-offensives-and-political-uncertainty/>.
- ¹⁹² Zsombor Peter, “World Bank: Inflation, Poverty Keep Climbing in War-Torn Myanmar,” *VoA*, June 12, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/world-bank-inflation-poverty-keep-climbing-in-war-torn-myanmar/7653449.html>.
- ¹⁹³ “Myanmar’s Public Struggles With Inflation as Currency Tumbles,” *Nikkei Asia*, May 9, 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Myanmar-s-public-struggles-with-inflation-as-currency-tumbles>.
- ¹⁹⁴ “Myanmar’s Growing Price Controls Deepen Economic Woes,” *Nikkei Asia*, August 20, 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Myanmar-s-growing-price-controls-deepen-economic-woes>.
- ¹⁹⁵ Jared Bissinger, “Myanmar’s Resistance and the Future of Border Trade,” *Trends in Southeast Asia*, No. 11 (2024), https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/TRS11_24.pdf.
- ¹⁹⁶ “Myanmar: New Data Suggests Military Still Importing Fuel for Deadly Air Strikes Despite Sanctions,” *Amnesty International*, January 31, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/myanmar-new-data-suggests-military-still-importing-fuel-for-deadly-air-strikes-despite-sanctions/>.
- ¹⁹⁷ Data obtained from Deep South Watch, November 4, 2024.
- ¹⁹⁸ Abdullah Benjakat, “Govt Pickup Used as Yala Car Bomb,” *Bangkok Post*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2820865/govt-pickup-used-as-yala-car-bomb>.

- ¹⁹⁹ Abdullah Benjakat and Saritdet Marukatat, "Tak Bai Bomb Possibly Linked to Massacre Court Case: Phumtham," *Bangkok Post*, September 30, 2024, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2874932/tak-bai-bomb-possibly-linked-to-massacre-court-case-phumtham>.
- ²⁰⁰ There were 135 Buddhist victims, including 33 deaths and 102 injuries. Muslim casualties totalled 185, including 47 deaths and 138 injuries. Data obtained from Deep South Watch, September 17, 2024.
- ²⁰¹ Mariyam Ahmad, "Coordinated Bombings, Arson Attacks Hit Thai South," *Benar News*, March 22, 2024, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/thai-deep-south-hit-bombings-arson-03222024053516.html>.
- ²⁰² "Summary of the News of the Cabinet Meeting," *Royal Thai Government*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.thaigov.go.th/news/contents/details/89130>.
- ²⁰³ See Jaringan Mangsa Dari Undang-Undang Darurat (JASAD), "An Open Letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Member States of the United Nations Human Rights Council," *Facebook*, January 6, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=756020049898711>.
- ²⁰⁴ "Sowo Phan Rang Kotmai Loek Khamsang Huana Khosocho yup Khanakammakan Borihan Chaidaeen tai Klap pai Chai Sapha Thipruaksa Thaen [Senate Passes Draft Law to Repeal NCPO Chief's Order, Dissolving the Southern Border Advisory Committee and Reinstating the Advisory Council]," *Prachatai*, August 13, 2024, <https://prachatai.com/journal/2024/08/110333>.
- ²⁰⁵ The author is a member of the ad hoc committee. See also Don Pathan, "Expect Parliamentary Sub-Committee to Make Bold Peace Recommendations for Thai Deep South," *Benar News*, June 17, 2024, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/parliamentary-sub-committee-peace-thai-deep-south-06172024124329.html>.
- ²⁰⁶ "Thai Court Issues Warrants for Former Security Personnel Over Deaths of 85 Demonstrators," *Reuters*, September 12, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-court-issues-warrants-former-security-personnel-over-deaths-85-2024-09-12>.
- ²⁰⁷ "Thanai Phon-aek Phisan Raksa Tua Tangprathet Mai Chua Cha Nam Tua Khuen San su Khadi Tak Bai Dai Mai [Lawyer Says Gen Pisarn Receiving Treatment Abroad, Unclear If He Would Fight Tak Bai Case in Court]," *Matichon Daily*, September 13, 2024, https://www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_4789860.
- ²⁰⁸ "Pisan Quits Pheu Thai to Escape Arrest, Interpol Help May Be Sought," *The Nation*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.nationthailand.com/news/politics/40042377>.
- ²⁰⁹ Nontarat Phaicharoen, "Thailand to Charge 8 Suspects in a Tak Bai Case as Deadline Nears," *Benar News*, September 18, 2024, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/new-tak-bai-suspects-09182024161500.html>.
- ²¹⁰ Zsombor Peter, "Hopes for Justice Expire 20 Years After Thailand's Tak Bai Massacre," *VoA*, October 25, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/hopes-for-justice-expire-20-years-after-thailand-s-tak-bai-massacre/7839297.html>.
- ²¹¹ The 2013 peace talk was the first time that the Thai government and the BRN agreed to have a formal peace dialogue facilitated by Malaysia. Nevertheless, the 10-month-long peace talk was disrupted after Yingluck Shinawatra was forced to step down, followed by a military coup in May 2014.
- ²¹² MARA Patani (Majlis Syura Patani, or Patani Consultative Council) is an umbrella organisation comprising four liberation movements – Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani (Patani Islamic Liberation Front, or BIPP), Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Patani (Patani Islamic Mujahideen Movement, or GMIP) and a few BRN members.
- ²¹³ The peace dialogue in this period mainly focused on ending physical violence and there was little discussion on addressing the root causes of the conflict. The joint technical team successfully drafted a plan to set up "safety zones" in the southernmost provinces; however, it never materialised as Bangkok refused to ink an agreement to endorse this initiative, fearing the document could be used by the BRN to seek international support to pave the way for secession.
- ²¹⁴ The Berlin Initiative, facilitated by a Europe-based international organisation, produced a general framework of the peace dialogue, which laid the groundwork for future talks.
- ²¹⁵ It was the first time since the 2014 coup that the SBPAC took part in the peace dialogue. During a decade of military rule, this civilian agency was significantly weakened and put under the ISOC's control.
- ²¹⁶ Some parts of the leaked JCPP were posted on the Facebook page of Tichila Phutthasaraphan, a TPBS reporter. See Tichila Phutthasaraphan, "JCPP Plan to Solve Unrest in Three Southern Border Provinces," *Facebook*, February 17, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/tichila.phutthasaraphan/posts/pfbid02TSYnL6P1ebRx2qizX7C85tsGFSqshuwsRW493nHfJZ1H2X9AmB7i2R7YtujkUA9Jl>.
- ²¹⁷ Patani NOTES, "Rao Ru Arai Bang Chak Rang JCPP Rue Ro Damaep Santiphap (1) [What Do We Learn from the Draft JCPP or Peace Roadmap (1)]," *Facebook*, February 24, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid031cNvK2vg9fMjvMrzf1vTXSk4JzzZeEq3K3fgxjeWR21QJ2ZVXWEwZVyJs7Epz1l&id=100046305528363.
- ²¹⁸ Another major point of difference is the geographical area to be covered under this framework. While the draft JCPP covers the three southernmost provinces and four Muslim-majority districts in Songkhla, the BRN version proposed adding Sadao district in Songkhla and Satun province.
- ²¹⁹ Patani NOTES, "What Do We Learn from the Draft JCPP."
- ²²⁰ Personal communication with a source inside the Thai peace dialogue panel, March 2, 2024.
- ²²¹ Personal communication with a source close to the BRN, July 22, 2024.
- ²²² Hardliners have also claimed that the BRN has infiltrated the Thai state apparatus and have advocated for curtailing freedoms in the political space. See "Surachart Tuean Khana Phutkhui Onhat – Yomchamnon [Surachart Warns Peace Dialogue Panel Amateurish – Surrender]," *Isra News Agency*, February 24, 2024,

<https://www.isranews.org/article/south-slide/126557-surachartchatchai.html>; Surachart Bamrungsuk, "BRN Lang JCPP [BRN After JCPP]," *Matichon Weekly*, July 10, 2024,

<https://www.matichonweekly.com/columnist/surachart-bamrungsuk>.

²²³ Patani NOTES, "Public Statement on the Peace Dialogue Process in Southern Thailand," *Facebook*, March 3, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1025680472318794&id=100046305528363. The statement was signed by Jonathan Powell, Mark Tamthai, Siri Skare and Bernd Mutzelburg.

²²⁴ Interview with a source inside the Thai peace dialogue panel, September 25, 2024; Personal communication with a source inside the Pheu Thai Party, September 25, 2024.

²²⁵ Personal communication with members of the Thai peace dialogue panel and sources close to the BRN, May-June 2024.

²²⁶ "Ex-MKN Dg Mohd Rabin Is New Malaysian Facilitator for Southern Thailand Peace Talks," *BERNAMA*, July 5, 2024, <https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2314748>.

²²⁷ Gen Zulkifli explained that the three substantive issues, namely, cessation of hostilities or reduction of violence, public consultation and discussions toward realising a political solution, would be endorsed by both parties in August, which could pave the way for the endorsement of the JCPP in September. See Majlis Keselamatan Negara, "Press Statement, National Security Council, Prime Minister Department," *Facebook*, June 25, 2024, <https://web.facebook.com/photo?fbid=791458176409210&set=pcb.791446716410356>.

²²⁸ Interview with a source inside the Thai peace dialogue panel, September 25, 2024.

²²⁹ Interview with a source inside the Thai peace dialogue panel, September 25, 2024.

²³⁰ Interview with a senior official of the National Security Council, October 24, 2024.

²³¹ In an interview with local media platform Wartani in August 2024, Ustaz Muhammad Syamsu, a BRN representative in the peace talks, stated that "if the negotiation could not resolve the conflict, we will continue with the war". See Wartani, "Khaochai Rueang JCPP Nai Kan Cheracha Santiphap Patani [Understanding JCPP in the Patani Peace Process]," *Facebook*, August 10, 2024,

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/dsZxepr72SPnaM6S/>.

²³² "Pemerintahan Sendiri Hak Komuniti Patani Dan Kemerdekaan Hak Perjuangan Bangsa [Self-Governance Is the Right of Patani Community and Independence Is the Right of National Struggle]," *Surat*, No. 138 (September 2024), pp. 6-7. A Thai translation of this article which was published in *Surat*, a journal representing the views of Patani liberation movement, is available at

<https://www.facebook.com/TheMotive2020/posts/pfbid02rvA9wxnvjzs5Tr4Qey1x1WYDffZMKFQk6tbRY3UAuXxP1RD4d9QrcN8w8axcnoWCI>.

²³³ Internal Security Department, *Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2024* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024), p. 2, <https://www.mha.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sttar-2024.pdf>.

²³⁴ Fabian Koh, "Terrorism Threat Elevated Since Renewed Israel-Palestine Conflict; Singapore Also Affected: ISD," *Channel News Asia*, July 25, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/terrorism-threat-elevated-renewed-israel-palestine-conflict-singapore-also-affected-isd-4503686>.

²³⁵ Fabian Koh, "Boy, 14, Who Was Radicalised Due to Israel-Hamas Conflict is Youngest to be Dealt With Under ISA," *Channel News Asia*, July 15, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/boy-14-radicalised-israel-hamas-conflict-youngest-isa-order-former-public-servant-isd-4480301>.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Samuel Devaraj, "17-Year-Old Self-Radicalised Singaporean Arrested Weeks Before Planned Attack in Tampines," *The Straits Times*, October 18, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/17-year-old-self-radicalised-singaporean-arrested-weeks-before-planned-attack-in-tampines>.

²³⁸ See Rueben Dass, "Malaysia," in this volume for more details on the attack.

²³⁹ Fabian Koh, "Singapore an Important Target for Terrorists; Recent Attacks, Arrests in Malaysia a Reminder of Threat: Shanmugam," *Channel News Asia*, June 29, 2024,

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singapore-important-target-terrorists-recent-attacks-arrests-malaysia-reminder-threat-shanmugam-4442771>.

²⁴⁰ "Heightened Security at Singapore Checkpoints Following Attack on Johor Police Station," *Channel News Asia*, May 18, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/checkpoints-security-travellers-delay-immigration-johor-police-station-attack-jemaah-islamiyah-4346281>.

²⁴¹ Fabian Koh, "Bangladeshi Preacher Used Passport With Different Name to Enter Singapore to Give Illegal, Extremist Sermon," *Channel News Asia*, August 21, 2024,

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/bangladeshi-preacher-amir-hamza-extremism-illegal-sermon-4558811>.

²⁴² See Iftekarul Bashar, "Bangladesh," in this volume for details on this development.

²⁴³ Lee Min Kok, "27 Radicalised Bangladeshis Arrested in Singapore Under Internal Security Act: MHA," *The Straits Times*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/27-radicalised-bangladeshis-arrested-in-singapore-under-internal-security-act>. See also Lydia Lam, "Maid in Singapore Supported Islamic State and Indonesian Affiliate, Jailed for Financing Terrorism," *Channel News Asia*, March 5, 2020,

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/maid-singapore-supported-islamic-state-indonesia-terrorism-769736>.

²⁴⁴ See Kalicharan Veera Singam, "Assessing the Extreme Right in the West in 2024," in this volume for more details on this development.

²⁴⁵ Nadine Chua, "Terrorism Threat in Singapore Elevated since Israel-Hamas Conflict: ISD," *The Straits Times*, July 25, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/terrorism-threat-in-singapore-elevated-since-israel-hamas-conflict-isd>.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Kalicharan Veera Singam, "Commentary: Why Would a Singaporean Youth Identify as a White Supremacist?" *Channel News Asia*, January 26, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/singapore-youth-far-right-radicalise-white-supremacy-isd-4073716>.

²⁴⁸ Chua, "Terrorism Threat in Singapore."

²⁴⁹ "What's Your Role in Keeping Singapore Safe?" *SGSecure*, 2024, <https://www.sgsecure.gov.sg/whatsyourrole>.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ These included the launch of the SGSecure Instagram account, with posts created in collaboration with local influencers; an updated SGSecure mobile app, with new functions such as maps to locate emergency facilities; and a music video featuring Singaporean singer-songwriter Nathan Hartono, which highlights the importance of social cohesion both before and in the aftermath of a potential terror attack. See Andrew Wong, "S'pore to Increase Public Engagement on SGSecure Through Digital Strategies: Shanmugam," *The Straits Times*, July 27, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/s-pore-to-increase-public-engagement-on-sgsecure-through-digital-strategies-shanmugam>.

²⁵² "About RRG," *Religious Rehabilitation Group*, 2016, <https://www.rrg.sg/about-rrg/>.

²⁵³ Wong Pei Ting, "12 Self-Radicalised Singaporean Youth Dealt with Under ISA since 2015," *The Straits Times*, May 30, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/12-self-radicalised-singaporean-youths-dealt-with-under-isa-since-2015>.

²⁵⁴ Religious Rehabilitation Group, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/@rrgsingapore/videos>; Religious Rehabilitation Group (@rrg_sg), Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/rrg_sg.

²⁵⁵ Nikhil Khattar and Jalelah Abu Baker, "ISD to Hold Engagement Sessions with Migrant Workers Following Bangladeshi Preacher's Extremist Sermon," *Channel News Asia*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/bangladeshi-preacher-extemist-sermon-isd-engagement-sessions-migrant-workers-4567566>.

²⁵⁶ Samuel Devaraj and Andrew Wong, "New Digital Platform Allowing Banks to Exchange Information on Suspicious Customers Launched," *The Straits Times*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-digital-platform-allowing-banks-to-exchange-information-on-suspicious-customers-launched>.

²⁵⁷ Mia Pei, "MAS Imposes New User Protection Requirements on Digital Payment Token Service Providers," *The Straits Times*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/mas-imposes-new-user-protection-requirements-on-digital-payment-token-service-providers>.

²⁵⁸ Andrew Wong, "Remittance Services in Singapore at High Risk of Being Exploited for Terrorism Financing: Report," *The Straits Times*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/remittance-services-in-s-pore-at-high-risk-of-being-exploited-for-terrorism-financing-report>.

²⁵⁹ Christine Tan, "Higher Percentage of Travellers Refused Entry Into Singapore With Automated Lanes," *The Straits Times*, September 9, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/higher-percentage-of-travellers-refused-entry-into-singapore-with-automated-lanes>.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Zaihan Mohamed Yusof, "Police, Together with SAF and SCDF, Hold Terror Attack Drill at One Punggol," *The Straits Times*, August 23, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/police-hold-annual-terror-attack-exercise-at-one-punggol-celebration-square>.

²⁶² Wong Shiyong, "MHA Building New Operations Centre by 2032 for Quicker Incident Response: Shanmugam," *The Straits Times*, February 25, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mha-building-new-operations-centre-by-2032-for-quicker-incident-response-shanmugam>.

SOUTH ASIA

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

AFGHANISTAN

Antonio Giustozzi

In 2024, Afghanistan experienced a modest resurgence of the activities of the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK), after a quiet 2023 in which the organisation reached its nadir since its inception in 2015. Nevertheless, the overall level of ISK activities remains modest, and it does not pose a strategic threat to the Taliban, nor is it capable of causing a major disruption. However, there are signs that funding to ISK is also resurging, mostly because of the organisation's involvement in attacks abroad (Iran and Russia). Although Afghanistan also hosts several other jihadist organisations, only the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda (AQ) have been showing significant levels of activity, aimed towards Pakistan.

Trends

A Modest ISK Resurgence

In the first half of 2024, ISK only claimed 13 attacks in Afghanistan, of which four were in its old strongholds of Kunar in the east and Badakhshan in the north-east.¹ Clearly, ISK is trying to avoid attracting the Taliban's attention to the east/north-east and instead attempting to spread its action as wide as possible. In 2024, it claimed attacks in the central provinces of Bamyán and Daikundi, where it never operated before, and also carried out attacks in Kandahar and Ghor, where it rarely ventured before. In Kabul, where it had focused in the past, it carried out a relatively modest four attacks from January to June 2024. The bloodiest attacks have targeted civilians, especially Shias. The purpose of this distribution of attacks appears to be to advertise the spread of ISK activities and generate, through the media, the impression of a powerful organisation that can hit anywhere. In reality, the level of violence was modest, considering that most attacks were small guerrilla strikes or assassinations, although it was nonetheless an increase on 2023, when ISK was at its lowest ebb.

Another trend in 2024 was ISK's growing involvement in terrorist attacks and plots abroad, including in Iran, Russia and Europe. ISK claimed the Kerman attack in Iran, and United States (US) intelligence sources claimed its involvement in the Crocus City Hall attack in Russia. Though ISK did not claim the latter attack, internal sources confirmed it was involved alongside the central organisation of the Islamic State (IS). Closer ISK cooperation with other branches of IS, not just the central structure but also the Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi branches, is another emerging trend.²

It may surprise that ISK, seemingly unable to seriously threaten the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, would want to dedicate energy and resources to long-range attacks. However, the explanation likely lies in ISK's need to raise funds for its operations. The crisis it went through in 2023 had multiple dimensions, but the financial one was the most important. The central structure of IS, operating out of Syria and Turkey, was no longer able to bankroll ISK and its own fund-raising efforts were lagging. It was, in fact, the central IS structure that launched a large-scale terror campaign around 2021-2022, requesting the cooperation of its branches. The intent seems clearly to have been to relaunch the IS brand and demonstrate that the organisation is not yet defeated and is instead still able to deliver massive destruction.³

For at least two years, the campaign was largely a failure, with tens of foiled plots in Europe, Russia, Iran and Turkey, and only very few and modest successes in Iran. There were signs of support for this campaign wearing down within ISK during 2023, but the successes of early 2024 changed that. ISK sources have reported that after the Kerman attack of January 2024 and even more so after the March 2024 attack against the Crocus City Hall in Russia, funding levels have been recovering, even if they remain far from the high levels of 2015-2017.⁴

Even with the recent improvement, ISK is currently barely able to maintain its structure of 6,000-7,000 men, including support elements, almost all divided between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The structure is becoming increasingly decentralised and dispersed, presumably to deny the Taliban an easy target for the latter's counterinsurgency operations. Part-time militias protect the areas of the far east and north-east, where ISK's leadership operates from, but elsewhere the group now operates through underground cells of four to five members each.⁵

Despite its lack of resources, ISK appears to be trying hard to infiltrate the Taliban, playing on the latter's internal rivalries, whether ethnic, personal or ideological. Not only ISK sources say that, but the Taliban's intelligence has confirmed this and there have been various detentions of Taliban members accused of having linked up with ISK, especially in the north-east.⁶

ISK sources have also explained that one obvious finding of the group's fund-raising campaigns of 2023-2024 is that the project of a jihad against the Taliban arouses no enthusiasm among prospective donors, who are mostly located in the Gulf monarchies. Hence, at least until ISK manages to develop its own sources of revenue through tax collection, a large-scale resumption of the jihad against the Taliban is not a serious prospect for the organisation. Terrorist attacks against foreigners (such as tourists like the three Spaniards killed in central Afghanistan in May 2024) and against Shia Afghans remain nonetheless on the agenda. Such attacks were repeatedly carried out during 2024, probably with the intent of undermining Afghanistan's rather good relations with Iran as well as discouraging investment in and travel to the country, both of which generate revenue for the Taliban's Emirate.⁷

ISK has also resumed efforts to expand in Central Asia, primarily through social media recruitment, with the long-term intention of kickstarting a militant campaign there, and also in Turkey, presumably with the intent of acquiring manpower for more plots in Turkey itself, Western Europe and Russia. There has been no visible activity in any of the Central Asian countries, but social media activity has undoubtedly increased, and ISK sources report efforts to deploy trained cadres to at least Tajikistan with the purpose of training and leading local recruits.⁸

Al-Qaeda and the TTP Intensify Operations against Pakistan

Two Al-Qaeda (AQ) organisations have for years shared Afghanistan – AQIS (Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent) and AQ Central. The latter has greatly reduced its presence in Afghanistan after Ayman al-Zawahiri's death, but various sources among the Taliban mention the presence in Afghanistan of close relatives of AQ's founder Osama bin Laden, whom AQ Central would be protecting.⁹ Some elements of AQ Central are also likely tasked with liaising with the Taliban and with facilitating any movement of members of the leadership. These elements are not likely to be involved in plotting attacks beyond Afghanistan.

AQIS is almost exclusively busy supporting the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Pakistan, across the Afghan border, by providing training and advisors. It is not clear whether AQIS is able to support the TTP financially, but TTP sources confirm the presence of AQ advisors and medics with the combat groups. AQ is also confirmed to have active training camps in Afghanistan, which most sources believe are focused on training TTP members.¹⁰ The TTP during 2024 has moved the bulk of its combat force to Pakistan, leading to a major deterioration of government control in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The TTP nonetheless maintains bases in Afghanistan, where its top leaders are also believed to be based most of the time.¹¹

Other AQ-linked groups have been unable in recent years to carry out significant activities. The remnants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), along with Jamaat Imam al-Bukhari and Jamaat Ansarullah, have continued to lose substantial numbers of members to ISK, and are isolated and unable to travel.¹²

Response

The Taliban Emirate's Anti-ISK Measures

The Taliban almost crushed ISK in 2023, helped by the group's financial difficulties. The Taliban were especially successful in the main cities, where ISK had invested considerable resources. However, once ISK adopted a low-profile approach and denied a target to the Taliban, the counter terrorism effort lost steam. Especially in the far east and the north-east, where ISK has its main bases, the Taliban have been wary of carrying out in-depth operations. These mountainous and often wooded areas are perfect grounds for guerrilla warfare – the Taliban know that very well, having fought there in the past. The Taliban lack any technology that could facilitate their tasks there, such as drones. The Taliban's helicopter force is not battle ready, hampered by a lack of trained crews, lack of spare parts and lack of financial resources to support sustained operations. The Taliban are also worried about the negative reaction that a massive deployment of their army could create in these areas, where the population is mostly Salafi and has little sympathy for the Taliban.¹³

Moreover, during 2024, some of the counter terrorism and counterinsurgency policies adopted by the Taliban started showing signs of failure, such as their reintegration policy. While in 2021-2022 the Taliban managed to reintegrate hundreds of former ISK fighters who surrendered, in 2024 many of these individuals rejoined ISK or fled from their confinement areas, mostly due to the Taliban's failure to follow up on promises of support.¹⁴

Unable or unwilling to crush ISK in its redoubts in the far east and north-east, the Taliban have to accept that they will not be able to inflict a conclusive defeat on ISK. Some Taliban, especially in the east and south-east, argue that ISK is a minor threat and that it would not be useful to commit large and scarce resources to fighting against it.¹⁵ However, the regional powers, and even the US, are encouraging the Taliban to intensify efforts against ISK, especially now that ISK has been expanding its operations abroad.¹⁶ For the Taliban leadership, a reasonable compromise between these diverging interests is to keep limited pressure on ISK, while asking for regional and international support to expand counter terrorism operations.

The Taliban rely mostly on the small but capable special forces of the security services (General Directorate of Intelligence, or GDI) for counter terrorism operations, with the police and local Taliban militias in a support role. The army is only engaged within the neighbourhood of its bases and is not deployed in counter terrorism. Budget constraints are also a factor in such decision-making: the Taliban's Emirate struggles with limited funding and deploying the army would be a major financial burden.¹⁷

The Emirate's Handling of AQ and the TTP

In principle, the Taliban's agreements with foreign jihadist groups (excluding ISK) were still holding during 2024. The smaller groups, such as IMU, Jamaat Imam al-Bukhari, Jamaat Ansarullah and ETIM, appear to have been quite compliant, even if they resisted accepting these agreements initially.¹⁸ The last one to be forcibly relocated to a remote area of the Taliban's choice was Jamaat Ansarullah in 2024, following rapidly progressing negotiations between Kabul and Dushanbe over the normalisation of relations.¹⁹ Thus, it took three years for the Taliban to impose their agreements on the smaller jihadist groups, a reflection of their cautious approach to the issue. Each of these groups had a significant share of members who stubbornly rejected compliance, and they all suffered significant defections to ISK.

The cases of AQ and the TTP are more complicated. They are also interlinked. The TTP is in clear breach of the Taliban requirement that it should not use Afghanistan as a base for operations abroad, except that the TTP has always refused to sign that agreement. The Taliban have not taken coercive action against the TTP, contrary to what they have done with the other smaller groups. Taliban sources suggest that their leaders are certainly worried about the prospect that the much larger TTP might suffer the same fate if forced to relocate away from the border, a policy that the Taliban have tried to apply in a non-coercive way, without any success.²⁰ With at least 15,000 fighters, the TTP could affect Taliban control in eastern Afghanistan in a significantly negative way.

Instead, the Taliban have sought to mediate between the TTP and Islamabad, in the hope that an agreement might be reached. The first and second mediation efforts in 2021 and 2022 failed, despite two short-lived ceasefires.²¹ In early 2024, the Taliban tried to restart their mediation, but after some informal contact and some initial TTP interest, the effort collapsed. The TTP leadership, faced with the risk of its hardline wing Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) splitting and with the general unpopularity of talks among the TTP's rank and file, decided to abandon the idea of talks and instead go on the offensive.²²

So far, the Taliban have been ignoring AQ's activities as well. The TTP cause is very popular among the Taliban and more so in general among Pashtuns in Afghanistan, and hostility towards Pakistan runs deep after the expulsion of over 500,000 Afghans and a long series of border clashes.²³ Although some Taliban leaders retain links to Pakistan, it is certainly politically expedient for the Emirate to stay away from intervening in the TTP's affairs.

Outlook

For now, ISK has little incentive to raise its head in Afghanistan again and launch a serious challenge against the Taliban, even if its recovery were to continue in 2025. Its incentives are to keep a low profile, recruit to refill its ranks and seek new sources of funding. It will probably have to refill its coffers and build reserves on top of expanding its ranks, before it is in a position to sustain an intense and prolonged confrontation with the Taliban. At the same time, the need to increase the funding levels is likely to remain a powerful incentive to participate in organising terrorist attacks abroad, especially in locations where these may attract extensive media coverage. Inside Afghanistan, it will likely continue to spread its network countrywide, to keep the Taliban off balance and to generate an impression of pervasive presence. Efforts to establish a presence in the Central Asian countries will also continue, although given the almost complete non-permeability of the border, this is going to a long-drawn process in any case.

Raising the profile of its attacks inside Afghanistan appears to be on ISK's wish list, as exemplified by its killing of Spanish tourists in 2024. However, even that attack had little media resonance. ISK sources indicate that there is also an ambition to target senior Taliban figures, who are however well protected. In practice, therefore, the only realistic option for ISK, now that its role in attacks abroad has been validated by the first major successes, is to keep pursuing that path. In reality, ISK has not directly supported any of these attacks from Afghanistan, relying instead on members based in Turkey and on Central Asian cells that it coordinates remotely from north-eastern Afghanistan. The desire to do more in terms of attacks abroad clashes therefore with major logistical issues. ISK has also operated internationally under the orders of IS Central, which presumably has little interest in ISK gaining autonomy.

As for the TTP and AQ, there seems to be little that could stop them from using Afghanistan as a base for their campaigns in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. If many Taliban were inclined to seek a solution to the problem, the expulsion of Afghans residing illegally in Pakistan in 2023-2024 has made it hard for anybody in Afghanistan to play a constructive role.

About the Author

Dr Antonio Giustozzi has a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). He is the author of several articles and papers on Afghanistan, as well as of six books, including *The Islamic State in Khorasan* (Hurst, 2018) and *The Taliban at War* (Hurst, 2019). Beyond Afghanistan, Dr. Giustozzi published articles on the conflict in Syria and jihadist groups in Central Asia. He can be reached at AntonioG@rusi.org.

BANGLADESH

Iftekharul Bashar

In 2024, a Bangladeshi university students' uprising, resulting in the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, created a power vacuum that triggered numerous jailbreaks and the escape of several high-profile militants. During this turbulent political transition, key members of various terrorist organisations were also released on bail, threatening a reactivation of dormant militants, boosting fresh recruitment efforts and inciting new attacks. The interim government of Dr Muhammad Yunus now confronts the urgent challenge of upholding law and order amid a weakened and demoralised police force, while the Islamist militant groups aim to re-establish their networks and ramp up their activities. A coordinated response from the government, intelligence agencies, law enforcement and civil society is crucial to address this growing threat and restore stability.

Trends

Political Violence, Regime Change, Law and Order

In 2024, Bangladesh underwent a period of significant upheaval, marked by widespread protests, political turmoil and a crisis within the police force. Bangladesh experienced significant upheaval, highlighted by widespread protests over a contentious civil service job quota system. These demonstrations, primarily led by university students, quickly escalated into violent confrontations with law enforcement institutions, reflecting broader dissatisfaction with the government. This unrest played a pivotal role in the downfall of Sheikh Hasina's administration, which had been in power for 15 years, marking a turning point in the country's political landscape.²⁴

While the Sheikh Hasina government carried out some major infrastructure projects and made strides to maintain a zero-tolerance policy against militancy, it faced mounting public criticism for authoritarianism, corruption, cronyism, youth unemployment and economic mismanagement. Efforts by the Sheikh Hasina regime to suppress dissent by deploying the police and paramilitary forces backfired, inciting public anger.²⁵

Police actions resulted in over 700 demonstrator deaths, leading to students' retaliatory attacks on police stations and vehicles, and instances of property destruction and looting. During the riots, more than 44 police personnel lost their lives,²⁶ reflecting the growing state-society conflict. There were also reports about the alleged involvement of over 150 militants from Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in violence during the quota reform protests in Dhaka.²⁷

The unrest also led to jailbreaks, allowing both common criminals and terrorists to escape, including notable terrorist leaders who are now operating openly. At least 98 militants reportedly escaped from prison. Since the government was toppled on August 5, as many as 43 high-profile militants have been granted bail.²⁸ Of these, most notable are Ansar al Islam (AAI)'s leader Jasimuddin Rahmani and Harkatul Jihad al Islami-Bangladesh (HuJI-B)'s leader Atik Ullah – further straining the already fragile security situation.

After Sheikh Hasina's ousting, Bangladesh's police faced low morale and public distrust. Many officers are now in hiding due to fears of backlash from protesters, with nearly 800 officers absent from their jobs and attacks on police stations limiting operations. The Inspector General of Police Md Mainul Islam has acknowledged significant operational challenges and lost resources, with numerous cases filed against officers, including high-ranking officials. The interim government is urging the police to rebuild public trust and improve effectiveness.²⁹ The decline has hampered law enforcement and counter terrorism efforts.

Separately, reports of mob attacks against religious minorities such as Hindus, Buddhists and Ahmadi Muslims³⁰ have also been reported in the wake of Sheikh Hasina's ouster.³¹ The ongoing political violence highlights the urgent need for security reforms to restore stability and public trust.

Global Jihadists' Efforts to Exploit Bangladesh's Political Turmoil

In 2024, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) have strategically released statements to exploit the political turmoil in Bangladesh. For instance, AQIS' leader Osama Mahmood lauded the resistance against corruption and secularism, advocating for an Islamic system and unity against oppression. This rhetoric aims to resonate with individuals dissatisfied with current political conditions, encouraging them to unite under a narrative of resistance against perceived oppression. Meanwhile, ISK's statement promoted preparations for conflict with India, highlighting the divine rewards for such efforts. Additionally, the Islamic State (IS)'s *al-Naba* newsletter published an editorial in September calling for a "genuine Islamic revival" in Bangladesh. It stressed the importance of establishing governance based on Islamic law (*shariah*) instead of secular frameworks, critiquing past failures to achieve this aim. The editorial urged Bangladeshi youth to focus on ideological education, reject tyranny and take collective action against injustices.³²

AQIS and ISK's strategic messaging have taken a deep interest in political developments in Bangladesh with a view to exploit the turmoil. This rhetoric comes at a time when Bangladesh is also witnessing a revival of jihadist militancy. Hence, this could resonate with disaffected individuals, including militants who are currently evading capture, potentially drawing them towards the ideological allure of global terrorist networks.

Revival of Jihadist Militancy

Ansar al Islam

AAI, also known as the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) or Al-Qaeda Bangladesh, remains a significant security threat in Bangladesh. As other militant groups weaken, AAI has expanded its operations through secretive networks nationwide. The group has successfully evaded capture due to its decentralised cell structure and by recruiting tech-savvy youth.³³ Recruiting tech-savvy youth enables AAI to enhance its operational efficiency, expand its reach through digital networks and evade law enforcement more effectively. Several key leaders of the group are still at large and continue to remain active. According to the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, AAI is acquiring weapons, including semi-automatic .22 rifles.³⁴ Though Bangladeshi authorities arrested 15 AAI operatives³⁵ and recovered a significant quantity of firearms in 2024, the successful prison escapes and the release of the group's key leaders have undermined counter terrorism efforts.

Throughout 2024, recruitment remained AAI's primary focus, having targeted youth and tech-savvy individuals since its ban in March 2017. The organisation leverages a strong online presence, using encrypted communications and social media to spread its ideology.³⁶ Reports indicate revitalised activities funded by local and foreign sources, including supporters from Malaysia and the United States.³⁷ Recent fund-raising efforts, disguised as charitable initiatives, have raised concerns over misleading campaigns aimed at financing its operations.³⁸

In 2024, after the fall of Sheikh Hasina's administration, Jasimuddin Rahmani, the group's chief, was released on bail, raising alarm among counter terrorism officials.³⁹ Following his release, Rahmani threatened India with consequences if it intervened in Bangladesh. Rahmani warned that Indian actions could invite support from China and revive separatist movements across India, including in Kashmir, Punjab, West Bengal and Northeast India.⁴⁰

In another key development, a new militant group called As-Shahadat has emerged in Bangladesh, linked to the banned AAI. The group is inspired by the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan and adheres to Al-Qaeda (AQ)'s extremist ideology, focusing on recruiting *madrassa* students.⁴¹ As-Shahadat reportedly has over 100 members.⁴² Since May 2024, Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) has arrested several As-Shahadat members in Dhaka, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. The group has targeted regions like Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Jessore, Satkhira and areas around Dhaka for training activities.⁴³ As-Shahadat has also extended its operations to neighbouring India, particularly in West Bengal, where recruits have been identified.⁴⁴ The group's main goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate in Bangladesh and to recruit members by distorting religious teachings and exploiting global Muslim persecution narratives. They have circulated extremist pamphlets, videos of Muslim persecution and speeches of leaders via WhatsApp, Telegram and BiP groups.⁴⁵ Although it has not yet carried out attacks, its growing network and cross-border activities underscore the increasing threat it poses.

Islamic State Bengal/Neo-JMB

The so-called Islamic State Bengal, or Neo-JMB, remains a key threat to Bangladesh's security, particularly due to its intent to carry out attacks. This is notwithstanding disruptions to its operations, especially since the 2016 Dhaka Holey Artisan Bakery attack. Law enforcement efforts have successfully disrupted many of Neo-JMB's activities, including the 2021 Narayanganj traffic police box improvised explosive device (IED) case where all the perpetrators were arrested and their operational capabilities neutralised. However, the group is still active and is attempting to reorganise, with many members remaining at large due to difficulties in identification.⁴⁶

According to police sources, at least five factions of Neo-JMB are active with several hundred members. However, they have not been able to achieve capabilities like conducting operations.⁴⁷ At present, the group is maintaining a low profile and attempting to reorganise under its new leader Abu Bakar following the arrest of former leader Mahadi Hasan in Turkey. The group is also recruiting new members while maintaining links with former affiliates – 315 militants were granted bail in 2023, 70 of whom are linked to Neo-JMB.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the group is promoting radical content on social media, such as circulating manuals to make IEDs, promoting lone-actor attacks and recruiting tech-savvy youth. Internal factors like growing radicalisation and external factors such as the continued ascendance of ISK contribute to the ongoing threat.

Neo-JMB is reportedly using cell phones smuggled into prisons to coordinate operations. A police intelligence report indicates that members, including leader Abu Bakar, are communicating with jailed militants through encrypted messaging apps, facilitated by corrupt prison guards.⁴⁹

Financially, Neo-JMB is diversifying its funding through foreign donations and agricultural ventures, reflecting a shift toward self-sustainability amid logistical constraints.⁵⁰ The group has also received funds from the proceeds of a construction business owned by Abu Bakar.⁵¹ While its operational capacity has decreased, the group still expresses intent to conduct attacks, particularly around significant events. Ongoing communications with larger jihadist networks, including ISK,⁵² emphasise the need for sustained vigilance and proactive counter terrorism efforts to prevent any resurgence.

Hizb ut-Tahrir

In 2024, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a banned extremist organisation, re-emerged in Bangladesh, actively conducting rallies and recruiting students from prestigious schools and colleges amid significant political changes.

HT allegedly receives funding from overseas and maintains close ties with HT chapters in several countries, including in Southeast Asia. HT has been operating in Bangladesh, particularly on university campuses, since 2002 and had gained prominence by 2008. The group has been trying to infiltrate the bureaucracy, military and, more recently, civil society. HT's propaganda arm, *Alwakia TV*, also broadcasts in Bengali.

After the recent unrest, HT has been more visible, holding rallies despite proscription in 2009 due to its extremist ideology.⁵³ The group has claimed that its members took part in the mass anti-Sheikh Hasina protests. This resurgence has raised alarms among law enforcement, who are concerned about the group's objective to establish a so-called caliphate governed by *shariah* law, as it perceives democracy as "un-Islamic". The recent arrest of Imtiaz Selim, the group's media chief, reflects intensified legal action against HT. Selim had publicly called for the lifting of the group's ban, echoing previous government actions towards other organisations.⁵⁴ HT's activities have notably expanded to include younger demographics, prompting worries about the group's influence on youth.⁵⁵

HT's recent public demonstrations, including vandalism of memorials commemorating victims of past terrorist attacks, have further provoked tensions in a politically charged environment.⁵⁶ Analysts caution that allowing such extremist groups to operate openly poses a significant risk of escalating violent extremism in Bangladesh. The group's connections to international funding and networks, alongside its calls for government overthrow, highlight a complex security landscape that challenges the balance between civil liberties and national safety.

Ethnic Conflict and Refugee Crisis

Bangladesh experienced a rise in ethnic conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the south-eastern region in 2024. Separately, in Cox's Bazar, violence erupted among Rohingya armed groups vying for control, exacerbated by worsening conditions across the border in Myanmar.

Amid the lax law and order situation, violence has surged in the hill districts of Rangamati and Khagrachhari. In September, the murder of a Bengali Muslim over an alleged motorcycle theft in Khagrachhari sparked clashes between the Bengalis and ethnic minorities, leading to four deaths and many injuries.⁵⁷ In response, government officials issued a temporary travel restriction in the affected areas, urged calm and announced a high-level investigation. The public relations division of the Bangladesh Armed Forces has warned of potential riots amid rising tensions. In Khagrachhari, the unrest led to a deadly shootout during an army patrol on September 19, causing multiple casualties.

Meanwhile, in Bandarban, security forces have ramped up operations against the Kuki-Chin National Front (KCNF), seizing significant arms caches and arresting numerous militants linked to recent criminal activities, including bank robberies.⁵⁸ These developments highlight the broader instability affecting the hill districts, as armed groups continue to challenge state authority, prompting a strong military response to maintain peace and security.

The situation in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar has also deteriorated, with escalating violence primarily between militant groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). This violence has resulted in at least 22 deaths and numerous injuries.⁵⁹ Compounding the unrest, criminal activities have surged, with law enforcement making at least 32 arrests and recovering weapons, revealing the camps' complex security challenges. Additionally, a significant influx of approximately 15,000 new arrivals in September – driven by intensified conflict in Myanmar – has further strained resources and complicated humanitarian efforts, with smuggling rings facilitating the influx.⁶⁰ Despite concerns from the government and international officials about the camps potentially becoming hotspots for

terrorism, responses have frequently fallen short of addressing the underlying causes of violence and instability.

State Response

In 2024, Bangladesh's response to terrorism and extremism faced significant setbacks, particularly during the third quarter, marked by massive protests and a breakdown of law and order. This shift in focus diverted law enforcement efforts towards restoring stability.

The interim government's release of high-profile militants has also raised concerns. On September 10, the Inspector General of Police Md Mainul Islam called for tougher actions against terrorism, emphasising the zero-tolerance policy and the commitment of specialised police units to maintain communal harmony. He highlighted the need to remain vigilant, especially regarding recently released individuals.⁶¹ As the interim government implements drastic changes in the security sector, there are fears that critical counter terrorism capabilities, developed with international support, could be lost, creating gaps in monitoring terrorist activities.

Additionally, ongoing instability in the CHT and the multi-faceted Rohingya crisis further complicate the security landscape, underscoring the need for comprehensive solutions which address immediate security challenges while also providing humanitarian assistance and long-term strategies for repatriation and integration.

Outlook

Developments in 2024 reveal an intensified threat landscape in Bangladesh, posing major challenges for the interim government. Weaknesses within law enforcement are severely hindering counter terrorism efforts, allowing terrorist groups to exploit the situation for recruitment and funding, and providing them with more opportunities to operate and scale up their activities. This vulnerability raises doubts about the effectiveness of the government's zero-tolerance policy. AQ-affiliated groups may also seek to gain popular support and infiltrate politics.

Meanwhile, stalled community engagement initiatives aimed at preventing violent extremism underscore the urgent need for revitalisation. The presence of escaped militants also heightens the risk of violent attacks, and without rebuilding counter terrorism infrastructure, the police force remains exposed. Continued cyber surveillance is essential, especially in remote areas like the CHT, to prevent the establishment of terrorist hideouts.

Following the government's fall in Bangladesh on August 5, protesters looted around 5,818 weapons and 300,000 rounds of ammunition from police stations nationwide.⁶² While some weapons have been recovered, about 2,000 firearms remain missing, fuelling the rise of armed gangs.⁶³ The looted arms pose a risk of being diverted to extremist groups, potentially escalating violence. Police efforts to recover the looted weapons have been slow, raising concerns about growing instability, organised crime and militant threats.

Moreover, overcrowded jails, security lapses and the absence of rehabilitation programmes create an environment conducive to radicalisation, highlighting the urgent need for reforms alongside security measures. To counter these threats effectively, the interim government must enforce its zero-tolerance policy with credible measures, while also addressing pressing issues such as the situation in the CHT and the ongoing impact of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh.

About the Author

Iftexharul Bashir is a Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at isifteharul@ntu.edu.sg.

INDIA

Mohammed Sinan Siyech

In 2024, India's threat landscape varied significantly, depending on the types of conflict actors involved. Despite India's claim of reduced insurgent activity, violent incidents concentrated within the Hindu-dominated Jammu region of Indian Kashmir surged, even after the loss of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in assembly elections in October 2024. Nonetheless, violent incidents were lower compared to previous periods of tension, such as the early 2000s and mid-2010s. Similarly, jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State (IS) failed to gain traction during 2024, continuing with their inability to garner support in India despite propaganda to recruit Indians. While a few cells of these groups were disrupted by the Indian security agencies, their irrelevance was evident through their lack of operations and major threat profiles. As a final point, Hindu extremist activities remained at a high level, with several incidents of hate speech against Muslims before the Indian general election (May 2024) leading to several mob lynching incidents in the July-October period.

Trends

Kashmir

2024 marked five years since the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status, splitting the region into two separate states and downgrading Kashmir to a union territory. Part of the stated reason for taking such steps was to reduce insurgency in the region, which has long witnessed armed rebellions and skirmishes to gain independence.⁶⁴ However, despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi claiming that the infrastructure of Kashmir-focused insurgent organisations had been dismantled and that there was a marked reduction in violent incidents from a peak of 222 incidents in 2014 to a low of 23 attacks in 2024,⁶⁵ tensions are far from over. In fact, 2024 witnessed the emergence of a new trend where insurgent groups targeted the Hindu-majority region of Jammu at a proportionally greater rate than attacks in the Muslim-majority Kashmir. These incidents included several attacks on combatants and non-combatants. Notably, most of these attacks took place in northern Jammu, where Hindus are in a minority, though in larger proportions than in Kashmir.⁶⁶

In addition, following assembly elections in the region in September and October of 2024 (where the BJP lost to the National Conference party), there were further rashes of attacks in the region.⁶⁷ Thus, while there may have been some hopes for peace with the loss of the BJP, the situation continues to be unstable. One prominent attack resulted in the death of several construction workers building an infrastructure project which was key to better connectivity of military troops in the region.⁶⁸

Jihadist Groups

For India, 2024 saw the 10-year anniversary of the formation of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State (IS). Both groups have largely been unsuccessful in launching attacks within India, barring a few minor incidents. In June, AQIS regained prominence when a group of individuals, suspected of being influenced by the group, were arrested in the northern state of Jharkhand. According to police officials, AQIS was planning to "revive the caliphate" and perpetrate terrorist attacks across India. While the revival of the caliphate is a questionable intention given the scope of reviving such a vast political institution, the group was also found to be in possession of several arms and ammunition, thus raising their threat profile. According to the police, these individuals had also received weapons training in India, thereby demonstrating AQIS is still recruiting in India offline.⁶⁹

Troublingly for India, AQIS released a statement in its official magazine praising the fall of Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a key ally of India, who resigned abruptly in the wake of student protests. This is particularly concerning for India since Sheikh Hasina's cooperation led to the crackdown on several insurgent groups, such as Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), operating along the India-Bangladesh border.⁷⁰ After her fall, India is still observing the aftermath. Without a strong joint border protection strategy in place, the country could see more insurgents infiltrating the border and launching attacks. Furthermore, the release of the ABT's former leader Jashimuddin Rahmani, who had previously plotted and launched attacks on India, was also a concerning development.

IS, however, had a far smaller footprint than AQIS in India during 2024. The group did employ anti-India rhetoric in its magazines, such as the *Voice of Khorasan* and *Serat ul Haq* (Path of Righteousness), much of which has also been translated into other Indian languages, such as Malayalam.⁷¹ While a few Sri Lankans who had pledged allegiance to IS were arrested in India, no significant activity linked to the group was observed.⁷² This could be because of extensive action conducted towards the end of December 2023, when the National Investigation Agency (NIA) claimed to have dismantled all remaining IS cells in the country.⁷³

Hindu Right-Wing Extremism

The 2024 general election, which resulted in a loss of seats for the BJP, led to the formation of a coalition government at the centre. Following the BJP's less-than-impressive electoral performance, many observers thought that this would curb the confidence of Hindu right-wing groups. However, as several incidents and trends demonstrated, this was not the case. First, despite a lull in incidents of cow vigilantism, there was an uptick in cases beginning in June 2024, whereby several Muslims in the northern part of India were lynched on suspicions of illegally transporting beef.⁷⁴ One incident in New Delhi involved cow vigilantes mistaking a Hindu boy for a Muslim and shooting him for allegedly carrying beef. They later apologised after realising that he was not a Muslim.⁷⁵ Dozens of these incidents took place in India from June 2024 onwards, demonstrating that this issue still carries a strong potential for anti-Muslim violence. As argued by political commentators like Apoorvanand Jha, the increased incidences of violence could denote the Hindu right wing's frustrations towards Muslims for voting against the BJP.⁷⁶

Another trend that emerged in 2024 was the spread of significant anti-Muslim propaganda in Bangladesh, primarily propagated online by Indian right-wing groups. Several accounts in India were accused of spreading fake news regarding Muslim atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh following Sheikh Hasina's ouster.⁷⁷ Although this disinformation was subsequently corrected by several fact-checking websites, it was not enough to prevent retaliatory attacks on Muslims in India by right-wing vigilantes.⁷⁸ At least a few retaliatory attacks for perceived injustices against Bangladeshi Hindus were recorded, where well-known vigilantes attacked slum dwellers, having mistakenly identified them as Bangladeshis.

Response

One of the security challenges in Jammu is the lack of sufficient army troops. Because much of the army has been redeployed to areas bordering China since the 2020 India-China border skirmishes, the Indian army has faced difficulties in managing the insurgent attacks in Jammu.⁷⁹ Reportedly, this is partly due to a level of laxity among the armed forces in Kashmir, since historically fewer attacks have occurred in the region.⁸⁰

Despite the abovementioned gaps, the army has adopted several tactics to engage with the insurgents in the region. First, it has attempted to redeploy troops to the region to boost manpower. Second, it has begun to arm villagers in various parts of Jammu. This initiative is named the Village Defense Guards (VDG), and is an established strategy that was first adopted in the 1990s.⁸¹ However, there are concerns that these groups may abuse their authority, given that around 220 cases were filed against such groups in the past for human rights violations, murder, rape and violently settling family disputes. As such, this strategy may deter militants in the future, but its

benefits may be outweighed by the potential problems if villagers were to engage in violence among themselves.

Due to the jihadist groups' presence in India, the NIA and other security organisations are constantly monitoring their developments in the country. This is reflected in the multiple arrests of Sri Lankan IS members and AQIS operatives across North India. It is also likely that the intelligence agencies will be keeping a close eye on the India-Bangladesh border to ensure that groups like the ABT and JMB do not take advantage of the weakened border security to make inroads into India.

Hindu right-wing extremists are often not provided the same level of attention by government authorities as Kashmiri insurgents or jihadist groups. For most observers, BJP leaders have played a role in fanning anti-Muslim hatred and emboldening Hindu right-wing groups. Several watchdogs pointed to the rising levels of hate speech before the 2024 general election, which ultimately led to post-election violence.⁸² Some arrests have taken place in a few of the lynching incidents.⁸³ However, the fact that many of the vigilantes themselves recorded the lynching incidents demonstrates their confidence in avoiding arrests for their crimes. Despite this, it is essential for the government to ensure that these groups are arrested, given that they have the potential to perpetrate crimes affecting the very basis of India's law and order.

Outlook

Regardless of the reduction in violent incidents in Kashmir, the government's claims of normalcy are questionable given the persistence of violent incidents. These attacks are not a military issue but rather a political response to the disenfranchisement of the region, the high unemployment rate (18 percent as opposed to the national average of eight percent) and several mega-infrastructure projects which threaten village geographies. Government excesses in governing the region (through force) have increased the trust deficit between India and the local population.⁸⁴ While a military response may help stem the flow of attacks, without addressing these genuine grievances politically, the government cannot hope to completely curb militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. With the National Conference (NC) party coming to power after the October 2024 assembly elections,⁸⁵ it remains to be seen how much its governance can influence the situation positively. If the Kashmiri people feel that the NC is able to accord them some rights, there may be a reduction in attacks over time. However, if they feel like the Indian central government is still casting a shadow over Kashmiri local politics, the chances of attacks may be higher.

Groups like IS and AQIS are largely defunct in India, regardless of the media attention given to them. Despite some propaganda noise created by AQIS and IS, the groups have little operational strength due to Muslims' rejection of these groups' underlying ideology as well as the strong ability of the Indian government to neutralise cells inspired or created by them. In all likelihood, the trajectory of these groups will continue to remain the same unless a significant event changes the current security equilibrium. The main area of threat, however, will likely be any militant group entering India from across the Bangladesh border, since this can set the stage to restore some level of jihadist activity in India. This potential will likely be curbed by strong measures taken by the Indian government, resulting from decades of experience of dealing with such groups.

It is unlikely that India will also see major decreases in Islamophobic incidents by Hindu right-wing groups given the government's ability to capitalise on the polarisation resulting from these groups' actions. Given the consistent pattern of hate speech directed at Muslims by BJP politicians, it is probable that these trends will continue in the near future.

About the Author

Mohammed Sinan Siyech is a doctoral scholar from the University of Edinburgh. He also teaches politics at King's College and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London. He was previously a Senior Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism

Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He has written and taught extensively on security and politics in South Asia and the Middle East.

PAKISTAN

Abdul Basit

As 2024 ended, Pakistan grappled with two active conflicts in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces as insurgent and militant groups enhanced their operational capabilities and geographical reach through alliance-making, nuanced propaganda warfare and exploitation of governance deficit. Though terrorist attacks continued to surge for the fourth consecutive year in Pakistan,⁸⁶ their lethality in 2024 was the most striking feature.⁸⁷ In response, the Pakistani state's counter terrorism policies have failed to inspire public confidence, critical for the success of any counter terrorism campaign. Nonetheless, Pakistan revamped its internal security framework under the Azm-e-Istehkam strategy to focus on both the kinetic and non-kinetic aspects of counter terrorism.⁸⁸ Without improving governance, bridging the yawning state-society gulf and addressing the challenge of Pakistani militant groups' sanctuaries in Afghanistan and Iran, the ongoing counter terrorism operations will bring only temporary respite from violence, not lasting peace.

Trends

For the fourth consecutive year, terrorist incidents and fatalities surged in Pakistan with 1,005 violent incidents⁸⁹ causing 1,524 casualties until October 15, 2024.⁹⁰ This figure for the same period in 2023 was 748 attacks with 1,202 fatalities.⁹¹ The most concerning aspect of terrorist attacks in 2024 was their lethality, as could be seen from the fatalities, which surged compared to the previous year.⁹² Most terrorist attacks were concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) are active, among other groups. The rise in terrorist attacks in Pakistan started with the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 and has continued unabated since then.⁹³ The Taliban have provided sanctuaries to the TTP and other like-minded militant groups to plan, prepare and execute attacks inside Pakistan, negatively impacting Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.⁹⁴

In 2024, Pakistan intermittently engaged in border skirmishes with Iran and Afghanistan over cross-border terrorist attacks. For instance, in January, Iran and Pakistan launched tit-for-tat missile strikes on each other's territory against alleged terrorist hideouts.⁹⁵ For years, Pakistan has tolerated the presence of the anti-Iran, Sunni-Baloch militant group Jaish-ul-Adl in Balochistan.⁹⁶ In retaliation, Iran has allowed Pakistani Baloch separatist groups to operate from its Sunni-Baloch-majority Sistan-Balochistan province.⁹⁷ Likewise, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border was closed several times in 2024 due to the TTP's cross-border attacks.⁹⁸ Afghanistan-Pakistan tensions peaked in March following Pakistani airstrikes against TTP hideouts in Paktika and Khost provinces.⁹⁹ In retaliation, the Taliban hit back with mortars and artillery fire, targeting Pakistani security checkpoints along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.¹⁰⁰

Alarmingly, the TTP has set up checkpoints on highways in several southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,¹⁰¹ gathering toll taxes from trade trucks and shipping containers, collecting public donations as well as forcing businesses to pay extortions.¹⁰² As the Pakistani state's writ is slipping in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, terrorist groups are filling the governance gaps to win the hearts and minds of local populations. The TTP's decision to limit its attacks to security forces and law enforcement agencies and spare civilians exemplifies this.¹⁰³ At any rate, a hostile neighbourhood tolerating Pakistani militant groups' presence, porous borders with active irredentist movements, a growing state-society gap and the easy availability of weapons, have created a conducive environment for Pakistani terrorist groups to grow in size and influence.¹⁰⁴

TTP's Mergers, Inter-Group Alliances and Coordinated Attacks

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, Pakistani jihadist groups have managed their internal differences and disputes to merge, ally and launch joint attacks. Since July 2020, as many as 62 militant factions have pledged oaths of allegiance to TTP chief Nur Wali Mehsud, adding to the group's operational and organisational strength.¹⁰⁵ In 2024, around 14 militant groups pledged their loyalties to TTP, including eight from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, three from Balochistan, two from Sindh and one from Punjab.¹⁰⁶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) are considered the TTP's strongholds; however, six of the 14 allegiances have come from other provinces, indicating the group's reach beyond its traditional strongholds.¹⁰⁷ The most significant of these allegiances was the merger with anti-Shia militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's Naeem Bukhari faction from Karachi.¹⁰⁸ The Naeem Bukhari faction is notorious for targeting the Shia community in Karachi and its union with the TTP will undermine Karachi's uneasy peace achieved after the military operation concluded in 2016, ending two decades of ethnic and sectarian violence.¹⁰⁹

In 2024, the TTP also overcame its differences with other like-minded jihadist groups to combine their militant campaigns for creating a Taliban-like theocracy in Pakistan. In March, the TTP resolved differences with one of its most lethal factions, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), which left the group after growing suspicions that Nur Wali had been involved in its chief Omar Khalid Khorasani's killing.¹¹⁰ As JuA was re-absorbed into the TTP, its representation increased from two to three. JuA's incumbent head Omar Mukarram Khorasani was appointed as head of the TTP's north military commission, Mufti Sarbakaf Mohmand was given a key position in the political commission, while Dr Haqyar was included in the *Rahbari Shua* (Consultative Council, the TTP's top decision-making body).¹¹¹

Concurrently, the TTP has also enhanced inter-group cooperation with the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGBG) and Lashkar-e-Islam (LI), using these alliances as a force multiplier against Pakistani security forces.¹¹² The TTP carried out several joint attacks with HGBG and LI in the NMDs. Inter-group alliances and mergers enhance terrorist groups' lethality and longevity: the more a terrorist group is allied, the longer the shelf life and the greater the lethality.¹¹³

Use of Drones and Artificial Intelligence for Attacks and Propaganda

Though Pakistani terrorist groups have been using social media to radicalise, recruit and fund-raise, the use of drones for attacks and artificial intelligence (AI) for propaganda dissemination has been non-existent.¹¹⁴ In 2024, however, both developments were observed, albeit at an incipient stage. By and large, Pakistani terrorist groups have been reluctant to use emerging technologies due to the easy availability of lethal weapons, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), assault rifles and rocket launchers, which are more effective in advancing their ideological and strategic goals.¹¹⁵ A combination of three factors has undergirded Pakistani terrorist groups' apathy towards emerging technologies: 1) utility; 2) accessibility; and 3) a safe place to experiment with technologies and expertise. With the employability of drones to drop small payloads and AI for propaganda bulletins, a significant psychological threshold has been crossed. Despite its symbolic nature, this development will excite and embolden Gen Z militants to further experiment with emerging technologies and add them to terrorists' operational toolkit in the future.

In September, Pakistani security forces discovered six attacks over a period of two months in North Waziristan district, involving quadcopter-borne IEDs to target military facilities and transport. HGBG militants tied explosive-filled bottles weighing 400-700 grammes each and laced with nails and ball bearings to commercially available quadcopters and detonated them with grenades.¹¹⁶ Though these attacks were insignificant in terms of their physical impact, the psychological impact is tremendous for two reasons. First, the successful execution of the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) hitting targets with small payloads will pave the way to increasing the payload and lethality. Second, it will attract young radicals with engineering and technological backgrounds to terrorist groups, potentially accelerating the process of embracing new emerging technologies in the future. However, it bears mention that Pakistani terrorist groups have limited finances, hence it will not be

easy to purchase commercially available high-end drones. Financial limitations compel them to adopt risk-averse behaviours to ensure high returns on low investments.

Similarly, the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) employed generative AI to claim attacks across Afghanistan, while imitating layouts of mainstream Pakistani news channels. This was done after the Islamic State (IS)'s move to claim the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack in Moscow through an AI-generated video. Using the title of *Khorasan TV*, ISK took credit for the Bamyán attack in May which killed six people, including three foreign tourists.¹¹⁷ In the AI-generated video, a humanoid posing as a news anchor dressed in Western attire read a Pashto-language bulletin.¹¹⁸ The video was shared in private channels of the Teleguard, a highly encrypted Swiss messaging app which offers uncompromising data protection. Since then, ISK has produced nine more AI-generated videos with requests of producing similar news broadcasts in Urdu and Persian languages.¹¹⁹

Though ISK's AI-generated videos are full of technical glitches, the group will gradually enhance the production quality. The most striking feature of ISK's AI-generated propaganda was its neutral tone and unbiased language. Instead of using offensive expletives to describe its opponents, such as "Crusader, infidels, Zionists, *Mushrikeen* and *Rafidah*", the group used non-offensive language.¹²⁰ At the same time, instead of describing its deceased militants as "martyrs" or "soldiers of the caliphate", it called them dead or killed. Through neutral language, ISK is using hybridisation tactics to exploit platform moderation gaps to amplify visibility, ensure longer shelf life and wider dissemination on larger social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X and TikTok. Socially, these platforms are more active and offer unparalleled opportunities for disseminating propaganda compared to encrypted platforms.¹²¹

Baloch Insurgency's Evolution from Defensive to Offensive Warfare

2024 marked a critical shift in the Baloch insurgency's operational tactics from defensive to offensive guerrilla warfare, equally matched by robust information warfare.¹²² If previous years had witnessed reactive attacks from Baloch insurgents on power pylons, cellular towers, railway tracks and gas pipelines, in 2024 they stormed security checkpoints, military camps and other high-profile targets, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)'s projects, in multiple coordinated attacks.¹²³ Furthermore, the insurgents, particularly the BLA's Majeed Brigade, are expanding the conflict beyond Balochistan to Pakistan's financial capital of Karachi.¹²⁴ The Baloch insurgents are taking the war to major Pakistani cities to draw attention to ethnic grievances, socio-economic marginalisation and the exclusion of Balochs from the province's development under the CPEC's framework.¹²⁵

The BLA's two high-profile attacks in 2024 underscore the shift from defensive to offensive guerrilla warfare. On August 26, BLA militants launched multiple coordinated attacks in Balochistan's 10 different districts, coinciding with the 18th death anniversary of notable Baloch politician Nawab Akbar Bugti.¹²⁶ Before launching the attack, the BLA blocked Balochistan's main entry and exit points and blew up the only railway bridge linking the province to the rest of Pakistan. Following that, BLA militants searched public transport on Balochistan's main highways and killed ethnic Punjabi drivers and passengers.¹²⁷ Concurrently, seven BLA suicide bombers, including female bomber Mahal Baloch, stormed a military camp in Lasbela district.¹²⁸ Strikingly, the BLA was able to overwhelm the Pakistani state's security apparatus for 12 hours for the first time in two decades, killing over 70 people. Since the main highways were blocked, security reinforcements arrived late.

Separately, in October, the BLA's suicide squad, the Majeed Brigade, targeted a convoy of Chinese engineers outside Karachi's Jinnah International Airport using a car bomb. The Majeed Brigade used 80-85 kilogrammes of commercial explosives to target the vehicular convoy of Chinese engineers. The BLA not only had insider information about the arrival time and route of the Chinese engineers, but it also successfully breached a high-security zone to carry out the attack.¹²⁹ In its statement of claim, the BLA warned China to leave Balochistan or face more such attacks in the future. The BLA has been targeting Chinese interests and nationals in Karachi since 2018, including attacks on the Chinese consulate in 2018, the Pakistan Stock Exchange in 2020 and Karachi University's Confucius Centre in 2022.¹³⁰

Three factors undergird the Baloch insurgency's evolution from a low-intensity to a high-intensity conflict.

First, as Baloch tribal chiefs have become less relevant due to their arrogant attitudes, disdain for lower cadres and use of the conflict for political and financial benefits, middle-class insurgent leaders like the BLA's chief Bashir Zeb and the Baloch Liberation Front's supremo Dr Allah Nazar have become the insurgency's pivotal figures.¹³¹ In 2002, when the current and fifth wave of insurgency began, its centre of gravity was in north-eastern Balochistan, where tribal structures are strong. However, with time, it has moved to the southern coastal belt of Makran region, where the educated and middle class reside.¹³² The state's mishandling of the Baloch conflict and local youth's alienation from the political process due to stolen public mandate and imposition of handpicked governments, have pushed educated Baloch youth towards the insurgency.¹³³

Second, social media's advent has accelerated and decentralised the flow of information, undermining the state's monopoly in controlling Balochistan's political narrative. The insurgents and other Baloch societal segments have effectively used social media to articulate their narrative and draw international attention to their grievances. At the same time, social media has also allowed young Balochs inside and outside Pakistan to mobilise and organise better.¹³⁴ Through the exchange of ideas and stories of their relative deprivation, they have forged bonds which transcend tribal divides, birthing a more radical form of Baloch nationalism which espouses separatism.¹³⁵ Furthermore, radical Baloch nationalists endorse more extreme forms of violence like suicide terrorism.¹³⁶ Even women have joined the insurgency in combat roles. Prior to this, women were performing secondary roles as nurturers, caregivers, propagandists, recruiters and social media activists for the insurgency. But now they have assumed more primary roles as suicide bombers.¹³⁷

Third, the inter-group coordination between different Baloch insurgent groups since 2018 also accounts for the insurgency's growing lethality and resilience. The Baloch insurgents have forged alliances, such as the Baloch Raji Ajo Sangar, to coordinate their efforts, firepower and human resources in order to sustain the insurgent campaign and make it strategically impactful.¹³⁸ Ethnically similar groups with shared notions of an ideal polity which operate in geographically contiguous conflict zones against a common adversary have aligned to maximise gains and minimise losses.

TTP-ISK's War of Words

The TTP-ISK's well-managed rivalry underwent a subtle shift in 2024, centred around Deobandi versus Salafi beliefs and local versus global jihad arguments.¹³⁹ Though ISK includes two splinter factions, among others, of the TTP from Orakzai and Bajaur districts, until recently, both militant groups had tolerated each other and managed their ideological rivalry. The TTP is pro-Taliban – the latter of which has been at loggerheads with ISK and has killed several of ISK's top leaders in Afghanistan – and pledges its oath of allegiance to the Taliban's Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, ISK has been attacking the Taliban's ideological legitimacy in its propaganda campaigns and has killed several Taliban leaders for deviating from the path of "true jihad" by striking a deal with the United States (Doha Agreement 2020) to regain power in Afghanistan.¹⁴¹ The TTP has found itself in the middle of this heated antagonism, but has adopted a pragmatic approach.

In late May, a member of the TTP's leadership council Qari Shoaib Bajauri criticised ISK in a video posted on X, for accepting extreme and deviant elements of the TTP, Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Afghan Taliban.¹⁴² While clarifying the TTP's stance on ISK, he underscored that the former has no covert agreement (ceasefire) or partnership with the latter. He said, "TTP is not at war with ISK to avoid opening another front", and emphasised that the group is focusing on its primary goal of establishing a Taliban-like theocracy in Pakistan.¹⁴³

In retaliation, ISK issued a 47-minute audio statement on June 2 dismissing any cooperation with the TTP, while calling it a “tribal Deobandi local militia” which has restricted its militant campaign to Pakistan and does not have a global agenda.¹⁴⁴ It bears mention that since 2018, the TTP has announced that it does not have any agenda beyond Pakistan. Furthermore, ISK alleged that the Taliban controls the TTP’s ideological posture and operational trajectory in Pakistan, a reference to two Taliban-facilitated, short-lived ceasefires between Pakistan and the TTP in 2021 and 2022. ISK also framed the TTP as a proxy of pro-democracy religious-political parties, such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal (JUIF), in Pakistan. In various statements, the TTP has reached out to Pakistan’s religious-political parties to forge a unified front for establishing a *shariah* system in Pakistan.

On July 24, ISK published another 71-minute audio release targeting the TTP’s former deputy leader Sheikh Khalid Haqqani’s past stance of questioning IS’ claim to a self-styled caliphate owing to its lack of territorial control and disapproval from the *ulema* (religious scholars), jihadist groups and the *ummah* (Muslim countries).¹⁴⁵ In retaliation, ISK termed Haqqani as an “uneducated cleric” who lacked religious knowledge and dismissed his criticisms as unfounded. ISK questioned the TTP’s oath of allegiance to Haibatullah whom it called a deviant controlling a small corrupt emirate in Afghanistan. In sum, ISK’s propaganda publications, such as the Pashto magazine *Khorasan Ghag*, routinely criticise the TTP for its restricted approach to jihadism, subservience to the Taliban, and soft stance towards pro-democratic Pakistani religious-political parties and the Shia community.

The TTP-ISK’s evolving antagonism brings into sharp focus the shifting alliances and rivalries of Pakistan’s fluid threat landscape. Though both groups have avoided targeting each other on the battlefield, the growing tit-for-tat propaganda war can degenerate into armed clashes very soon. Critically, ideological animosities lie at the heart of ongoing militant tussles for retaining legitimacy, gaining ascendance and discrediting rival militant groups.

State Response

Confronted with an array of asymmetric militant threats, Pakistan announced a new counter terrorism strategy, Azm-e-Istehkam (Resolve for Stability), in June by revamping the erstwhile National Action Plan, a 20-point counter terrorism roadmap, to focus on kinetic and non-kinetic domains.¹⁴⁶ In August, the government also allocated Rs 60 billion (around US\$216 million) for Azm-e-Istehkam.¹⁴⁷ The announcement of a new counter terrorism strategy raised suspicions about an impending military offensive in the NMDs. Consequently, large protest rallies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa decried Azm-e-Istehkam, fearing the mass displacement of people in anticipation of another military operation.¹⁴⁸

The protests compelled the government to clarify that the new counter terrorism strategy was aimed at aligning existing efforts through improved institutional and inter-agency coordination.¹⁴⁹ Instead of launching a new operation, Azm-e-Istehkam will expedite the ongoing intelligence-based operations. Concurrently, it will pay equal attention to counter ideology efforts, improve governance and foster a culture of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and diversity.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, people’s lack of trust in the government’s security policies points to the growing state-society gap in the NMDs, which has allowed the TTP and other groups to sustain their recruitment and militant campaigns.

In August, the National Counter Terrorism Authority issued a notification to label the TTP as “*Fitna al Khawarij*” (conflict of seceders, or those beyond the pale of Islam) to delegitimise the group.¹⁵¹ Though terminologies are critical in shaping political and religious discourses against militant groups, the credibility of those shaping such narratives is equally critical. Due to a lack of governance, never-ending political strife and an economic meltdown, the Pakistani state lacks the credibility necessary to control the narratives, especially in the presence of social and digital media platforms. Likewise, Pakistan also banned HGBG and the Majeed Brigade as terrorist organisations.¹⁵² In Pakistan’s fluid and volatile threat landscape, proscriptions are ineffective

because terrorist groups raise funds through the informal economy and do not own physical assets. At best, bans serve a tactical purpose.

Outlook

Pakistan is facing two active insurgencies in its north and south-western peripheries, which share borders with Afghanistan and Iran. The TTP and other like-minded groups' militant campaigns have been given a new lease of life since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, enjoying a safe haven under the latter's ideological umbrella. Meanwhile, the ethno-separatist insurgency in Balochistan is rooted in decades of ethnic discrimination, political exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation. Baloch insurgents operate out of Iran's Sunni-majority Sistan-Balochistan province where the majority of the population is ethnic Baloch. To navigate this complex security landscape, Pakistan will have to combine its security, political and diplomatic efforts for lasting peace. At the political level, addressing the genuine grievances of the Baloch and Pashtun communities will be essential to isolate the militant groups. Diplomatically, Islamabad will have to engage Tehran and Kabul to address the issue of external sanctuaries, without which local security efforts will only deliver short-term respite from violence, not lasting peace.

About the Author

Abdul Basit is a Senior Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at isabasit@ntu.edu.sg.

SRI LANKA

Amresh Gunasingham

2024 saw some Islamic State (IS)-linked activities in Sri Lanka, years on from the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings that targeted several hotels and religious landmarks. The May arrests of Sri Lankan nationals in Colombo and neighbouring India for plotting a fresh wave of IS attacks revealed some individuals had a criminal history in drug peddling. Overall, Sri Lanka is potentially grappling with a low-grade but varied threat picture, amid a nexus between would-be terrorists and transnational criminal gangs in the drug trade.

Trends

Re-emergence of Islamic State Cells

After a lull of five years, security forces in Sri Lanka and India arrested several individuals for terrorism-related offences in May 2024. On May 19, four Sri Lankan nationals were detained after arriving at India's Gujarat state's Ahmedabad airport.¹⁵³ Local police linked them to the Islamic State (IS), adding the quartet had intended to conduct terror attacks in India. The IS-linked cell was previously associated with the Sri Lankan extremist group, the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ).¹⁵⁴

The NTJ was the outfit responsible for the devastating 2019 Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka's capital of Colombo, which saw over 270 people killed in a series of suicide bomb blasts.¹⁵⁵ The Gujarat Anti-Terror Squad in Ahmedabad said it had discovered several loaded pistols among the Sri Lankan suspects' belongings. According to reports, the quartet had travelled from Colombo via Chennai, India, and on to Ahmedabad on an Indigo Airlines flight. Analysis of their seized mobile phones uncovered incriminating photos and videos, apparently confirming links to IS.¹⁵⁶

Several pistols and a black IS flag inscribed with the initials “Mohammed is the Messenger of God and there is no god but Allah” were also among the discovered items at an undisclosed location near Ahmedabad. After being charged under India’s Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the Penal Code as well as the Arms Act, details of the Sri Lankan IS cell were released. Members of the cell included Mohammad Nusrat, a Colombo-based businessman involved in the import of telecommunications and electronics.

A second individual, Mohammad Nirfan, 27, was identified as the son of a notorious drug lord in Colombo.¹⁵⁷ The latter had previously been sentenced to death for the killing of a High Court judge. A third person, Mohammad Faris, 35, worked as a porter. Faris had previously been arrested on two separate occasions in March and November 2023 in Sri Lanka for drug trafficking. The last individual, Mohammad Rashdeen, a driver, was also suspected by police sources of trafficking crystal meth and ice in Sri Lanka. He had been arrested in September 2022 in Sri Lanka and was later released on bail. The latter two arrests suggest a possible nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism activities in Sri Lanka.

In a related development, Sri Lanka’s Criminal Investigation Department (CID) said it had arrested Pushparaja Osman, 46, the suspected local handler of the IS-linked cell detained in India.¹⁵⁸ Police had earlier issued a wanted notice and a video of Pushparaja and offered a Rs 2 million cash reward for credible information on his whereabouts.¹⁵⁹ Investigations revealed Osman had made telephone contact with the four individuals prior to their arrests in India.

In addition to communicating with Osman,¹⁶⁰ the Sri Lankan IS cell had reportedly also received instructions from a Pakistani handler, who went by the moniker “Abu Pakistani”. Abu Pakistani was allegedly affiliated with the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) and reportedly first made contact with them in February 2024.¹⁶¹ He subsequently radicalised and recruited the Sri Lankan nationals into ISK. According to reports, they planned to carry out a series of attacks around India, allegedly on Abu Pakistani’s instructions.¹⁶²

With a global membership base and ambitions, ISK has increasingly posed a threat to several countries in the West as well as the Central and South Asian regions.¹⁶³ While most ISK-linked attacks since 2015 have focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the group has also more recently conducted attacks in Moscow, Iran and Turkey. The May 2024 terror plots in India point to a further expansion of ISK’s transnational capabilities.¹⁶⁴

Notably, ISK’s English-language magazine, the *Voice of Khorasan*, in a recent edition praised and valorised Zahran Hashim, a former NTJ leader and the mastermind of the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka.¹⁶⁵ In the aftermath of these attacks, investigations also revealed links between the perpetrators and IS-linked terror entities in India. Zahran, for example, was known to have been in communication with several IS-linked individuals, particularly in India’s southern states.

Drug Trafficking and the Crime-Terror Nexus

The revelation that some of the Sri Lankan IS operatives arrested in India had previous criminal records related to drug trafficking, warrants closer scrutiny by security agencies. According to a global International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) study, many jihadist attacks, including in regions such as Europe and Africa, had some overlap with organised crime. Often, terrorist groups seek to obtain arms from the black market or use the proceeds from criminal activities, including drug trafficking, to finance their activities.¹⁶⁶ Many attackers were also observed to have had criminal pasts.

Sri Lanka has for years been a transit hub for drug trafficking due to its location along maritime lanes in the Indian Ocean. Among others, drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine are often sourced from countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar.¹⁶⁷ Security officials also say cannabis trafficking is frequently observed in the international waters off India’s Tamil Nadu state, which neighbours Sri Lanka’s northern province.¹⁶⁸

Amid worsening crime rates and public complaints of increasing consumption of drugs among youth in recent years, the Sri Lankan government in December 2023 launched a four-month-long island-wide crackdown that saw over 50,000 arrests and drug seizures worth over US\$20 million.¹⁶⁹ The anti-drug bust appears to have curtailed the issue, much like anti-narcotics and crime operations of the past launched by previous governments. However, in most instances, these operations have only resulted in short-term drops in crime rates.

Responses

The police say it remains unclear if IS' ideology has significantly spread in Sri Lanka, following the appointment of a special task force in late May to investigate the group's activities in the country. Nonetheless, the authorities should still take proactive steps to curtail any potential terrorist-related activities, given the devastating impact another attack on the scale of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings could have in Sri Lanka. This is especially as large swathes of the population continue to reel from the country's significant social and economic challenges in the post-pandemic era.

There have been calls in some quarters for the establishment of more effective rehabilitation and community engagement programmes in Sri Lanka. According to security sources, several individuals linked to the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings remain in custody and have not been rehabilitated.¹⁷⁰ Immediately following their detention, observers say many were assessed to determine their radicalisation levels. They were also exposed to materials promoting moderation, tolerance and peaceful interfaith community harmony.¹⁷¹

However, additional plans to introduce learning modules to encourage critical thinking and religious knowledge failed to get off the ground.¹⁷² Other such proposals included mandating certifications for local and foreign clerics, banning overseas preachers who advocate hate speech, and promoting curricula in religious schools around the country that encourage moderation and peaceful coexistence between various communities in society.¹⁷³

Observers have pinned the impasse partly on local authorities and some Muslim leaders who apparently have placed personal and political interests above forging a consensus on a national security agenda.¹⁷⁴ The risk of inaction is reflected in the 2024 arrests of the four IS-linked Sri Lankan nationals in India, for whom appropriate monitoring and intervention measures were lacking. This is despite the quartet having been identified as security risks in a Presidential Commission Report released after the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, which also recommended they be put through a deradicalisation programme.

Policy Recommendations

A failure to initiate effective prison deradicalisation and other countering violent extremism (CVE) measures could give space for a resurgent IS threat in Sri Lanka. More resources are required to maintain and enhance the capabilities of the various military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies to prevent and pre-empt terror-related activities. Given the transnational nature of the jihadist threat, the Sri Lankan government also needs to collaborate and forge partnerships with countries in the region and beyond to build common databases and share expertise, experiences and resources.

Additionally, successive Sri Lankan administrations have for decades implemented a number of measures to curtail drug abuse and trafficking. Programmes for drug prevention and rehabilitation have also been rolled out. Yet, challenges persist to address the key drivers of drug abuse and dismantle sophisticated trafficking networks.¹⁷⁵ For more effective outcomes, more targeted public awareness campaigns are required to highlight the ill effects of drug usage, including health issues, breakdown of societal structures and economic downturns.¹⁷⁶ Given the emerging signs of a link between radicalisation and drug crime, the domestic anti-drugs programmes do require more sustained resources and attention from the authorities and community.

About the Author

Amresh Gunasingham is an Associate Editor/Coordinator (Research Contracts) at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at isAmreshLG@ntu.edu.sg.

Citations

- ¹ See "ISKP: Attacks Against Taliban Officials in Ghor and Expansion of Area of Operations," *Afghan Witness*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.afghanwitness.org/reports/iskp%3A-attacks-against-taliban-officials-in-ghor-and-expansion-of-area-of-operations>.
- ² See Antonio Giustozzi, "Jihad Reloaded: The IS Attack at Moscow's Crocus City Hall Marks a New Global Campaign of Terror," *The Insider*, April 5, 2024, <https://theins.press/en/opinion/antonio-giustozzi/270564>.
- ³ Antonio Giustozzi, *Crisis and Adaptation of the Islamic State in Khorasan* (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2024), <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/2024-02-01-SpecialReport-Giustozzi-Khorasan-FINAL.pdf>.
- ⁴ Interviews and contacts with ISK members in Afghanistan, April-July 2024.
- ⁵ Giustozzi, *Crisis and Adaptation of the Islamic State in Khorasan*.
- ⁶ Interviews with Taliban GDI officers; interviews and contacts with ISK members in Afghanistan, April 2023-July 2024.
- ⁷ On the Taliban's relations with Iran, see Vinay Kaura, "Iran-Taliban Ties: Pragmatism Over Ideology," *Middle East Institute*, April 11, 2024, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-taliban-ties-pragmatism-over-ideology>.
- ⁸ Marlene Laruelle, "A New Recruiting Ground for ISIS: Why Jihadism Is Thriving in Tajikistan," *Foreign Affairs*, May 14, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tajikistan/new-recruiting-ground-isis>; Lucas Webber, "Islamic State in Khorasan Province's Increased Activity Threatens Central Asia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 21, No. 106 (2024), <https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-state-in-khorasan-provinces-increased-activity-threatens-central-asia/>; Colin Clarke, Lucas Webber and Peter Smith, "ISKP's Latest Campaign: Expanded Propaganda and External Operations," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET)*, June 27, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/06/27/iskps-latest-campaign-expanded-propaganda-and-external-operations/>.
- ⁹ The contacts took place in April-September 2024.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. See also Ayaz Gul, "UN: Al-Qaida, Afghan Taliban Assist TTP With Attacks in Pakistan," *VoA*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-al-qaida-afghan-taliban-assist-ttp-with-attacks-in-pakistan-/7466250.html>.
- ¹¹ Thomas Watkins, "Islamabad Needs More US Military Equipment to Fight TTP, Pakistan's Ambassador Says," *The National*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/us/2024/06/19/pakistan-us-ambassador-taliban/>; interviews with TTP commanders, May-August 2024.
- ¹² Interview with a Taliban official in Badakhshan, July 2024; contacts with IMU members, January-July 2024.
- ¹³ Giustozzi, *Crisis and Adaptation of the Islamic State in Khorasan*.
- ¹⁴ Interview with a Taliban official, September 2024; contacts with former ISK members, September 2024.
- ¹⁵ Interviews with Taliban officials, August 2024.
- ¹⁶ "The Taliban's Neighbourhood: Regional Diplomacy with Afghanistan," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No. 337, January 30, 2024, p. 9; Dan De Luce, Mushtaq Yusufzai and Tom Winter, "The Enemy of My Enemy: Biden Admin Weighs Working With the Taliban to Combat ISIS-K," *NBC News*, July 3, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/investigations/biden-admin-weighs-cooperation-taliban-counter-isis-k-rcna159789>.
- ¹⁷ Interviews with GDI officers, February-March 2024.
- ¹⁸ Antonio Giustozzi, "Al-Qa'ida and the Taliban: Are They on Diverging Paths?" *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 167, No. 4-5 (2022), pp. 12-24.
- ¹⁹ Interviews with Taliban officials, July 2024.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Samina Ahmed, "The Pakistani Taliban Test Ties between Islamabad and Kabul," *International Crisis Group*, March 29, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/pakistani-taliban-test-ties-between-islamabad-and-kabul>.
- ²² Interviews with TTP commanders, January-March 2024; contact with a Pakistani official, February 2024.
- ²³ Asfandiyar Mir, "In a Major Rift, Pakistan Ramps Up Pressure on the Taliban," *United States Institute of Peace*, November 16, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/11/major-rift-pakistan-ramps-pressure-taliban>.
- ²⁴ Julhas Alam and Krutika Pathi, "Bangladeshi PM Sheikh Hasina Resigns as Widening Unrest Sees Protesters Storm Her Official Residence," *Associated Press*, August 6, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/bangladesh-hasina-student-protest-quota-violence-fdc7f2632c3d8fcbd913e6c0a1903fd4>.
- ²⁵ Saif Hasnat and Andrés R. Martínez, "What We Know About the Ouster of Bangladesh's Leader," *The New York Times*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/bangladesh-student-protests.html>.
- ²⁶ "Police Say 44 Personnel, Mostly Constables, Killed in Movement," *bdnews24.com*, August 19, 2024, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/8fe1a2063786>. See also "List of Policemen Killed in July-August Published," *Prothom Alo*, October 25, 2024, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/zqhqbxbhij>.

- ²⁷ “Over 150 Rajshahi JMB Militants Involved in Dhaka Violence,” *Somoy News*, July 26, 2024, <https://en.somoynews.tv/news/2024-07-26/TtP9CRy6>.
- ²⁸ “98 Militants Escaped From Prisons, 15,000 Granted Bail Amid Unrest,” *bdnews24.com*, September 17, 2024, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/b1d13ca57c3c>.
- ²⁹ Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee and Mohammad Jamil Khan, “Cops Working, Not Effectively,” *The Daily Star*, September 6, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/cops-working-not-effectively-3695511>.
- ³⁰ “Ahmadiyya Muslims Denounce Attacks on Community,” *Dhaka Tribune*, September 1, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/356884/ahmadiyya-muslims-denounce-attacks-on-community>.
- ³¹ “205 Incidents of Persecution of Minorities Since Aug 5: Oikya Parishad,” *The Daily Star*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/205-incidents-persecution-minorities-aug-5-oikya-parishad-3673106>.
- ³² “Bangladesh and Shari’ah Rule,” *al-Naba*, No. 461 (2024).
- ³³ Mahmudul Hasan, “8 Years of Holey Artisan Attack: Ansar Al Islam Still Active,” *The Daily Star*, July 1, 2024, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/pi4wsmcc72>.
- ³⁴ “Abu Bakar’s Attempt to Revive New JMB From the Middle East: 8 Years Since the Holey Artisan Attack,” *Kalbela*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.kalbela.com/ajkerpatrika/firstpage/100285>.
- ³⁵ Based on author’s compilation of Bangladeshi media reports.
- ³⁶ Nuruzzaman Labu, “Eight Years Since the Attack on Holy Artisan Cornered Militant Organizations Are Still Active Online,” *Bangla Tribune*, July 1, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/ms972nd3>.
- ³⁷ Mahabub Alam, “Ansar Al Islam Regrouping With Foreign Funding, Military-Style Training,” *Daily Sun*, July 11, 2024, <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/757242>.
- ³⁸ Mohammad Jamil Khan and Emrul Hasan Bappi, “Ansar Al Islam Raised Tk 18 Lakh Through Crowdfunding,” *The Daily Star*, June 6, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/ansar-al-islam-raised-tk-18-lakh-through-crowdfunding-3627741>.
- ³⁹ Md Raihanul Islam Akand, “Ansarullah Bangla Team Chief Released on Bail From Kashmir Jail,” *Dhaka Tribune*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/356166/ansarullah-bangla-team-chief-freed-from-kashimur>.
- ⁴⁰ Keshav Padmanabhan, “Released by Yunus, Pro-Al-Qaeda Islamist Rahmani Seeks Support From Pakistan for Kashmir & Khalistan,” *ThePrint*, September 7, 2024, <https://theprint.in/world/released-by-yunus-pro-al-qaeda-islamist-rahmani-seeks-support-from-pakistan-for-kashmir-khalistan/2257285/>.
- ⁴¹ “New Militant Group ‘Shahadat’ Emerges Out of ‘Dormant’ Ansar al-Islam: RAB,” *bdnews24.com*, May 25, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yehfmuss>.
- ⁴² “3 Members of New Extremist Group ‘Shahadat’ Arrested,” *New Age*, May 25, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/5ajmj7ha>.
- ⁴³ “New Group of Ansar al-Islam Members, 3 Arrested,” *Bangla Tribune*, May 25, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/u6h5htr2>.
- ⁴⁴ Sweety Kumari, “West Bengal Police Arrest College Student for Alleged Links With Bangladesh Terror Outfit,” *The Indian Express*, June 24, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/suspected-terrorist-bangladesh-arrest-west-bengal-police-9409693/>.
- ⁴⁵ “Three Islamists of ‘As-Shahadat’ Arrested in Cox’s Bazar,” *bdnews24.com*, June 29, 2024, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/bf1fe4a485dd>.
- ⁴⁶ *Kalbela*, “Abu Bakar’s Attempt to Revive New JMB from the Middle East.”
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Mohammad Jamil Khan, “Militants Using Prisons to Run Operations,” *The Daily Star*, July 4, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/militants-using-prisons-run-operations-3648421>.
- ⁵⁰ “8 Years of Holy Artisan Attack: Prisoners in Sensational Case Invite Militants,” *Samakal*, July 1, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/jhsy3apv>.
- ⁵¹ “Neo JMB trying to reorganise,” *The Daily Star*, January 1, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/neo-jmb-trying-reorganise-3507916>.
- ⁵² Interview with a Bangladeshi counter terrorism expert, July 2024.
- ⁵³ “Hizb ut-Tahrir Posters Emerge Amid Ruins of Holey Artisan’s Deepto Shopoth Sculpture,” *Dhaka Tribune*, August 29, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/356512/hizb-ut-tahrir-posters-emerge-amid-ruins-of-holey>.
- ⁵⁴ “Hizb ut-Tahrir Media Coordinator Imtiaz Remanded,” *Dhaka Tribune*, October 4, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/court/360770/hizb-ut-tahrir-media-coordinator-imtiaz-remanded>.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ *Dhaka Tribune*, “Hizb ut-Tahrir Posters Emerge Amid Ruins of Holey Artisan’s Deepto Shopoth Sculpture.”
- ⁵⁷ Ruma Paul, “Fears Grip Ethnic Minorities After Deadly Violence in Bangladesh,” *Reuters*, September 21, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/29hkp637>.
- ⁵⁸ “How Kuki-Chin Commits Bank Robbery,” *Somoy News*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.somoynews.tv/news/2024-04-03/CM6KNV1B>.
- ⁵⁹ Based on author’s compilation of Bangladeshi media reports.
- ⁶⁰ Jobaer Chowdhury, “Over 15,000 More Rohingyas Enter Bangladesh Amid Attacks in Rakhine,” *The Business Standard*, September 11, 2024, <https://www.tbsnews.net/rohingya-crisis/over-15000-more-rohingyas-enter-bangladesh-amid-attacks-rakhine-938426>.

- ⁶¹ "IGP Asks for Taking Prompt Action Against Terrorism, Communalism," *BSS News*, September 10, 2024, <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/208831>.
- ⁶² "Report: 5,818 Weapons Looted Nationwide, 3,933 Recovered," *Dhaka Tribune*, September 7, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/357584/police-report-5-818-weapons-looted-nationwide>.
- ⁶³ Mohammad Jamil Khan, "Drive Recovers 318 Weapons in One and Half Months," *The Daily Star*, October 19, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/drive-recovers-318-weapons-one-and-half-months-3730791>.
- ⁶⁴ Iymon Majid, "Violence and insurgency in Kashmir: Understanding the Micropolitics," *India Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2022), pp. 576-598.
- ⁶⁵ "Jammu and Kashmir Voter Turnout Improves After Terror Attacks Drop to 23 in 2024, From 222 in 2014," *The Economic Times*, September 30, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/assembly-elections/jammu-kashmir/jammu-and-kashmir-voter-turnout-improves-after-terror-attacks-drop-to-23-in-2024-from-222-in-2014/articleshow/113807649.cms>.
- ⁶⁶ "New Wave: Why Suspected Rebel Attacks Are Rising in Kashmir's Jammu Area," *Al Jazeera*, August 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/1/new-wave-why-suspected-rebel-attacks-are-spiking-in-kashmir-jammu-area>.
- ⁶⁷ Mir Ehsan, "2 Soldiers Among 4 Killed in Terror Attack on Army Trucks in Jammu and Kashmir," *Hindustan Times*, October 25, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/4-killed-in-terror-attack-on-army-trucks-in-jk-101729796118156.html>.
- ⁶⁸ Bashaarat Masood, "What Is the Z-Morh Project in Kashmir, Where 7 Were Killed by Militants?" *The Indian Express*, October 23, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-is-the-z-morh-project-kashmir-attack-9630983/>.
- ⁶⁹ Ajit Kumar Singh, "India: Global Terror and Failure to Launch – Analysis," *The Eurasia Review*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/26082024-india-global-terror-and-failure-to-launch-analysis/>.
- ⁷⁰ Shuriah Niazi, "India, Bangladesh Vow to Jointly Combat Terrorism, Extremism," *Anadolu Agency*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/india-bangladesh-vow-to-jointly-combat-terrorism-extremism/2679000>.
- ⁷¹ Mona Thakkar, "ISKP and Digital Propaganda: An Escalating Anti-India Media Warfare," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET) Insights*, May 22, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/05/22/iskp-and-digital-propaganda-an-escalating-anti-india-media-warfare/>.
- ⁷² Kabir Taneja, "The Curious Case of Pro-ISIS Movements Between India and Sri Lanka," *Observer Research Foundation*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-curious-case-of-pro-isis-movements-between-india-and-sri-lanka>.
- ⁷³ Animesh Roul, "NIA Dismantles Remaining Islamic State Cells in India," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2024), <https://jamestown.org/program/nia-dismantles-remaining-islamic-state-cells-in-india/>.
- ⁷⁴ Nadim Asrar, "What Killing of Hindu Teen by India Cow Vigilantes Tells Us About Modi 3.0," *Al Jazeera*, September 6, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/6/what-killing-of-hindu-teen-by-india-cow-vigilantes-tells-us-about-modi-3-0>.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Haris Zargar, "India: Why Muslim Lynchings Continue Unabated in Modi's Third Term," *Middle East Eye*, August 12, 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/india-modi-third-time-muslim-lynchings-continue-unabated-why>.
- ⁷⁷ Abdul Basit, "Agent Provocateurs: Online Hindutva Groups' Misinformation Campaign Amid Bangladesh's Political Crisis," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, October 8, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/10/08/agent-provocateurs-online-hindutva-groups-misinformation-campaign-amid-bangladeshs-political-crisis/>.
- ⁷⁸ Alishan Jafri, "Hindutva Group Attacks Muslims in Ghaziabad Shanties to Avenge Anti-Hindu Violence in Bangladesh," *The Wire*, August 10, 2024, <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindutva-group-attacks-muslims-in-ghaziabads-shanties-to-avenge-anti-hindu-violence-in-bangladesh>.
- ⁷⁹ Al Jazeera, "New Wave: Why Suspected Rebel Attacks Are Rising in Kashmir's Jammu Area."
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ "Why India's Revival of Civil Militias in Kashmir Is Raising Fears", *Al Jazeera*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/13/why-indias-revival-of-civil-militias-in-kashmir-is-raising-fears>.
- ⁸² "India: Hate Speech Fueled Modi's Election Campaign," *Human Rights Watch*, August 14, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/14/india-hate-speech-fueled-modis-election-campaign>.
- ⁸³ "Five Arrested in Haryana for Lynching Man on Suspicion of Eating Beef," *Hindustan Times*, August 31, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/five-arrested-in-haryana-for-lynching-man-on-suspicion-of-eating-beef-101725097855875.html>.
- ⁸⁴ Anuradha Bhasin, "Kashmir, Five Years On," *Foreign Policy*, September 19, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/09/19/india-kashmir-pakistan-china-narendra-modi-terrorism/>.
- ⁸⁵ Fahad Shah, "The Party Promising Kashmiri Statehood Wins an Election," *The Nation*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/jammu-kashmir-national-conference-election-autonomy/>.
- ⁸⁶ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2024* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024), p. 22, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>.
- ⁸⁷ Haroon Janjua, "Pakistan: Why Are Militant Attacks on the Rise?" *Deutsche Welle*, September 12, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-why-are-militant-attacks-on-the-rise/a-70197380>.

- ⁸⁸ Abid Hussain, “‘Azm-e-Istehkam’: Can New Pakistani Military Operation Curb Armed Attacks?” *Al Jazeera*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/24/azm-e-istehkam-can-new-pakistani-military-operation-curb-armed-attacks>.
- ⁸⁹ “Datasheet – Pakistan: Number of Terrorism Related Incidents Year Wise,” *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, 2024, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/incidents-data/pakistan>.
- ⁹⁰ “Datasheet – Pakistan: Yearly Fatalities,” *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, 2024, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, “Datasheet – Pakistan: Number of Terrorism Related Incidents Year Wise.”
- ⁹³ Ayaz Gul, “UN: Afghan Taliban Increase Support for Anti-Pakistan TTP Terrorists,” *VoA*, July 11, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-afghan-taliban-increase-support-for-anti-pakistan-ttp-terrorists/7694324.html>.
- ⁹⁴ Bill Roggio, “Analysis: The ‘Bonds Are Close’ as the Pakistani Taliban Benefits From Its Afghan Safe Haven,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, July 6, 2024, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/07/analysis-the-bonds-are-close-as-the-pakistani-taliban-benefits-from-its-afghan-safe-haven.php>.
- ⁹⁵ Asif Shahzad and Gibran Naiyyar Peshimam, “Pakistan Fires Retaliatory Strike at Iran, Stoking Regional Tension,” *Reuters*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/pakistan-has-conducted-strikes-inside-iran-afp-report-2024-01-18/>.
- ⁹⁶ Farhan Zahid, “Jaish al-Adl’s Reemergence Threatens Iran-Pakistan Relations,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/jaish-al-adls-reemergence-threatens-iran-pakistan-relations/>.
- ⁹⁷ For details on Iran-Pakistan tensions, see “Experts React: What’s Really Going on With Pakistan and Iran Exchanging Attacks?” *Atlantic Council*, January 18, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react-whats-really-going-on-with-pakistan-and-iran-exchanging-attacks/>.
- ⁹⁸ Abubakar Siddique, “From Allies To Enemies: Relations Between Afghan Taliban And Pakistan Hit Rock Bottom,” *Radio Free Europe*, August 15, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-pakistan-taliban-ttp-terrorism/33078685.html>.
- ⁹⁹ Tahir Khan et al., “Pakistan Carried Out Intelligence-Based Anti-Terrorist Operations in Afghanistan, FO Confirms,” *Dawn*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1822274>.
- ¹⁰⁰ “Taliban Says It Strikes Back After Deadly Pakistani Strikes,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-pakistan-airstrikes-bomb/32865938.html>.
- ¹⁰¹ Ramzan Semab, “Video Showing TTP ‘Highway Check-Post’ Goes Viral,” *The Express Tribune*, June 6, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2470002/video-showing-ttp-highway-check-post-goes-viral>.
- ¹⁰² Aihtesham Khan, “Terrorism, Extortion Cloud the Local Economy in K-P,” *The Express Tribune*, September 30, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2499544/terrorism-extortion-cloud-the-local-economy-in-k-p/>.
- ¹⁰³ Shahzad Akhtar and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, “Understanding the Resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflicts*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2023), pp. 285-306.
- ¹⁰⁴ Abdul Basit and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, “The Persistence of Terrorism in Pakistan: An Analysis of Domestic and Regional Factors,” in *Terrorism, Security and Development in South Asia: National, Regional and Global Implications*, eds. M Raymond Izarali and Dalbir Ahlawat (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 157-173.
- ¹⁰⁵ Khyber Scoop (@KhyberScoop), “KS Monitoring: A militant group led by Umari, hailing from Miranshah, North Waziristan District has pledged allegiance to TTP Chief Noor Wali Mehsud and merged with TTP,” X, September 25, 2024, <https://x.com/KhyberScoop/status/1838847253437424062>.
- ¹⁰⁶ Based on the author’s own research and monitoring of social and mainstream media.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ Zia Ur Rehman, “Merging Shadows: The Quiet Shift In Karachi’s Militant Landscape,” *The Friday Times*, September 17, 2024, <https://thefridaytimes.com/17-Sep-2024/merging-shadows-the-quiet-shift-in-karachi-s-militant-landscape>.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Iftikhar Firdous, “Deciphering the TTP’s Strategy To Revive in Punjab,” *The Khorasan Diary*, May 7, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/05/07/deciphering-the-ttps-strategy-to-revive-in-punjab>.
- ¹¹¹ Abdul Sayed, “The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has announced the reconciliation of the Jamat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) faction,” X, March 11, 2024.
- ¹¹² Abdul Basit, “Terrorism’s Persistence in the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs): An Examination of Inter-Group Militant Cooperation and Rivalries,” *Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2024), pp. 1-32, <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/PJTR-Vol-6-Issue-1-January-June-2024-1.pdf>.
- ¹¹³ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁴ Abdul Basit and Rueben Dass, “Tech and Terror: Why Have Drones Not Penetrated the Afghanistan-Pakistan Militant Landscape?” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, April 29, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/04/29/tech-and-terror-why-have-drones-not-penetrated-the-afghanistan-pakistan-militant-landscape/>.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁶ Iftikhar Firdous, “TKD Exclusive: Pakistani Officials Believe Pakistani Taliban Have Developed ‘Nascent’ Drone Technology,” *The Khorasan Diary*, September 29, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/09/25/tkd-exclusive-pakistani-officials-believe-pakistani-taliban-has-developed-%27nascent%27-drone-technology>.
- ¹¹⁷ Mona Thakkar and Anne Speckhard, “ISIS Supporters Harness the Power of AI to Ramp Up Propaganda on Facebook, X and TikTok,” *Homeland Security Today*, July 15, 2024, <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/is-iskp-supporters-harness-generative-ai-for-propaganda-dissemination/>.

- ¹¹⁸ Sirwan Kajjo, "IS Turns to Artificial Intelligence for Advanced Propaganda Amid Territorial Defeats," *VoA*, May 23, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/is-turns-to-artificial-intelligence-for-advanced-propaganda-amid-territorial-defeats/7624397.html>.
- ¹¹⁹ Iftikhar Firdous, "ISKP Begins Publishing Pashto News Bulletins Using Artificial Intelligence," *The Khorasan Diary*, May 21, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/05/21/iskp-begins-publishing-pashto-news-bulletins-using-artificial-intelligence>.
- ¹²⁰ "ISKP: Use of Generative AI Presenters to Create Newscasts," *Afghan Witness*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.afghanwitness.org/reports/iskp%3A-use-of-generative-ai-presenters-to-create-newscasts>.
- ¹²¹ Mariam Shah, "The Digital Weaponry of Radicalisation: AI and the Recruitment Nexus," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, July 4, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/07/04/the-digital-weaponry-of-radicalisation-ai-and-the-recruitment-nexus/>.
- ¹²² Mickey Kupecz, "Pakistan's Baloch Insurgency: History, Conflict Drivers, and Regional Implications," *The International Affairs Review*, May 16, 2024, <https://www.iar-gwu.org/print-archive/8er0x982v5pj129srhre98ex6u8v8n>.
- ¹²³ Kiyya Baloch, "Baluch Militancy's Newest and Most Lethal Phase in Pakistan," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 20, No. 18 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/baluch-militancys-newest-and-most-lethal-phase-in-pakistan/>.
- ¹²⁴ Zeeshan Ahmed, "Calculated Chaos: What's Driving the Surge in Baloch Terror Attacks?" *T-Magazine – The Express Tribune*, October 13, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2502399/calculated-chaos-whats-driving-the-surge-in-baloch-terror-attacks>.
- ¹²⁵ Muhammad Amir Rana, "A Radical Shift in Insurgency," *Dawn*, October 13, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1864895>.
- ¹²⁶ "More Than 70 Killed in Multiple Armed Attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan," *Al Jazeera*, October 7, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/26/at-least-38-killed-in-multiple-armed-attacks-in-pakistans-balochistan>.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
- ¹²⁸ Saleem Shahid, "Balochistan Plunges Deeper Into Militancy Vortex," *Dawn*, August 27, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1855006>.
- ¹²⁹ "Majeed Brigade and ZIRAB Unit Behind Karachi Attack, Over 20 Killed, Says BLA," *The Balochistan Post*, October 7, 2024, <https://thebalochistanpost.net/2024/10/majeed-brigade-and-zirab-unit-behind-karachi-attack-over-20-killed-says-bla/>.
- ¹³⁰ Arpan Rai, "Why Chinese Workers Are Under Attack From Militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *The Independent*, October 7, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/karachi-airport-blast-chinese-workers-pakistan-afghanistan-b2625058.html>.
- ¹³¹ Seema Khan and Costas Laoutides, "Trapped Between Religion and Ethnicity: Identity Politics Against the Baloch in Iran and Pakistan," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflicts*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2024), pp. 164-184, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17467586.2024.2356508>; Mahvish Ahmad, "Balochistan: Middle-Class Rebellion," *Dawn*, June 5, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/723987/balochistan-middle-class-rebellion>.
- ¹³² Hari Prasad and Wil Sahar Patrick, "Pakistan Faces Rising Separatist Insurgency in Balochistan," *New Lines Institute*, January 24, 2023, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/nonstate-actors/pakistan-faces-rising-separatist-insurgency-in-balochistan/>.
- ¹³³ Sarah Zaman, "Why Pakistan's Balochistan Remains Restive," *VoA*, August 30, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/why-pakistan-s-balochistan-remains-restive/7765694.html>.
- ¹³⁴ Sajid Aziz, "Virtual Battlegrounds: Understanding the Online Campaign of Baloch Separatist Groups in Pakistan," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET) Insights*, April 2, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/04/02/virtual-battlegrounds-understanding-the-online-campaign-of-baloch-separatist-groups-in-pakistan/>.
- ¹³⁵ Shakoor Ahmad Wani, "The New Baloch Militancy: Drivers and Dynamics," *India Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (2021), pp. 4479-4500, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09749284211027253>.
- ¹³⁶ Vaishali Jaipal, "The Changing Face of Baloch Activism," *Observer Research Foundation*, May 9, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-changing-face-of-baloch-activism>.
- ¹³⁷ Abdul Basit, "Women Suicide Bombers and the Changing Trajectories of Pakistan's Baloch Insurgency," *New Lines Magazine*, December 14, 2023, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/women-suicide-bombers-and-the-changing-trajectories-of-pakistans-baloch-insurgency/>.
- ¹³⁸ Adnan Amir, "Pakistani Separatist Groups Unite to Target China's Belt and Road," *Nikkei Asia*, August 1, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/Pakistani-separatist-groups-unite-to-target-China-s-Belt-and-Road>.
- ¹³⁹ Iftikhar Firdous (@IftikharFirdous), "ISKP Opens Up Front Against TTP," *X*, June 23, 2024, <https://x.com/IftikharFirdous/status/1804787022650904585>.
- ¹⁴⁰ Mona Thakkar and Vidyut S, "TTP's Alliance With the Afghan Taliban: In ISKP's Crosshairs," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET) Insights*, September 20, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/09/20/ttps-alliance-with-the-afghan-taliban-in-iskps-crosshairs/>.
- ¹⁴¹ Soumya Awasthi, "Digital Battleground: ISKP vs. Taliban," *Observer Research Foundation*, April 8, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/digital-battleground-iskp-vs-taliban>.
- ¹⁴² Afghan Analyst (@AfghanAnalyst2), "TTP Clarifies Stance on Islamic State Group in Af-Pak Region," *X*, May 25, 2024, <https://x.com/AfghanAnalyst2/status/1794349643112792085>.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid.

- ¹⁴⁴ Pak Afghan Affairs (@Pak_AfgAffairs), “from groups, including the #TTP, Afghan #Taliban & Al-Qaeda,” X, June 2, 2024, https://x.com/Pak_AfgAffairs/status/1797182135477871001.
- ¹⁴⁵ Abdul Sayed, “Al-Azaim Media of ISKP has severely criticized Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in a recent 71-minute audio statement,” X, July 24, 2024.
- ¹⁴⁶ “Govt Approves ‘Operation Azm-e-Istehkam’ to Eliminate Terrorism,” *Ministry of Information and Broadcasting – Government of Pakistan*, June 23, 2024, <https://www.moib.gov.pk/News/62472>.
- ¹⁴⁷ Shahbaz Rana, “Rs60 Billion Approved for Operation Azm-e-Istehkam,” *The Express Tribune*, August 22, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2490199/rs60-billion-approved-for-operation-azm-e-istehkam>.
- ¹⁴⁸ “Rallies, Jirgas in KP Oppose Azm-i-Istehkam Military Offensive,” *Dawn*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1843029>.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ikram Junaidi, Saleem Shahid and Umer Farooq, “Azm-i-Istehkam Is No Large-Scale Military Op,” *Dawn*, June 25, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1841822>.
- ¹⁵⁰ Zia Ur Rehman, “What Makes Azm-i-Istehkam Different From Operations Past?” *Dawn*, July 30, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1848738/what-makes-azm-i-istehkam-different-from-operations-past>.
- ¹⁵¹ “Pakistan Labels TTP as ‘Fitna al-Khawarij’ to Expose Its True Ideology,” *The Express Tribune*, August 1, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2484659/pakistan-labels-ttp-as-fitna-al-khawarij-to-expose-its-true-ideology>.
- ¹⁵² Iftikhar A. Khan, “Govt Proscribes Gul Bahadur Group, Majeed Brigade,” *Dawn*, August 1, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1849349>.
- ¹⁵³ “Indian Police Arrest 4 Sri Lankans for Suspected IS Links,” *The Straits Times*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/indian-police-arrest-4-sri-lankans-for-suspected-islamic-state-links>.
- ¹⁵⁴ Devesh Kumar, “Four ISIS Terrorists, All Sri Lankan Nationals, Arrested at Ahmedabad Airport,” *Mint*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/four-isis-terrorists-from-sri-lanka-arrested-at-ahmedabad-airport-gujarat-ats-11716198185105.html>.
- ¹⁵⁵ Jack Seale, “Sri Lanka’s Easter Bombings Review – Startling and Deeply Disturbing Viewing,” *The Guardian*, September 6, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/sep/06/sri-lankas-easter-bombings-review-startling-and-deeply-disturbing-viewing>.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ojjaswini Gupta, “4 Sri Lankan Nationals With Alleged ISIS Links Arrested in India,” *JURISTnews*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2024/05/4-sri-lankan-nationals-with-alleged-isis-links-arrested-in-india/>. The video reportedly showed four men standing in front of a black flag with an inscription in Arabic. They are seen making *bai’ah* in Arabic and Tamil to IS and to former IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. They also commit to targeting Jews, Christians and members of the ruling BJP party in India, whom they allege have committed atrocities against Muslims worldwide.
- ¹⁵⁷ “India Will Deal With the 4 IS Suspects Arrested in Gujarat, Says Sri Lankan govt,” *The Economic Times*, May 27, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-will-deal-with-the-4-isis-suspects-arrested-in-gujarat-says-sri-lankan-govt/articleshow/110464815.cms?from=mdr>.
- ¹⁵⁸ “Sri Lanka Arrests Alleged Handler of Islamic State Suspects Held in India,” *The Hindu*, June 2, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-police-arrests-wanted-handler-of-4-isis-suspects-detained-in-india/article68240045.ece>.
- ¹⁵⁹ “Two More Arrested in Sri Lanka for Suspected ISIS Links,” *Deccan Herald*, May 29, 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/world/two-more-arrested-in-sri-lanka-for-suspected-isis-links-3043299>.
- ¹⁶⁰ Records revealed the suspects had travelled extensively to India in the years prior.
- ¹⁶¹ “The Islamic State Sri Lanka Branch Revives,” *Ceylon Today*, May 22, 2024, <https://ceylontoday.lk/2024/05/22/the-islamic-state-sri-lanka-branch-revives/>.
- ¹⁶² The latter had paid the Sri Lankan suspects Rs 400,000 and made the arrangements for the weapons and ammunition to be used in the planned terror attacks. They were to retrieve the weapons and await further instructions, before being pre-empted by the Indian authorities.
- ¹⁶³ Tricia Bacon, “The Islamic State in Khorasan Province: Exploiting a Counterterrorism Gap,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, April 11, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/islamic-state-khorasan-province-exploiting-counterterrorism-gap>.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* ISK is increasingly a global threat and has been culpable for multiple plots in Europe. It also harbours ambitions to strike in the United States as well as other global powers such as China and Russia.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Ceylon Today*, “The Islamic State Sri Lanka Branch Revives.”
- ¹⁶⁶ “The Crime Terror Nexus,” *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, 2024, <https://icsr.info/our-work/the-crime-terror-nexus/>.
- ¹⁶⁷ Rathindra Kuruwita, “Are Sri Lanka’s Anti-Drug Crime Operations Working?” *The Diplomat*, February 26, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/are-sri-lankas-anti-drug-crime-operations-working/>.
- ¹⁶⁸ Pramod Madhav, “Drugs Worth Rs 71 Crore Bound for Sri Lanka Seized in Tamil Nadu,” *India Today*, March 11, 2024, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/drugs-worth-rs-71-crore-bound-for-sri-lanka-seized-in-tamil-nadu-2513178-2024-03-11>.
- ¹⁶⁹ Uditha Jayasinghe, “Sri Lanka to Continue Drugs Crackdown Despite Rights Group Concerns – Minister,” *Reuters*, January 18, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sri-lanka-continue-drug-crackdown-despite-rights-group-concerns-minister-2024-01-18/>.
- ¹⁷⁰ Interview with a security source.
- ¹⁷¹ Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka’s Easter Sunday Attack Massacre: Lessons for the International Community* (Singapore: Penguin Random House SEA, 2023).
- ¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ P.K. Balachandran, "De-Radicalization Program Needed To Fight Islamic Terrorism, Says New Book on Sri Lanka Bombings – Book Review," *Eurasia Review*, July 24, 2023, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/24072023-de-radicalization-program-needed-to-fight-islamic-terrorism-says-new-book-on-sri-lanka-bombings-book-review/>.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with a security source.

¹⁷⁵ Amresh Gunasingham, "Sri Lanka Cracks Down on Drugs in the Name of Justice," *East Asia Forum*, May 4, 2024, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/05/04/sri-lanka-cracks-down-on-drugs-in-the-name-of-justice/>.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Central Asia

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Xinjiang

Riccardo Valle

In 2024, Central Asia witnessed a sharp increase in its nationals' involvement in terrorist plots and major attacks from the Middle East to Asia to Europe. While no attack occurred in any Central Asian Republic (CAR), several individuals were arrested in connection with militant organisations who were either recruiting, channelling funds or planning attacks inside the countries. On the other hand, jihadist groups across the ideological spectrum boosted their propaganda narratives targeting Central Asian countries, inciting attacks in Central Asia and beyond. In 2024, two major points of concern for all CARs were the repatriation of militants' families from Syria and the possible spillover of instability from Afghanistan, which they tried to address politically and diplomatically. However, the widespread hysteria sparked by the Crocus City Hall attack might jeopardise the security situation both in Central Asian countries as well as for the Central Asian migrant diaspora abroad.

Trends

IS and ISK's Extended Focus on Central Asian Militants

In 2024, the Islamic State (IS) and its branch in Central and South Asia, the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK), increasingly relied on a dispersed and loose network of cells and individuals from Central Asian Republics (CARs) to carry out attacks in the region and beyond. The string of plots and attacks witnessed in 2024 was a continuation of a surge in the use of Tajik nationals by ISK in attacks conducted throughout 2023.¹ Generally, a combination of social factors – including anti-Islamic regulations adopted in Central Asia, the exposure of Central Asian individuals and diaspora to the allure of ISK propaganda, as well as external developments such as the Taliban's crackdown on ISK cells in Afghanistan and the latter's relations with Central Asian countries – have intersected with ISK's international aspirations, providing the latter with a new tactic.

In 2024, ISK carried out several attacks in Afghanistan from Central Asian countries. For instance, on January 14, Muhammad Qasim Khalid, the Afghan Taliban governor of Nimroz, survived an attempted suicide attack by an ISK element of Tajik descent.² This was the first attempt of the year by ISK Tajik members to move into Nimroz and carry out attacks; in April, two Tajik citizens were arrested near the Iran-Afghanistan border while entering Afghanistan.³ On March 21, 2024, a suicide attack by an Uzbek national at the Kabul Bank in Kandahar marked the second suicide attack claimed by ISK in the city. By exploiting Central Asian militants to conduct its operations in Afghanistan, ISK aims to counter the Taliban's narrative that the group has no ground operatives in the country. ISK indoctrinates Central Asian individuals by arguing that since they cannot practise Islam in their countries of origin, and jihad and martyrdom are the pillars of religion (according to ISK's own interpretation), they are thus required to perform their so-called religious obligation in Afghanistan by carrying out attacks, as it is most likely for them to strike in Afghanistan rather than in Central Asia.

However, in 2024, IS and ISK progressively expanded the use of Central Asian nationals for attacks beyond the Khorasan region, pointing to a new phase of external operations by the latter. A case in point was IS' suicide attack in Kerman, Iran, on January 3 during a procession held to commemorate the deceased Iranian General Qassem Soleimani.⁴ While an IS-linked cell in Iran claimed the attack, Iranian investigators concluded that one of the two bombers and the attack's mastermind were Tajik nationals who had travelled to Afghanistan via Turkey, where the bomber received training and

instructions.⁵ Subsequently, Iran launched a major crackdown on ISK elements in the country, unveiling a network between Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan that involved Afghan and Tajik nationals.⁶

On January 28, two armed individuals entered the Santa Maria Church in Istanbul, killing one Turkish citizen. As the Islamic State – Turkish Province claimed the attack, the two perpetrators were subsequently tracked down and arrested by Turkish authorities.⁷ The attackers, Amirjon Khaliqov and David Tanduev, were Tajik and Russian nationals, respectively, with connections to the broader network involved in the Kerman suicide bombing.⁸ Between January and February, Turkey conducted a series of crackdowns on IS cells in the country, leading to the arrest of more than 150 individuals, many originally from Central Asia.⁹ Subsequently, between March and April, Turkey launched a second round of arrests, identifying more than 200 individuals as potential IS members; again, the majority of the suspects were of Central Asian origin.¹⁰ Some of the arrestees were later listed as prominent ISK members linked to the group's extended network between Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey.¹¹

The March 16 Crocus City Hall attack in Russia marked a new phase of intermittent plots by IS. The attack – which left more than 150 people dead – was carried out by a four-member IS cell of Tajik citizens.¹² Though IS claimed the attack, ISK is believed to be connected to some extent.¹³ Furthermore, in the aftermath of the attack, Russian authorities arrested a total of 18 Central Asians, mostly Tajiks, connected to the attack.¹⁴ Though the Russian authorities have been tight-lipped about the investigations into the Crocus City Hall attack, the existence of an extended IS network from Europe, Russia and Central Asia has been discovered.¹⁵ A publication by ISK media affiliate, Al-Hadid Media, argued that ISK leader Shahab al-Muhajir directly planned and coordinated the attack in Moscow after ISK established contact with the Central Asian militants.¹⁶

In contrast to attacks being carried out internationally, no major incidents were observed in Central Asia. Based on information collected by security forces as well as propaganda and biographies published by ISK, the majority of ISK's Central Asian militants were indoctrinated and recruited abroad in Russia and Turkey, where they came into contact with veterans of IS wars in Syria or militants from the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, it is also possible that ISK might have directed Central Asian militants to redirect their attention within their countries of origin, hence opening a new front.

New Propaganda Offensive

It is difficult to assess whether the deployment of Central Asian nationals for operations abroad is a systematic strategy framed by IS/ISK or, rather, the consequence of the availability of manpower from Central Asia. However, it has been observed that IS and ISK are increasingly focusing on external operations, both in terms of organised campaigns as well as individual propaganda campaigns that have intensified the production of content in Central Asian languages.¹⁷

A substantial surge in propaganda output and communication channels from Central Asian militants, particularly in the Tajik, Uzbek and Russian languages, was observed in 2024. While propaganda production targeting Central Asian constituencies has been on the rise since 2022, in 2024, IS and ISK stepped up the quality of the products.¹⁸ For instance, after the Crocus City Hall attack, ISK published its first-ever Tajik-language magazine, the *Voice of Khorasan*, focusing on Tajikistan and Russia.¹⁹ In June, the organisation published a second issue, this time featuring articles not only in Tajik but also in Cyrillic Uzbek and Russian, stating that the Crocus City Hall attack had been carried out in revenge for the IS female members held in prison in Syria.²⁰ The fact that the Uzbek language was written in the Cyrillic rather than the Latin alphabet suggests that the intended target was the Uzbek population living in Afghanistan rather than Uzbekistan, as the latter prefers using the Latin alphabet. Additionally, the language expansion of the magazine from purely Tajik to three languages is in line with ISK's regional and international aspirations.

ISK also published a book entirely dedicated to Tajikistan, first in the Pashto language and then translated into Tajik. The book specifically instructed Tajik religious scholars to side with ISK, otherwise the group would consider them enemies.²¹ The group has continued to publish other booklets in Pashto and Tajik, focusing on political figures in Central Asia and Russia in order to intersect with local political and social discussions.²² Moreover, criticism against CARs and Russia was connected to Afghanistan, arguing that while ISK is striving to establish a so-called caliphate, the Taliban are building diplomatic relations with historical enemies of religion – as interpreted by Central Asian militants – referring to Russia. ISK's publications narrated how Russia conquered Central Asia and then Afghanistan. ISK sees Afghanistan as the preferable destination for conducting attacks, in light of past spectacular ISK operations and the Taliban's crackdown on ISK.

However, ISK also exploited its Central Asian – and specifically Tajik – base of support to challenge prominent religious scholars from Central Asia, opening a new front of ideological battles and potential destabilisation in the region due to sectarian frictions. ISK criticised both non-militant scholars, such as Tajik Hoji Mirzo Ibronov, who has always opposed IS, as well as rival, anti-state, jihadist scholars, such as Uzbek Abdulloh Zufor and Sadiq Somorqondi.²³ However, a major rift of infighting between hardcore pro-ISK members and individuals inclined towards IS ideology was sparked after the Crocus City Hall attack. In its aftermath and during the Russian security services' crackdown on Tajik nationals, influential regional scholar Abu Muhammad Madani published a series of videos criticising ISK for the attack, arguing that given the fact it had caused the deaths of innocent civilians, it was an inside job by the Russian and Tajik services.²⁴ Abu Muhammad Madani is an anti-state, pro-jihad scholar who enjoys a good reputation among ISK's Uzbek and Tajik supporters due to his anti-state sermons. However, after his comments on the Moscow attack, ISK published two booklets in the Tajik and Persian languages declaring the death penalty on him, igniting a polarising debate among ISK's followers.²⁵

However, most ISK-linked Telegram channels and Facebook accounts display cross publications and messages in the Tajik, Uzbek (Cyrillic and Latin), Russian and Persian languages. Critically, several publications revealed that IS and ISK members were radicalised and recruited in Russia and Istanbul, then instructed to either carry out attacks in Russia or Afghanistan, or provide other services to the organisation, such as collecting funds or managing emigration to the Khorasan region. In some of these publications, it was narrated that the CAR militants recruited in Turkey and Russia came into close connection with ISK because of the latter's virulent propaganda against Central Asian states for their alleged suppression of freedom of religion. At the same time, ISK laments that in Central Asia, perceived un-Islamic practices are fuelled by Russia and Turkey, hence arguing that CAR militants are obliged to uphold religion by carrying out attacks.²⁶ As a consequence, this transnational connection passes through online communication channels, since these Uzbek- and Tajik-language channels frequently share propaganda content in the Russian and Turkish languages, specifically from ISK mouthpiece Al-Azaim Media.²⁷ Often, propaganda operations embed the fund-raising efforts of IS' Central Asian affiliates who are connected to Russia and Europe. For instance, ISK Tajik and Uzbek channels frequently share coordinates to bitcoin and crypto wallets to Russian and German accounts tasked with collecting money for purposely providing benefits to IS families in Syrian detention camps.²⁸ Soon after the Crocus City Hall attack, more than two thousand dollars were withdrawn by one of such wallets and transferred to the cards of some of the perpetrators.²⁹

Central Asian Countries Face Potential Instability and Growth of Domestic Threats

While Central Asia has remained a relatively untouched area by terrorism and militancy compared to neighbouring countries – such as Afghanistan, Iran and Russia – in 2024, several new developments have compelled Central Asian countries to frame and adopt new joint policies for regional security.

The two main developments involving Central Asian countries are related to the issue of repatriation of IS members and families still held in Syria and the potential destabilisation from Afghanistan. The

latter concern includes not only the growing transregional threat of ISK, but also the hosting of Central Asian militant organisations affiliated with the Taliban who aspire to become insurgent forces in Central Asia.

Uzbekistan

Central Asian countries already repatriated more than two thousand IS members – mostly women and children – between 2023 and 2024, setting up rehabilitation centres in accordance with their internal legislations.³⁰ In May 2024, Uzbekistan hosted the first meeting of the Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees from Conflict Zones in Central Asia.³¹ In July, the Regional Expert Council held its first working session in Tashkent, focusing its agenda on legal and judicial issues, psychosocial support and countering terrorist narratives while engaging civil society.³² In September, Uzbekistan also hosted the joint conference of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (RATS SCO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center (CIS ATC).³³

At the domestic level, the aftermath of the Crocus City Hall attack and the widespread hysteria in Russia targeting Central Asian nationals also spread to Uzbekistan, leading to several crackdowns on Uzbek nationals suspected of terrorist links. On April 7, Tashkent police arrested 50 individuals in 45 different searches.³⁴ In the same period, Uzbekistan issued a series of warnings to parents against sending children to Islamic *madrassas* abroad, and enacted several restrictive measures targeting imams in the country by restricting their foreign tours.³⁵ Uzbek citizens were also detained abroad for alleged links to IS; in April, the United States (US) security forces arrested an Uzbek national who had entered the country in 2022 and was applying as an asylum seeker.³⁶ In August, Russian authorities arrested an individual from Central Asia who was recruiting young Uzbek citizens online, possibly linked to the broader network of ISK.³⁷

Tajikistan

By far, Tajikistan has been the Central Asian country most exposed to terrorism and its repercussions, both diplomatically and internally. The Crocus City Hall attack signalled a watershed moment for the country and the perception of Tajikistan's neighbours, especially Russia. While Tajikistan is not the only Central Asian country that suffered from the xenophobic backlash of the Crocus City Hall attack, it has faced the brunt of a series of discriminatory policies, expulsions and police raids targeting Tajik immigrants, which has damaged Russia-Tajikistan ties.³⁸

Internally, in the first six months of 2024, Tajikistan arrested around 226 people in connection with terrorist organisations, mostly IS and Jamaat Ansarullah (Tajik Taliban) militants, and security forces detected three cases of terrorist plots and two of attempted terrorism in Khatlon province, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and the directly administered districts. Testifying to the widespread financial network linked to militant organisations, during the same period, 95 cases of terrorist funding for a total of 500 Somoni (US\$47,000) were registered.³⁹ Arrests were conducted across the country; for instance, in Vanj district of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, 27 people were arrested for alleged links to Jamaat Ansarullah, while in Sughd province, 130 people were detained for alleged links with terrorist organisations.⁴⁰

Additionally, 44 Tajik citizens were arrested abroad in coordination with Interpol and local authorities; 22 of these had already been repatriated by August 2024.⁴¹ For instance, in June, the US authorities arrested eight Tajik citizens who had entered the US at different times through its southern border for alleged links with ISK.⁴² In April, meanwhile, Italian authorities arrested a Tajik citizen whose preventive incarceration was later confirmed due to his involvement in funding activities for ISK.⁴³

Tajikistan has inaugurated a new plan for 2024-2028 aimed at rehabilitating the families of former IS affiliates who were held captive in Syria, around 300 of whom have been repatriated by Tajikistan.⁴⁴ Tajikistan's Ministry of Interior has also assured that under new legislation – which guarantees amnesty to citizens who had travelled to conflict zones and joined militant organisations, provided that they did not commit any crimes – militants might be reintegrated into society if they “sincerely repent and voluntarily return”.⁴⁵

A potential catalyst for a new radicalisation process is the new dress code inaugurated by Tajikistan, which has virtually banned some Islamic attires, such as the hijab.⁴⁶ While the new piece of legislation has not been entirely enforced and is subject to different interpretations, such as only prohibiting full facial veils, militant organisations across the jihadist spectrum have criticised the move, attempting to capitalise on it for recruitment and publicity. For instance, Jamaat Ansarullah and ISK have released different items of propaganda, while top pro-Al-Qaeda (AQ) ideologue Mufti Abu Zar al-Burmi issued a message in the Uzbek language criticising the decision.⁴⁷ Hence, even though the new legislation might have only rhetorical goals, it might serve as a catalyst for militants to reinforce their narratives.

Finally, while there was no reported cross-border attack from Afghanistan into Tajikistan from either ISK or Jamaat Ansarullah, the latter has continued to publish online videos of some of its militants in open areas in Afghanistan, such as Kabul city and Parwan province.⁴⁸ Even though Jamaat Ansarullah holds no official position within power structures in the state, with the Afghan Taliban carefully keeping the group under surveillance, its militants enjoy relatively free movement.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan carried out several waves of arrests against individuals linked to terrorist organisations, particularly following the Crocus City Hall attack. In February, Kazakh security forces launched a vast security operation covering eight provinces; in total, 49 searches were conducted, which led to the arrests of 23 people suspected of links to extremist organisations, most of whom were linked to IS.⁴⁹ Subsequently, between May and June, two more operations in different provinces, including the capital, led to the arrests of nine Kazakh citizens involved in the production and dissemination of propaganda materials in the country.⁵⁰ Again, in July, in another operation across four provinces, four Kazakh citizens and one foreigner were detained for possessing weapons and militant propaganda.⁵¹ Finally, in late August, another foreigner and five Kazakh citizens were arrested in connection with terrorist activities in the capital.⁵²

Compared to the trend in 2023, Kazakhstan, for now, seems to have effectively boosted security measures, registering a decrease in the number of plots and arrests.⁵³ Furthermore, authorities also prevented 151 foreigners with ties to extremist organisations from entering the country in coordination with regional neighbours.⁵⁴

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan experienced an unprecedented wave of arrests and the discovery of terrorist plots in the country, a trend that had been developing since 2023.⁵⁵ Before the start of 2024, Kyrgyz authorities dismantled a plot involving ISK-linked Kyrgyz nationals to strike the city of Jalal-Abad with a series of coordinated bombings during the New Year's celebrations.⁵⁶ In June, Kyrgyz authorities uncovered a major plot in Bishkek, leading to the arrest of 15 IS-linked suspects. According to investigations, an ISK commander in Afghanistan recruited the cell's leader online, following instructions to recruit young Kyrgyz in the country to carry out an attack.⁵⁷ A month later, Kyrgyz security forces dismantled a cell that had been planning to carry out several coordinated attacks in the country. The five-man team was found in possession of large quantities of weapons, ammunition and drones. They also had a duplicate of a military ID of a member of parliament, highlighting their intention to attack key institutions.⁵⁸ Pictures published by the State Committee for National Security showed several books relating to

religious ideology; the Committee stated that the group was following “religious ideology with fanaticism”.⁵⁹

Similar to other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan set up a new action plan within the Ministry of Interior to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies, specifically in the online realm, stretching to 2027.⁶⁰

In addition to the dismantling of militant cells, Kyrgyzstan continued crackdowns on other banned religious organisations, including Hizb ut-Tahrir and Yakyn Inkar (considered a Tablighi Jamaat offshoot), banned in 2003 and 2018, respectively. Several arrests were carried out throughout the country targeting individuals involved in criminal activities – such as the forgery of official documents and IDs – as well as ordinary people following conservative religious movements.⁶¹ These actions have been part of Kyrgyzstan’s attempts to exercise direct control over the practice of religion within the country, which has encountered resistance from the more traditionalist fringes of society.

Finally, Kyrgyzstan followed Kazakhstan’s example by removing the Afghan Taliban from its list of banned organisations. In June 2024, Kazakhstan removed the Taliban regime from its terrorist list based on the understanding of the importance of developing economic and security cooperation.⁶² Similarly, Kyrgyzstan took the same decision to strengthen regional stability and cooperation.⁶³ This follows the enhanced cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, pointing to the common interest among the three Central Asian countries in developing trade and strengthening security against terrorism.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has no recent history of attacks or destructive plots within the country. However, after the Crocus City Hall attack, it was reported that Turkmenistan tightened control over religious centres and people attending them.⁶⁴ At the same time, like the rest of CARs, Turkmen migrant workers have also been facing harassment in Russia, as they are sometimes suspected of being linked to terrorist organisations, without any proof.⁶⁵

Xinjiang

The situation in Xinjiang remained generally stable during 2024, with China inaugurating a new phase of counter terrorism measures focused on “social stability” in the autonomous province.⁶⁶

However, the anti-state Uyghur jihadist organisation, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), remains active in the Idlib area of Syria and in Afghanistan, although in hiding. Throughout the year, TIP’s deputy leader, Ustad Abdul Salam, continued to publish different audio messages, from the importance of jihad to criticism of China’s government over the treatment of the Uyghur population.⁶⁷ On June 16, on the occasion of Eid, TIP’s chief Abdul Haq also issued an audio message congratulating TIP militants, their families and the Uyghur people, while also reaffirming the importance of continuing a long-term struggle against China.⁶⁸ In 2024, TIP also went through an important reformation concerning its Syrian branch. On March 24, Abdul Haq, together with the Central Shura Commission, issued a statement arguing that while TIP had been established in Afghanistan, the group has now achieved a full-fledged organisational branch in Syria, acknowledging Abu Omar Kawthar as the Syrian branch’s head and appointing Shaykh Toubia and Zahid Qari as deputies, with the latter also being the military commander of the group in Syria. The statement also reaffirmed the group’s commitment to fight for the “liberation” of Turkistan from Syria and Afghanistan.⁶⁹

While the Afghan branch and its central leadership have been shy of appearing online since 2022, the Syrian branch publishes daily pictures and videos of its members in Idlib and neighbouring areas,

performing various activities from military training and operations against Damascus' troops, to engaging the local population in social activities, openly displaying its top cadres.

Xinjiang also remains a key topic of discussion among other jihadist factions as well as jihadist ideologues. In 2024, ISK dedicated several issues of its English- and Pashto-language magazines, the *Voice of Khorasan* and *Khorasan Ghag*, to criticising the Afghan Taliban's relations with China over the treatment of Uyghur people in Xinjiang.⁷⁰ Separately, pro-AQ jihadist ideologue Mufti Abu Zar al-Burmi also delivered a sermon in the Uzbek language in June, addressing the Uyghur population in Xinjiang and the rest of Central Asia.⁷¹

Outlook

From a global perspective, Central Asia is rapidly becoming a regional and international hotspot for jihadist recruitment and funding activities. There is a distinct divide between the security situation in Central Asian countries and the disproportionate involvement of Central Asian individuals in terrorist attacks and activities abroad.

In 2024, Central Asian nationals – especially from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – were responsible for some of the major terrorist attacks carried out in multiple countries in the Middle East, Asia and Europe, most of them claimed by IS. At the same time, Central Asian militant organisations have been consolidating their narratives and organisational structures. In Afghanistan, Jamaat Ansarullah operates under the strict control of the Afghan Taliban, but remains free to move around the country, conduct its activities and boost its propaganda narratives. On the other hand, in Syria, TIP has been expanding its organisational structure after receiving direct orders from the central branch in Afghanistan. In the same areas in Syria, a plethora of other Central Asian jihadist mercenary groups, such as the Central Asian Malhama Tactical, the Uzbek Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad and Muhojir Tactical, the Uyghur Yurtugh Tactical and the Kazakh/Tajik Musafeer Tactical, could acquire access to sophisticated weapons and boost their financing.⁷²

In contrast, no major attack occurred in any Central Asian country. However, over the past three years, the threat of instability due to terrorist plots in Central Asian countries has been increasing. The year 2024 saw the detection and dismantling of multiple major attempts and cells, leading to several arrests. There is the potential risk that the panic sparked by the Crocus City Hall attack, coupled with the tightened security measures adopted by Central Asian countries and the persistent propaganda produced by militant organisations, might present the opportunity for individuals who harbour hostile sentiments against Central Asian governments to carry out a successful attack, possibly with the assistance of ISK.

About the Author

Riccardo Valle is a researcher focused on militancy and jihadism in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region. He is the co-founder of *The Khorasan Diary*, an online news and research platform on asymmetric conflict, and can be reached at riccardo.valle@thekhorasandiary.com.

Citations

¹ Raffaello Pantucci, "Central Asia," in *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2024), pp. 79-86.

² Moqim Mehran, "Suicide Attack Targets Taliban Governor's Office in Nimruz Province, Causes Explosion," *Hasht-e Subah*, January 14, 2024, <https://8am.media/eng/suicide-attack-targets-taliban-governors-office-in-nimruz-province-causes-explosion/>; Ibn Sufyan (@IbnSufyan313), "The suicide bomber from his looks a foreigner, most likely Tajik, although his identity is under process...", X, January 14, 2024, <https://x.com/IbnSufyan313/status/1746582162453725544>

- ³ “Arrest of Two Tajik Daesh Members on the Border of Iran and Afghanistan,” *Entekhab*, April 23, 2024, <https://shorturl.at/ZYm32>.
- ⁴ “Heinous: World Reacts to Twin Blasts that Kill Dozens in Iran,” *Al Jazeera*, January 3, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/3/heinous-world-reacts-to-twin-blasts-that-kill-dozens-in-iran>.
- ⁵ “Manhunt for Kerman Terror Attack Elements Expands Abroad: Iran Intelligence Ministry,” *Tasnim News Agency*, January 11, 2024, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2024/01/11/3021346/manhunt-for-kerman-terror-attack-elements-expands-abroad-iran-intelligence-ministry>.
- ⁶ “The Third Notification of the Ministry of Information About the Terrorist Incident in Kerman; The Arrest and Death of a Number of ISIS Leaders,” *Tabnak*, January 19, 2024, <https://shorturl.at/gq5xl>.
- ⁷ “Türkiye Arrests ISIS Members, Including Foreigners, in 2 Security Operations,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, February 21, 2024, <https://english.aawsat.com/world/4868021-t%C3%BCrkiye-arrests-isis-members-including-foreigners-2-security-operations%C2%A0>.
- ⁸ Riccardo Valle and Cagatay Cebe, “How and Why ISIS-K Has Resurged in Turkey,” *Al-Monitor*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/02/how-and-why-isis-k-has-resurged-turkey>.
- ⁹ Utku Simsek, Mustafa Unal Uysal and Yavuz Emrah Sever, “Daesh/ISIS terror Suspect Wanted on Red Notice Nabbed in Central Türkiye,” *Anadolu Agency*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/daesh-isis-terror-suspect-wanted-on-red-notice-nabbed-in-central-turkiye/3131751>.
- ¹⁰ Peter Smith, Levent Kemal and Lucas Webber, “Islamic State Khorasan’s Westward Network Expansion into Iran, Turkey, and Europe,” *The Diplomat*, April 30, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/islamic-state-khorasans-westward-network-expansion-into-iran-turkey-and-europe/>.
- ¹¹ “Treasury Targets ISIS-Linked Human Smuggling Network in Coordinated Action with Türkiye,” *United States Department of the Treasury*, June 14, 2024, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2406>.
- ¹² “Moscow Court Arrests Tenth Defendant in Crocus Attack Case: He Is Accused of Paying Rent for Terrorist Attack Participants,” *Currenttime*, April 1, 2024, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/krokus-arest-figuranta/32886613.html>.
- ¹³ Riccardo Valle and Cagatay Cebe, “From Russia to Iran and Turkey: Understanding Rise, Narrative of ISIS-K,” *Al-Monitor*, March 30, 2024, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/03/russia-iran-and-turkey-understanding-rise-narrative-isis-k>.
- ¹⁴ “Court Arrests 18 People in Crocus Terror Attack Case,” *Lenta.ru*, June 1, 2024, <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/06/01/sud-arestoval-18-chelovek-po-delu-o-terakte-v-krokuse/>.
- ¹⁵ “Rosfinmonitoring Reported the Involvement of an International Team in the Terrorist Attack at Crocus,” *Lenta.ru*, July 16, 2024, <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/07/16/rosfinmonitoring-soobschil-o-prichastnosti-internatsionalnoy-komandy-k-teraktu-v-krokuse/>.
- ¹⁶ “The Dream of Kafir Dost and the Militia,” *Al-Hadid Media*, August 2024, pp. 32-33.
- ¹⁷ “Al-Naba Newsletter,” No. 450, July 4, 2024, <https://ijihadology.net/2024/07/04/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-450/>.
- ¹⁸ Amira Jadoon et al., “From Tajikistan to Moscow and Iran: Mapping the Local and Transnational Threat of Islamic State Khorasan,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2024), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/from-tajikistan-to-moscow-and-iran-mapping-the-local-and-transnational-threat-of-islamic-state-khorasan/>.
- ¹⁹ “TKD MONITORING: ISKP Magazine (Sadoi Khuroson) Issue 1,” *The Khorasan Diary*, March 29, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/03/29/tkd-monitoring-iskp-magazine-sadoi-khuroson-issue-1>.
- ²⁰ “TKD MONITORING: ISKP Magazine (Sadoi Khuroson) Issue 2,” *The Khorasan Diary*, June 27, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/06/27/tkd-monitoring-iskp-magazine-sadoi-khuroson-issue-2>.
- ²¹ “TKD MONITORING: ISKP Publishes First Ever Book on Tajikistan Seeking to Attract New Recruits,” *The Khorasan Diary*, March 7, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/03/07/tkd-monitoring-iskp-publishes-first-ever-book-on-tajikistan-seeking-to-attract-new-recruits>.
- ²² “TKD MONITORING: Pro-ISKP Mubarizeen Media Discusses Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Their Governments,” *The Khorasan Diary*, June 10, 2024, <https://thekhorasandiary.com/en/2024/06/10/tkd-monitoring-pro-iskp-mubarizeen-media-discusses-tajikistan-uzbekistan-and-their-governments>.
- ²³ Towheed TV, “Inviters to Hell,” Episodes 2 and 8, *Telegram*, May 14; Idlib Bahori, “What is the Verdict of Sadiq Samarkandi and Abdullah Zufar?” *Telegram*.
- ²⁴ Jadoon et al., “From Tajikistan to Moscow and Iran.”
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Xuroson Ovozi, “New Immigrant Jafar,” *Telegram*, March 4, 2024; Xuroson Ovozi, “New Immigrant Zubayr,” *Telegram*, February 23, 2024.
- ²⁷ Valle and Cebe, “How and Why ISIS-K.”
- ²⁸ Mona Thakkar and Anne Speckhard, “Islamic State’s Global Financial Networks: Cryptocurrency and European Bank Transfers Fund Detained IS Women and Incarcerated IS Fighters in Syria, Furthering Militant Objectives,” *ICSVE*, May 17, 2024, <https://icsve.org/islamic-states-global-financial-networks-cryptocurrency-and-european-bank-transfers-fund-detained-is-women-and-incarcerated-is-fighters-in-syria-furthering-militant-objectives/>.
- ²⁹ Ivashkiv Olena, “Media Outlets Find Crypto Wallet of ISIS Tajikistan Wing Used to Transfer Payment for Terrorist Attack in Moscow Oblast,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/03/29/7448665/>.

- ³⁰ Alouddin Komilov, "How Central Asia Approaches Repatriation and Reintegration from Middle East War Zones," *The Diplomat*, June 18, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/06/how-central-asia-approaches-repatriation-and-reintegration-from-middle-east-war-zones/>.
- ³¹ United Nations Uzbekistan, "First Meeting of the Regional Expert Council in Central Asia on the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees to Be Held in Tashkent," press release, May 9, 2024, <https://uzbekistan.un.org/en/268577-first-meeting-regional-expert-council-central-asia-rehabilitation-and-reintegration>.
- ³² "Representatives of the Regional Expert Council Discussed Work Plans for 2024-2025," *ISRS*, July 26, 2024, <https://isrs.uz/en/yangiliklar/sostoalos-pervoe-zasedanie-rabochih-grupp-regionalnogo-ekspertnogo-soveta-po-voprosam-reabilitacii-i-reintegracii>.
- ³³ "Mirziyoyev's Remarks RATS SCO and ATC CIS Joint Conference," *The Tashkent Times*, September 5, 2024, <https://tashkenttimes.uz/national/13633-mirziyoyev-s-remarks-rats-sco-and-atc-cis-joint-conference>.
- ³⁴ "Tashkent Police Arrest 50 Individuals on Suspicion of Extremism and Terrorism," *Kun.uz*, April 8, 2024, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2024/04/08/tashkent-police-arrest-50-individuals-on-suspicion-of-extremism-and-terrorism>.
- ³⁵ Faranjis Najibullah, "Uzbekistan Cracks Down On 'Religious Extremism' in Aftermath of Moscow Terror Attack," *Radio Free Europe*, April 13, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-crackdown-muslims-crocus-attack/32904040.html>.
- ³⁶ "Asylum Seeker Was Suspected Isis Member Who Lived in the US for Two Years After Crossing Border," *GBN*, May 2, 2024, <https://www.gbnews.com/news/us/asylum-seeker-suspected-isis-member-us-border>.
- ³⁷ "Russian Authorities Detain Foreign National for Recruiting Citizens of Uzbekistan into Terrorist Ranks," *Kun.uz*, August 21, 2024, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2024/08/21/russian-authorities-detain-foreign-national-for-recruiting-citizens-of-uzbekistan-into-terrorist-ranks>.
- ³⁸ "The Riot Police Didn't Even Check the Documents, They Immediately Started to Destroy Everything," *Radio Free Europe*, August 29, 2024, <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/33098253.html>; "Migration Raids in Khabarovsk," *Radio Free Europe*, August 28, 2024, <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/33096563.html>.
- ³⁹ "UPDATED. 3 Acts of Terrorism and 2 Cases of Attempted Terrorism Were Detected in Tajikistan Within Half a Year," *Asia Plus*, August 8, 2024, <https://asiaplustj.info/tj/news/tajikistan/laworder/20240808/dar-toikiston-davomi-nim-sol-3-amali-terrorist-va-2-olati-siasd-ba-terrorizm-oshkor-shudaast>.
- ⁴⁰ "General Alamshozoda on the Prevention of 3 Terrorist Acts...", *Bomdod*, August 8, 2024, <https://www.bomdod.com/2024/08/08/general-alamshozoda-dar-borai-peshgiri-shudani-3-amali-terroristi-bozdoshti-27-sokini-jazgulom-va-afvi-1589-jangjui-tojik-video/>; "110 Cases Against 130 People: The Increase in Cases Related to Terrorism and Extremism in Sughd," *Asia Plus*, August 30, 2024, <https://asiaplustj.info/tj/news/tajikistan/laworder/20240830/110-parvanda-nisbati-130-nafar-afzoishi-parvanda-oi-vobasta-ba-terrorizmu-ekstremizm-dar-sud>.
- ⁴¹ *Bomdod*, "General Alamshozoda."
- ⁴² "Intel Brief: Islamic State Khorasan Determined to Attack in U.S.," *The Soufan Center*, June 19, 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-june-19/>.
- ⁴³ "Ricicla Auto Rubate Per Isis, Nuovo Arresto Per Il Tagiko Considerato "Un Membro Dell'Isis," *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, September 3, 2024, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2024/09/03/ricicla-auto-rubate-per-isis-nuovo-arresto-per-il-tagiko-considerato-un-membro-dellisis/7679260/>.
- ⁴⁴ "Integration of Former Terrorists and Extremists with Society: They Want to Adopt a Special Program in Tajikistan," *Asia Plus*, June 3, 2024, <https://asiaplustj.info/news/tajikistan/security/20240603/amgiroii-sobi-terroristonu-ekstremiston-bo-omea-dar-toikiston-mehoand-barnomai-mahsus-abul-kunand>.
- ⁴⁵ "Ministry of Internal Affairs: If Citizens Voluntarily Refuse to Participate in the Activities of Extremist and Terrorist Groups, They Will Be Released from Criminal Responsibility," *Khovar*, August 8, 2024, <https://khovar.tj/2024/08/vazorati-kor-oi-dohil-dar-surati-1-ihiyoran-dast-kashidani-sha-rvandon-az-ishtirok-dar-faoliyati-gur-oi-ekstremistivu-terrorist-on-o-az-avobgarii-inoyat-ozod-karda-meshavand/>.
- ⁴⁶ "Emomali Rahmon Signed a Law Banning "Clothing That Is Alien to National Culture," *Radio Free Europe*, June 21, 2024, <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/emomali-rahmon-podpisal-zakon-predusmatrivayuschiy-zapret-chuzhdoy-natsionaljnoy-kuljture-odezhdy-/33003469.html>.
- ⁴⁷ Risolat Media, "Message for Sisters," *Telegram*, June 18, 2024; Movarounnahr, "The Enemies of Hijab Are Hypocrites," *Telegram*, May 28, 2024; Mufti Abu Zar Azzam Studio, "Message to Tajikistan on Hijab," *Telegram*, May 2024.
- ⁴⁸ Monitoring of Telegram channel "Sadoi Mujahid" affiliated with Jamaat Ansarullah.
- ⁴⁹ "KNB Announced the "Neutralization" of Groups in Eight Regions of Kazakhstan," *Radio Free Europe*, February 19, 2024, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/32825552.html>.
- ⁵⁰ "The KNB Made Arrests in Astana and Pavlodar," *Tengri News*, May 5, 2024, https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/knb-proizvel-zaderjaniya-v-astane-i-pavlodare-534361/; "Four Suspects in Terrorism Propaganda Detained in Turkestan Region," *Vlast.kz*, June 27, 2024, <https://vlast.kz/novosti/60762-v-turkestanskoj-oblasti-zaderzany-cetvero-podozrevaemyh-v-propagande-terrorizma.html>.
- ⁵¹ "The KNB Detained Radicals in 4 Regions: Among Them a Participant in the Military Actions," *Tengri News*, July 12, 2024, <https://tengrinews.kz/crime/knb-zaderjal-radikalov-4-regionah-sredi-uchastnik-boevyih-541106/>.

- ⁵² “Terrorism Suspects Detained in Three Regions and Almaty,” *Kazakhstan Today*, September 3, 2024, https://www.kt.kz/rus/crime/v_treh_oblastyah_i_almaty_zaderzhali_podozrevaemyh_v_1377968439.html.
- ⁵³ For data on the year 2023, see “Who Has Been Held Responsible for Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan?” *Ranking.kz*, March 2024, <https://ranking.kz/reviews/regions/kogo-v-rk-privlekali-k-otvetstvennosti-za-ekstremizm-i-terrorizm.html>.
- ⁵⁴ “26 People Convicted of Terrorism and Extremism in Kazakhstan Since the Beginning of the Year,” *KazTag*, June 12, 2024, <https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/26-chelovek-osudili-s-nachala-goda-za-terrorizm-i-ekstremizm-v-kazakhstane-01>.
- ⁵⁵ Pantucci, “Central Asia.”
- ⁵⁶ “Kyrgyzstan Foils Terror Attack Attempt,” *Xinhua Net*, December 28, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/asiapacific/20231228/80675a8c1b904ecea91500ca51a5449c/c.html>.
- ⁵⁷ “Suspects of Recruiting Youth for ISIS Detained in Bishkek (Photos and Videos),” *Kaktus Media*, June 14, 2024, https://kaktus.media/doc/503307_v_bishkeke_zaderjali_podozrevaemyh_v_verbovke_molodeji_dlia_ig_foto_i_video.html.
- ⁵⁸ “The State Committee for National Security Confirmed that the Suspects in the Preparation of the Seizure of Power Had a Military ID of a Member of the Parliament and Reported That They Were Preparing Riots,” *Radio Free Europe*, July 6, 2024, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/33024363.html>.
- ⁵⁹ Kyrgyzstan State Committee for National Security (@gknb.official), *Instagram*, July 5, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C9CO8dENC2y/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D.
- ⁶⁰ “How Kyrgyzstan Plans to Combat Extremism and Terrorism,” *VB.kg*, March 28, 2024, https://www.vb.kg/doc/436082_kak_v_kyrgyzstane_planiryut_borotsia_s_ekstremizmom_i_terrorizmom.html.
- ⁶¹ “Foreign Extremists Illegally Obtained Kyrgyz Citizenship. The State Committee for National Security Conducted Searches,” *Kaktus Media*, July 5, 2024, https://kaktus.media/doc/504659_ekstremisty_inostrancy_nezakonno_polychali_grajdanstvo_kyrgyzstana_gknb_pro_vel_obyski.html; “SCNS: Six People Renounced Extremist Ideology of Yakyn Inkar,” *24.kg*, August 29, 2024, https://24.kg/english/303419_scns_six_people_renounced_extremist_ideology_of_yakyn_inkar/.
- ⁶² “Kazakhstan Removed the ‘Taliban’ from the List of Banned Organizations,” *Radio Free Europe*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.azattyk.org/a/32977351.html>.
- ⁶³ “Under What Conditions Does Bishkek Cooperate with the Taliban?” *Radio Free Europe*, September 4, 2024, <https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-talibandy-kara-fizmeden-chygyardy/33109145.html>.
- ⁶⁴ “Turkmen Police Increase Pressure on Religious Muslims,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 25, 2024, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/turkmenskaya-politsiya-usilila-davlenie-na-religioznyh-musulman-32876623.html>.
- ⁶⁵ “Security Forces Conducted Another Raid Among Migrants in the Volgograd Region, the Regional FSB Reports,” *Novosti Volgograd*, September 2, 2024, <https://novostivolgograda.ru/news/2024-09-02/ufsb-ustroilo-oblavu-na-terroristov-sredi-migrantov-v-volgograde-5183146>.
- ⁶⁶ “Senior CPC Official Highlights Counter-Terrorism, Social Stability in Xinjiang,” *Xinhua Net*, May 26, 2024, <https://english.news.cn/20240526/d057540f9bf3428d9593bd403539d918/c.html>.
- ⁶⁷ Ustad Abdul Salam, “Let’s Be Among Those Who Join Us for the Liberation of East Turkistan,” *Telegram*, May 9, 2024.
- ⁶⁸ Abdul Haq Turkistani, “Happy Eid 1445,” *Telegram*, June 16, 2024.
- ⁶⁹ “Decision by Central Shura Council Commission of the Turkistan Islamic Party Issued to Our Group’s Branch in Al-Sham,” *Telegram*, March 24, 2024; United Nations Security Council, *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2734 (2024) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities*, S/2024/556, July 22, 2024.
- ⁷⁰ See, for example, the *Voice of Khorasan*, No. 35 (2024); *Khorasan Ghag*, No. 33 (2024).
- ⁷¹ Mufti Abu Zar Azzam Studio, “Oppressed Turkistan,” *Telegram*, June 2024.
- ⁷² “Militant Enterprises: The Jihadist Private Military Companies of Northwest Syria,” *Syria Justice and Accountability Centre*, May 9, 2024, <https://syriaaccountability.org/militant-enterprises-the-jihadist-private-military-companies-of-northwest-syria/>.

Assessing the Gaza War's Impact on Salafi-Jihadist Messaging in MENA, Following Resistance Axis Losses

Moustafa Ayad

Amidst an all-consuming conflict between Hamas, Hezbollah, Ansar Allah (colloquially known as the Houthis), Iran and Israel, subsuming neighbouring countries over the past year, Salafi-jihadist groups such as the Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda (AQ) and its affiliate Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), have significantly stepped up their messaging and propaganda efforts,¹ in a bid to inspire attacks and would-be plotters globally.² The ability to tap into the zeitgeist around the war in Gaza, Israeli military action,³ high-level assassinations of rival groups⁴ and an increasing civilian casualty count in the tens of thousands,⁵ has not just been a boon for propagandists,⁶ but has also been part and parcel of the co-opting of the Palestinian cause for their messaging for decades.⁷

Trends

The Palestinian Cause

Salafi-jihadist messaging on the Palestinian cause is not new in any sense of the word. Released in 1998, Al-Qaeda (AQ)'s "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders" made Palestine its number three reason to wage jihad against the United States (US). Scholars Thomas Hegghammer and Joas Wagemakers reviewed AQ texts between 1990 and 2002, and found 158 references to Palestine and concluded that it was primarily used as a "motivational mechanism".⁸ Matthew Levitt, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, noted nearly every public statement by Osama bin Laden since 1990 had made reference to Palestine in some shape or form.⁹ This led to one of the group's most vaunted tacticians, Abu Musab al-Suri, claiming bin Laden's use of the Palestinian cause had "advanced jihadism to a new level".¹⁰

Bin Laden and al-Suri were of course comfortable using the Palestinian cause to advance their ideological and strategic aims, just as the Islamic State (IS) and its current leadership have done over the course of 2024.¹¹ Yet, have these efforts led to what al-Suri envisioned in the region as "jihadism at a new level"? If in fact the statement was taken at face value and applied to attacks by IS and AQ in the Middle East and North Africa, the answer would be a no. Both AQ and IS are shells of their former selves in the region, despite a resurgence of attacks by the latter in Syria and Iraq,¹² and the ability of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to hold its ground in Yemen.¹³ Both groups are experiencing strategic successes in Central Asia¹⁴ as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa,¹⁵ including the re-establishment of AQ training camps in Afghanistan under the Taliban's rule and IS' persistent attacks across the Sahel and West Africa. However, a slew of targeted strikes and arrests on IS in Iraq and Syria by the US, Iraq and Turkey have likely tempered some of their capabilities in the region.¹⁶

AQ and IS Exploiting the Gaza War

Regardless, this has not stopped both AQ and IS propaganda arms from messaging around the war in Gaza,¹⁷ launching both online and offline campaigns to inspire lone actors, much of which has emanated from the groups' leadership as well as their numerous official and unofficial propaganda arms. For instance, AQ's supposed leader Sayf al-Adl, believed to be on house arrest in Iran, has produced more than nine instalments of a paper series titled *This is Gaza*, in which he has argued that

“the events in Gaza are the final nail in the coffin of the colonialist, Crusader-Zionist West”.¹⁸ Similarly, AQAP’s leader Khubaib al-Sudani has called for lone-actor attacks in the West, and specifically in the US, in the wake of October 7, which he has compared in terms of significance to the 9/11 attacks.¹⁹ AQAP’s Malahem Media arm has produced more than 80 “Inspire Tweets” amidst these calls,²⁰ referencing Gaza and Israel in calls for attacks in the Middle East and the West.²¹ IS has followed suit, with its spokesman Abu Hudhayfah al-Ansari declaring in March 2024 that in the wake of the war in Gaza the group was to “renew and repeat [it]s incitement for the lone lions to strive intensely to target the Crusaders and Jews in every place”.²² Numerous posters, magazines, articles and videos produced by both IS’ official and unofficial propaganda arms have since called for targeting Western as well as Middle East governments for their complicity in the war.

Much of this messaging has passed through channels affiliated with either AQ or IS networks online, such as Rocket.Chat forums affiliated with the groups, but has similarly appeared on popular social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok. In July 2024, for instance, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) found 55 videos on TikTok featuring AQ and IS ideologues, using a simple randomised search for their names; together, the videos received more than 1.1 million views.²³ IS has not only been focused on propaganda efforts, of course. As the scholar Aaron Zelin noted, there have been 16 IS-linked plots against Israel since October 7, 2023, two of which likely had handlers inside Syria.²⁴ Yet, despite these developments, IS has tempered its own prognosis of attacking Israel directly, as its adversaries, such as Hezbollah and those in the “Axis of Resistance”, continue to face setbacks, stating “it was not the time for an all-out jihadist confrontation with Israel”.²⁵

Iran’s Resistance Axis

While AQ and al-Suri’s vision of jihad may not have reached “new levels” and IS’ continued efforts to incite attacks globally have been tempered in some regards, Iran-aligned armed groups such as Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and the Houthis in Yemen, have seen their messaging and worldviews mainstreamed in the wake of the conflict. Despite significant command structure blows, such as the recent assassination of Yahya Sinwar, the leader of the Hamas government in Gaza, and the deaths of longtime Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and members of the Hezbollah leadership council, the Iran-backed Axis of Resistance, otherwise known as the Resistance Axis, has found its version of jihad worldwide talking points. Even in the face of the assassinations of key ideologues, commanders and strategists linked to Hezbollah and Hamas, these groups continue to experience notable popular support online,²⁶ with hundreds of thousands of views on content grieving for the leadership of both groups and daily exultations with regard to their attacks on Israel.²⁷ Similarly, rocket attacks by the Houthis, Hamas and Hezbollah have yet to subside in the wake of these key losses and seem to have entrenched some of their positions further, despite continued Israeli assaults on both groups.²⁸

Much of this can be attributed to the groups’ direct involvement in the October 7, 2023 attack, in which Hamas launched the largest ever terror attack on Israeli soil, and the subsequent aftermath, along with the phalanxes of accounts spread across social media platforms such as X, Facebook, Telegram and TikTok, as well as the websites linked to the various groups in the Resistance Axis. Following the October 7 attacks, the Telegram accounts for Hamas, the al-Qassam Brigades and its leadership grew by tenfold.²⁹ The Tech Transparency Project found Hezbollah accounts on X – including one attributed to the now deceased Hassan Nasrallah – which were verified by the platform, ultimately prioritising their posts and replies.³⁰ The Houthis’ expansive digital ecosystem includes similarly verified accounts on X with hundreds of thousands of followers.³¹ Thus, these groups’ ability to reach more audiences and grow their respective social media footprints in comparison to AQ and IS, has been incomparable.

Fragile Socio-Political Environment

AQ and IS still see an advantage to messaging in an environment where their messaging is likely drowned out by rival groups, specifically around the perceived complicity or ineffectuality of governments across the region to stop or intervene in the war. This long-standing narrative by both groups seeks to highlight the fragility and incompatibility of regimes in zones of influence such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan. By focusing on *taghut*,³² or “tyrant”, states, the groups hope the ongoing decimation of Gaza spurs attacks on Arab governments that can be leveraged by either group. While that may be where the groups converge in relation to their messaging, they diverge on support for the groups involved in the fighting, most notably Hamas. AQ has embraced Hamas as an extension of itself around the October 7 attack; meanwhile, IS has largely shunned Hamas in lieu of its own ideological “purity”. Instead, IS has sought to position itself as the vanguard of “liberating Palestine”, with a view that both Hamas and AQ are “apostates” for their support from Iran. As scholar Aymenn al-Tamimi noted, “there is no evidence that the Gaza war has brought them nearer to realization of these goals, whether in terms of strengthening the affiliates or bringing the organizations in general a significantly increased level of popular support in the Muslim world”.³³

Even more fragile are the environments where there is direct influence of Resistance Axis groups, given the likelihood of internal conflict amidst power vacuums in groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. As the author, analyst and commentator Hassan Hassan noted, “[Hamas leader] Sinwar's death would not have been as significant had it not been so close to the killing of his predecessor Ismail Haniyeh in July as well as Hezbollah's Nasrallah and almost all key public faces of the Iran axis like Soleimani in 2020. The *optics* is that of an edifice collapsing”.³⁴

Conclusion

Despite these narratives, both AQ and IS face an uphill battle in inspiring “jihadism at a new level” simply because they have been out-messaged and their capacity to message has been degraded by rival groups. Throughout 2024, and likely 2025, the groups will continue to use Palestine as a rhetorical device to spur attacks or further seed their ideological aims. This strategy may spur lone-actor attacks in the West, but it will not shift the narrative landscape in AQ and IS' favour in the face of the Resistance Axis, the latter of which has gained a relatively stronger position regionally with its messaging and high-profile losses in the conflict with Israel. AQ and IS may see Palestine as a means to an end, but their ability to turn that into strategic wins which could alter their respective images regionally has yet to come and likely never will. For now, the idea of “jihadism at a new level” remains out of grasp, even if they claim it is not the case.

As the year rounded out, over 11 days at the end of November and through December 8, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) ran through Bashar al-Assad's forces, as Russian and Iranian-backed armed groups retreated, and Türkiye-backed rebels took over Syria. The move, swift and decisive, ended one of the longest-running authoritarian regimes of the modern Middle East, and dealt another blow to IS and AQ's brand of jihadism, signaling, at least for now, a new era of nationalist and technocratic jihad, framed around the ability to not just fight, but similarly govern. The victory of HTS and aligned rebels was a similarly decisive victory over the Iran-backed militia groups of the Resistance Axis. Just what this holds for the region remains to be unseen.

The Resistance Axis faces an unclear future with command structures obliterated through Israeli military action, though the groups' ability to continue strikes against Israel through the use of drones and rockets continues relatively unabated.³⁵ This capability, coupled with continued messaging in support of the attacks and the daily drumbeat of casualties out of Gaza, have made the groups digital folk heroes with an amalgamation of regional and international support online. The ability to continue this level of pressure on Israel,³⁶ weighed against the civilian death toll in Lebanon and Gaza, remains both a challenge and an opportunity for the groups, who are using the attacks to highlight an inherently

corrupt international order.³⁷ Whether this can translate to support for the Resistance Axis on the ground, beyond its current state of play, is a shaky premise. As shown earlier in 2024 by the Arab Barometer, the long-standing and largest repository of publicly available data on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)'s citizens, support for Iran and its various proxies in the region is not as strong as believed.³⁸ Recent events may challenge this perception. Until then, the groups will continue to use the wars to challenge the prevailing international order and highlight their commitment to fighting Israel as a popular cause rather than a means of survival. What is clear for now is that the region continues to burn, civilians continue to die and destabilisation hangs like a pall over the Middle East.³⁹

About The Author

Moustaafa Ayad is the Executive Director for Africa, the Middle East and Asia (AMEA) at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), headquartered in London, the United Kingdom.

Citations

- ¹ Colin Clarke, Lucas Webber and Peter Smith, "ISKP's Latest Campaign: Expanded Propaganda and External Operations," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, June 27, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/06/27/iskps-latest-campaign-expanded-propaganda-and-external-operations/>; John Hudson, "Gaza War a Recruiting Boon for Terrorists, U.S. Intelligence Shows," *The Washington Post*, July 5, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/07/05/gaza-terrorism-israel-us-intelligence/>.
- ² "US Intelligence Agencies on High Alert After European Terror Attacks," *ABC News*, August 28, 2024, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/video/us-intelligence-agencies-high-alert-after-european-terror-113211642>.
- ³ "Explainer: The Dahiya Doctrine & Israel's Use of Disproportionate Force," *The Institute for Middle East Understanding*, July 31, 2024, <https://imeu.org/article/the-dahiya-doctrine-and-israels-use-of-disproportionate-force>.
- ⁴ Peter Beaumont, "Impact of Hezbollah Assassinations May Take Months to Emerge," *The Guardian*, September 29, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/29/impact-of-hezbollah-assassinations-may-take-months-to-emerge>.
- ⁵ David Gritten, "UN Condemns 'Large Number of Civilian Casualties' in North Gaza," *BBC News*, October 14, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y5zy1vwmlo>.
- ⁶ Caleb Weiss, "Al-Qaeda's North and West African Branches Respond to the Hamas-Led Invasion of Israel," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2023/10/al-qaedas-north-and-west-african-branches-respond-to-the-hamas-led-invasion-of-israel.php>.
- ⁷ Aaron Zelin, "The Gaza War Has Jump-Started a Weakened al-Qaeda," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, October 4, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gaza-war-has-jump-started-weakened-al-qaeda>.
- ⁸ Thomas Hegghammer and Joas Wagemakers, "The Palestine Effect: The Role of Palestinians in the Transnational Jihad Movement," *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 53, No. 3-4 (2013), pp. 281-314, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-5334P0001>.
- ⁹ Matthew Levitt, "Israel as an Al-Qa'ida Target – Sorting Rhetoric From Reality," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (2009), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/israel-as-an-al-qaida-target-sorting-rhetoric-from-reality/>. Bin Laden, now dead for almost 15 years, had told his daughter back in 1986 that "we ought to strike inside America" because of Palestine. See Nelly Lahoud, *The Bin Laden Papers: How the Abbottabad Raid Revealed the Truth about al-Qaeda, Its Leader and His Family* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), p. 124.
- ¹⁰ Lahoud, *The Bin Laden Papers*, p. 124.
- ¹¹ Aymenn al-Tamimi, "In the Time of the Massacre – Islamic State Editorial on Gaza and Jihad," *Aymenn's Monstrous Publications*, August 28, 2024, <https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/in-the-time-of-the-massacre-islamic>; Samar Batrawi, "What ISIS Talks About When It Talks About Palestine," *Foreign Affairs*, October 28, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2015-10-28/what-isis-talks-about-when-it-talks-about-palestine>.
- ¹² Abbas Kadhim, "ISIS Fell, but the Conditions That Created the Terrorist Group Still Exist in Iraq," *The Atlantic Council*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/iraq-isis-corruption-economy-mosul/>.
- ¹³ Tom Joscelyn, "Wake Up Call: UN Security Council's Report on ISIS and al-Qaeda," *Just Security*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.justsecurity.org/98429/security-council-report-isis-qaeda/>.
- ¹⁴ Vibhu Mishra, "UN Counter-Terrorism Chief Highlights Da'esh Surge, Calling for Global Action," *United Nations – UN News*, August 8, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/08/1152986>.

- ¹⁵ Caleb Weiss, "Analysis: Al Qaeda's Da'wah Campaign in West Africa," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 19, 2024, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/10/analysis-al-qaedas-dawah-campaign-in-west-africa.php>.
- ¹⁶ United States Central Command, "Iraqi Security Forces Target, Kill Multiple Senior ISIS Members, With Support From CJTF-OIR Forces," press release, October 23, 2024, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3943013/iraqi-security-forces-target-kill-multiple-senior-isis-members-with-support-fro/>; United States Central Command, "Iraqi Security Forces, Partnered with Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, Conduct Targeted Strike that Killed Senior ISIS Leader," press release, October 18, 2024, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3939218/iraqi-security-forces-partnered-with-combined-joint-task-force-operation-inhere/>; United States Central Command, "U.S. Central Command Conducts Airstrikes Against Multiple ISIS Camps in Syria," press release, October 12, 2024, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3934398/us-central-command-conducts-airstrikes-against-multiple-isis-camps-in-syria/>; "Suspect Linked to Daesh Bomb-Making Arrested in Istanbul," *Turkiye Today*, October 21, 2024, <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/turkiye/suspect-linked-to-daesh-bomb-making-arrested-in-istanbul-68057/>.
- ¹⁷ Christopher Wray, "Director Wray's Remarks at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point," *Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)*, March 4, 2024, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/director-wrays-remarks-at-west-point>.
- ¹⁸ Kevin Jackson (@alleyesonjihad), "Two days ago, al-Qa'ida central released a new piece by Sayf al-Adl. This is the 9th installment in his writing series titled 'This is Gaza'," X, July 18, 2024, <https://x.com/alleyesonjihad/status/1813949009586966959>.
- ¹⁹ Elisabeth Kendall (@Dr_E_Kendall), "#AlQaeda in #Yemen marks 9/11 anniversary with new 35-minute video featuring Ibrahim al-Qusi; Stresses parallels between 9/11 & 7Oct attack on #Israel; Casts America as Enemy no.1..." X, September 11, 2024, https://x.com/Dr_E_Kendall/status/1833852933475057838.
- ²⁰ "Al-Qaeda's 'Inspire Tweets' Continue Comparison Between 9/11 and 7 October," *BBC Monitoring*, September 15, 2024, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/b0002e4o>.
- ²¹ Ahmad Mukhtar, "The Taliban Vowed to Cut Ties With al Qaeda, But the Terror Group Appears to Be Growing in Afghanistan," *CBS News*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-al-qaeda-growing/>.
- ²² Aymenn al-Tamimi, "New Speech by Islamic State Spokesman Abu Hudhayfa al-Ansari: 'By God this matter will be fulfilled'," *Aymenn's Monstrous Publications*, March 30, 2024, https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/new-speech-by-islamic-state-spokesman-c7c?utm_source=publication-search.
- ²³ Moustafa Ayad, "The 'Original Sounds' of Terrorist Leaders: A TikTok Feature Enables Terrorist Content to Flourish," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, July 18, 2024, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-original-sounds-of-terrorist-leaders-a-tiktok-feature-enables-terrorist-content-to-flourish/.
- ²⁴ Aaron Zelin (@azelin), "5 Israelis linked to ISIS arrested for plotting car-bombing of Tel Aviv's Azrieli Mall https://timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/5-israelis-arrested-for-plotting-car-bombing-of-tel-aviv-azrieli-mall-linked-to-isis/..." X, October 10, 2024, <https://x.com/azelin/status/1844371036822962637>.
- ²⁵ Mina al-Lami (@MinaLami), "2/ The group said the time was not right now for an all-out jihadist confrontation against Israel, and that until then, 'Muslims' need to focus on fighting the Shia as well as 'apostate' armies in the..." X, September 27, 2024, <https://x.com/Minalami/status/1839654364576727343>.
- ²⁶ Omar Abdel-Baqi and Summer Said, "In Death, Hamas Leader May Have Won Wider Support Than When He Was Alive," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/in-death-hamas-leader-may-have-won-wider-support-than-when-he-was-alive-7d3b5ef5>.
- ²⁷ Simon Speakman Cordall and AJLabs, "How Does Hezbollah Function – And What Arsenal Does It Have?," *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/10/1/how-does-hezbollah-function-and-what-arsenal-does-it-have>.
- ²⁸ Seth Franzen, "Hezbollah Continues to Fire Large Barrages of Rockets at Israel," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/10/hezbollah-continues-to-fire-large-barrages-of-rockets-at-israel.php>.
- ²⁹ Donie O'Sullivan and Brian Fung, "Hamas' Social Media Following Has Skyrocketed Since Its Attack. America Is Powerless to Stop It," *CNN*, October 17, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/16/tech/hamas-telegram/index.html>.
- ³⁰ "X Provides Premium Perks to Hezbollah, Other U.S.-Sanctioned Groups," *Tech Transparency Project*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/x-provides-premium-perks-to-hezbollah-other-us-sanctioned-groups>.
- ³¹ "The Houthi (Ansar Allah) Digital Ecosystem," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, May 28, 2024, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-houthi-ansar-allah-digital-ecosystem/.
- ³² Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Islamic State Editorial on Media and the Masses," *Aymenn's Monstrous Publications*, February 11, 2022, https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/islamic-state-editorial-on-media?utm_source=publication-search.

³³ Aymenn al-Tamimi, "The Problem With 'Return of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda' Media Stories," *Aymenn's Monstrous Publications*, October 18, 2024, <https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/the-problem-with-return-of-the-islamic>.

³⁴ Hassan Hassan (@hxhassan), "Sinwar's death wouldn't have been as significant had it not been so close to the killing of his predecessor Ismail Haniyeh in July as well as Hezbollah's Nasrallah...", X, October 17, 2024, <https://x.com/hxhassan/status/1846911962258559096>.

³⁵ Seth Frantzman, "Multi-Front Drone Threats Against Israel Increase," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/10/multi-front-drone-threats-against-israel-increase.php>.

³⁶ Paul Millar, "Israel's Attacks Have Devastated Hezbollah. How Is It Still Fighting Back?" *France24*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20241024-israel-s-attacks-have-devastated-hezbollah-how-is-it-still-fighting-back>.

³⁷ Patrick Wintour, "Iran Calls Missile Attack on Israel 'Legal, Rational and Legitimate'," *The Guardian*, October 1, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/01/iran-calls-missile-attack-on-israel-legal-rational-and-legitimate>.

³⁸ Barometer Wave VII (2022-2023) revealed that few citizens in Sudan (30 percent), Lebanon (24 percent), Mauritania (23 percent), Iraq (16 percent) and Jordan (six percent) agreed with the statement, "It is good for the Arab region that Hezbollah is getting involved in regional politics". See Salma Al-Shami, "Iran's Position on Palestine Is Not Enough to Win the Favor of MENA Citizens," *Arab Barometer*, July 31, 2024,

<https://www.arabbarometer.org/2024/07/irans-position-on-palestine-is-not-enough-to-win-the-favor-of-mena-citizens/>

³⁹ Nassim Badani, "Israel Killed Nasrallah. Lebanon Will Burn Because of It," *New Lines Magazine*, October 21, 2024, <https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/israel-killed-nasrallah-lebanon-will-burn-because-of-it/>. "For Nasrallah, protecting the Assad regime was essential for maintaining the Axis of Resistance against Israel. That axis, which linked Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and allied militias, has been the backbone of anti-Israeli efforts in the region for decades. Without Assad, the axis crumbles. Without Nasrallah, it may collapse entirely." See Hassan Hassan and Kareem Shaheen, "End of an Era: What Hassan Nasrallah's Assassination Spells for the Middle East," *New Lines Magazine*, September 28, 2024, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/end-of-an-era-what-hassan-nasrallahs-assassination-spells-for-the-middle-east/>.

Africa

Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Nigeria

Atta Barkindo

Africa has taken centre stage in global discussions on terrorism, marked by increasingly complex patterns of violence and political instability. The continent's prominence in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) reflects this reality, as African countries dominate the rankings due to a surge in terrorist activities. The GTI, which assesses terrorism's global impact based on incidents, fatalities, injuries and property damage, shows that nations such as Somalia, Nigeria and Burkina Faso rank among the most severely affected by violent extremism. This article examines current developments in the terrorism and counter terrorism landscape in Africa, looking at the threat and impact of terrorism, government responses and future trends.

Domestic Threat Landscape in Africa

Impact of Military Coups

In West Africa, the rise in terrorism has coincided with a troubling trend of military coups. This undermines political structures and democratic norms. Countries like Mali, Chad and Niger have experienced coups in recent years, which continue to shake confidence in the future of democracy. For instance, Mali faced two military coups in 2020 and 2021, which exacerbated its security and governance crises. Similarly, Chad's military takeover in 2021 and Niger's coup in 2023 indicate an ominous shift towards authoritarianism, casting doubt on the region's democratic resilience. Other nations, such as Burkina Faso and Guinea, have also faced military upheavals which signify a broader regional challenge that intertwines political fragility and escalating terrorist threats.

Islamic State (IS) Affiliates and Activities

The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group's expansion across Africa through various provinces highlights the group's strategic adaptation and regional embedding via its ability to leverage local conflicts and weak governance to consolidate power. Each so-called province represents a unique facet of IS' diverse approach to extending its ideological and operational influence across the continent.¹ This is predicated on three stages of interaction: terrorists' coexistence, cooperation and convergence into a single group.

The estimated number of fighters within the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region remains a subject of fluctuation. However, the group is believed to maintain a strength of an approximately² 3,500 to 5,000 fighters as of 2020.³ Despite the uncertainty, this number represents a substantial segment of ISWAP's operatives in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, where it remains the most potent insurgent force.⁴ In June 2024, the north-eastern Nigerian region of Gwoza in Borno State witnessed a deadly resurgence of suicide bombings, attributed to Boko Haram. Coordinated attacks by female suicide bombers targeted high-profile civilian locations such as wedding ceremonies, a funeral and a hospital where victims from the earlier explosions were receiving treatment. These attacks killed at least 30 people and left many injured. This marks a return of female suicide bombing tactics after several years of relative quiet from such strategies in the region. Although the history of Boko Haram remains contested, the terror group became increasingly violent after the death of its founder, Mohammed Yusuf, in 2009.⁵ In 2016, it split due to ideological differences, which led to the creation of ISWAP.⁶ While Boko Haram under Shekau continued to unleash indiscriminate violence, ISWAP led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi focused on targeting the military and the government.

Boko Haram and ISWAP have continued to pose threats by regrouping and launching sporadic attacks.⁷ The latest attack in the country was reported in October 2024, where about 40 soldiers were killed in Barkaram. Though the location of the attack was near the Nigeria-Niger border, an area where jihadist militants are known to be active, the statement from the Chadian authority did not name any suspects in the attack.

As of 2024, the so-called Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel)⁸ is reported to have increased efforts to gain support in building its fighting capacity, with its concentration in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.⁹ Recent IS-Sahel attacks reflect a strategic modus operandi that includes ambushes on military convoys, assaults on outposts and kidnappings.¹⁰ Notably, in 2023, IS-Sahel claimed responsibility for a series of high-profile attacks in the Liptako-Gourma region, including a deadly ambush on Nigerien forces that resulted in dozens of fatalities. The group has also exploited political upheaval in Niger following the 2023 coup, intensifying attacks near the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger border. The expansion of violent extremism in the Sahel has been attributed to persistent weak governance, characterised by corruption, democratic backsliding, legitimacy deficits and human rights violations.¹¹

The IS-Sinai Province (IS-SP), primarily based in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, has launched multiple attacks on Egyptian military and police forces, including an attack in January 2024 on a security checkpoint in Rafah that killed several officers.¹² IS-SP has also targeted critical infrastructure, such as pipelines supplying natural gas to Israel and Jordan, which emphasises its tactic of striking both military and economic targets.¹³ IS-SP's operations underscore its adaptability and the group's strategic role within the broader IS network, using local insurgency tactics to promote IS' regional ambitions.

The Islamic State Algeria Province (IS-Algeria), originally formed as Jund al-Khilafah fi Ard al-Jazair, a breakaway faction from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), pledged allegiance to IS in 2014. While its operations have been less significant compared to other so-called provinces, the existence of IS in Algeria highlights how the terror group has sought to penetrate North African jihadist movements by integrating splinter groups with shared ideological commitments.¹⁴

In Congo, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which rebranded under IS, was responsible for over 1,000 civilian deaths in 2023 in the eastern region of the country, marking it as a severe threat to local populations. Employing brutal tactics such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), kidnappings and mass killings, the ADF continues to destabilise both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).¹⁵ Notably, the group was implicated in the June 2023 Lhubirira Secondary School massacre in Uganda, where 42 people, mostly students, were killed. Additionally, in January 2024, an ADF bomb attack during a church service in eastern DRC killed 12 and injured around 50.¹⁶ Despite sustained military operations against the ADF, including joint Ugandan and Congolese efforts, the group has been resilient in adapting its tactics and maintaining its operational capacity.

Overall, the formation of these IS provinces demonstrates a strategic shift from centralised operations in the Middle East to more decentralised, localised insurgencies across Africa. IS has managed to embed itself in this region by integrating with or absorbing pre-existing groups and exploiting regional instabilities. This makes it a persistent and adaptive threat. Consequently, this evolution requires nuanced, context-specific responses that address both security and the underlying socio-economic drivers of extremism in Africa.

Al-Qaeda (AQ) Affiliates

Recent estimates of Al-Shabaab's fighting capacity in Somalia range between 7,000 and 12,000 fighters.¹⁷ Al-Shabaab reportedly draws new fighters from recruitment campaigns, often fuelled by political grievances and leveraging local clan dynamics. For instance, in early 2024, Al-Shabaab called for opposition to Ethiopia's influence in the region, which attracted recruits motivated by nationalistic sentiments. Despite ongoing counter terrorism efforts by Somali forces and international allies, including the United States (US) and the African Union Transition Mission in

Somalia (ATMIS), Al-Shabaab continues to exert control over parts of south and central Somalia, where it enforces its taxation and governance. Notably, in June 2024, the group launched a large-scale assault on El Dher in Galgadud, killing dozens of Somali soldiers and briefly seizing control of the area, before being repelled by Somali forces with the assistance of US airstrikes.¹⁸ In addition to this major offensive, Al-Shabaab has targeted public spaces in urban areas, as seen with the August 17 bombing at a tea shop in Mogadishu, which injured and killed several civilians.¹⁹

Furthermore, there have been clashes between Al-Shabaab and IS operatives in Somalia's Puntland region. Casualties were significant in 2023.²⁰ Sources indicate that in March 2023 alone, at least 40 militants from both sides were killed. These confrontations intensified as IS claimed further attacks, especially in the Balidhidin district, with ongoing skirmishes and ambushes throughout the year. IS' statements suggest that the campaign left over 200 Al-Shabaab members dead or wounded by the end of 2023.

Apart from Al-Shabaab, another AQ affiliate, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), a prominent jihadist group based in Mali, remains active. It also operates in Burkina Faso and Niger.²¹ In Burkina Faso, on September 4, 2023, JNIM conducted an attack on a military unit in the Koumbri area, killing 17 soldiers and wounding 36 members of the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP), a local volunteer defence group. The attack also left at least 30 others injured.²² Three days later, the group struck again in the Tombouctou Region of Mali, carrying out an attack on a riverboat near Abakoira causing the deaths of at least 49 civilians.

The Lukurawa – A New Terrorist Group

A new terrorist group in Nigeria, the Lukurawa (or “Lakurawas”) emerged in the north-western part of the country, with active operations in several areas, including Sokoto and Kebbi States.²³ Declared a terrorist organisation by the Nigerian Defence Headquarters on November 7, 2024, the Lukurawa is believed to have been formed from factions of herding communities along the Nigeria-Niger border.²⁴ Initially identified around 2018 as a group of about 200 nomadic herders from Niger Republic, they were considered non-violent by local authorities despite suspicions of heavy armament.²⁵ However, recent developments, including violent confrontations and ideological shifts, have led the Nigerian Defence Headquarters to declare the Lukurawa a terrorist organisation with connections to Sahel-based jihadist networks, particularly in Mali and Niger.²⁶

The group has been involved in deadly attacks on rural communities, including a recent violent incident in Mera village, Kebbi State, which left 15 people dead. The Lukurawa aligns with extremist Salafi-jihadist ideologies, aiming to establish *shariah* law in areas under its control. It operates with a combination of local grievances and religious ideological motives. The group has deployed sophisticated weaponry in target areas in north-western Nigeria, which is already struggling with banditry.²⁷ According to reports, the group uses financial inducement as part of its recruitment strategy, offering as high as NGN one million (SGD 799) to youth willing to join.²⁸ The group's current targets include government security forces, other armed vigilante groups and rival terrorist factions, while civilians are largely spared and encouraged to adopt radical Islamist practices that the group claims align with divine law. Lukurawa fighters often preach about payment of alms (*zakat*) and obedience to their ideological principles.

Increase in Terrorism-Related Deaths

Sub-Saharan Africa now has the highest number of terrorism-related deaths compared to any other region. For the past seven years, the region has consistently reported the most fatalities.²⁹ For instance, on August 24, 2024, jihadists linked to AQ killed hundreds in a single day near Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso.³⁰ The country now tops the Global Terrorism Index, with 1,907 terrorism-related deaths in 2024, accounting for a quarter of all such fatalities worldwide. These fatalities and incidents are a result of the continuous expansion of terrorist groups in the region, which poses profound implications for stability and peace in Africa, making it crucial to understand these emerging trends and address their root causes. Meanwhile, Niger recorded 676 deaths from 153 attacks in 2024.

Overall, the principal perpetrators behind these alarming figures are a mix of well-known and splinter extremist factions. Boko Haram and ISWAP remain dominant in Nigeria and parts of Niger, while JNIM, an AQ-affiliated coalition, operates extensively in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Responses

Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK), launched in April 2021, is an ongoing Nigerian military campaign targeting ISWAP and Boko Haram insurgencies across north-eastern Nigeria. As part of a strategic shift from earlier operations, OPHK combines air and ground forces to weaken insurgent strongholds, improve territorial security and restore civilian authority in affected regions, particularly Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States. With support from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), OPHK seeks to protect vulnerable communities, reclaim territories and curb cross-border terrorist activities across the Lake Chad Basin.

On May 9, 2024, OPHK handed over Lydia Simon, a rescued Chibok schoolgirl, along with her three children, to the Borno State government in Maiduguri. Lydia's release marked a continuation of successful rescue efforts under OPHK aimed at reuniting former Boko Haram captives with their families – this comes 10 years after Boko Haram abducted 276 female students at Government Girls Secondary School in Borno State, north-eastern Nigeria.³¹

In September 2024, OPHK forces killed eight Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters in a focused assault within Borno State. The mission also led to the release of 16 hostages and the recovery of significant arms and ammunition from the insurgents. Through sustained operations like these, OPHK has not only inflicted casualties on insurgent ranks, but has also worked to dismantle logistics hubs, recover territories and rescue hostages.

Operation Safe Corridor is a Nigerian government initiative focused on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former Boko Haram fighters who voluntarily surrender. The programme began in 2016 and is carried out primarily in north-eastern Nigeria, particularly in Borno State, where Boko Haram and ISWAP have historically been active. The initiative is overseen by the Nigerian Defence Headquarters in collaboration with state governments and local authorities.

The programme has recorded relative success, with some former insurgents contributing valuable intelligence and fostering local peace-building. The main rehabilitation camp for Operation Safe Corridor is in Gombe State, where former insurgents undergo vocational training, psychological counselling and religious reorientation.³² In 2023, around 600 former fighters completed the rehabilitation process at the Gombe camp and were reintegrated into their communities. This reintegration process includes handing over rehabilitated individuals to local authorities and community leaders, who play a role in monitoring their progress and ensuring a smooth transition into society. However, significant challenges persist, particularly scepticism and resistance from affected communities.

Niger's Operation Almahaou was launched in 2020 as a response to increasing attacks by Islamic State in the Sahel (also referred to as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, or ISGS), particularly in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions near the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso. However, insurgent groups adapted to the offensive by moving across borders and employing mobile and decentralised tactics. Niger also partnered with France's counter terrorism initiative, Operation Barkhane, which spans the Sahel region, including Mali and Burkina Faso. As of 2024, Niger's partnership with France, particularly in terms of military collaboration, significantly changed due to political upheaval and shifting alliances.³³ French troops, particularly under Operation Barkhane, had provided substantial support to Sahelian countries through anti-terror efforts, including surveillance, intelligence and combat training.³⁴

With French troops now absent from Niger, local forces face a heavier security burden, potentially weakening Niger's ability to contain extremist violence and cross-border insurgencies. The withdrawal leaves a vacuum that international players, such as Russia, are likely to exploit. The

Wagner Group, a Russian paramilitary organisation, has already established a presence in Mali and the Central African Republic, and there are indications that some Sahelian nations are considering or have already accepted Wagner support to bolster their militaries. However, the effectiveness of the Wagner Group in counter terrorism remains uncertain, as their approach differs from French and Western methods, focusing instead on direct financial gains from local resources (e.g., mining).

Challenges in Counter Terrorism

Political instability remains one of the most significant obstacles to effective counter terrorism in the Sahel. This is marked by a series of coups and changes in leadership. For instance, Mali experienced coups in August 2020 and May 2021, which resulted in the removal of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and subsequent leadership changes. In a similar pattern, Niger faced a coup in July 2023, which deposed President Mohamed Bazoum and led to the suspension of military partnerships with Western allies. These disruptions prevent long-term policy implementation and hamper the consistent execution of counter terrorism strategies.

Additionally, while regional bodies such as the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF have been crucial frameworks for joint military actions, their efficacy has been limited by coordination issues and a lack of resources. The G5 Sahel (which includes Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad) has struggled with unified leadership and financial constraints. This lack of cohesive action became more pronounced after Mali's withdrawal from the G5 Sahel in 2022, which weakened the coalition's ability to launch coordinated operations.

Finally, while the US government says it has provided more than US\$1.9 billion since the start of 2024 to support counter terrorism measures, the ability of Sahelian nations to conduct sustained counter terrorism operations is severely hindered by insufficient military resources and logistical support.³⁵ For instance, the withdrawal of the US military base in Niger following the cancellation of a security agreement with the military government in 2023 has significant implications for Niger's internal security, particularly its counter terrorism strategies.³⁶ Furthermore, with the end of this agreement, the US has lost a key intelligence-gathering hub and a direct operational presence in West Africa. Similarly, without such an agreement, Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to face limitations in training and resources, which will hinder the effectiveness of their security forces.

Outlook

Africa is increasingly recognised as a continent severely affected by terrorism, with a significant proportion of the world's deadliest attacks occurring within its borders. This reflects a grim reality where extremist violence has become a central challenge to security and stability in the region. The proliferation of terrorist groups, coupled with political instability characterised by military coups and weakened governance structures, exacerbate the situation. This trend indicates that without a comprehensive approach addressing both immediate security concerns and the underlying socio-economic grievances, the threat of terrorism in Africa is likely to persist and even escalate, posing profound implications for regional and global security.

About the Author

Fr Atta Barkindo is a Security & Terrorism Expert on Africa with a specialty in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions. He has consulted for and held several research positions at various institutions across the world. He sits on the board of the Africa Research Institute, London. He can be reached at atta.kind06@gmail.com.

Citations

- ¹ Erik Alda and Joseph L. Sala, "Links Between Terrorism, Organized Crime and Crime: The Case of the Sahel Region," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2014), pp. 1-9, <https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.ea>.
- ² Tomás F. Husted, "Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province," *Congressional Research Service*, March 26, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10173/8>.
- ³ "Analyst: ISWAP's Momentum Unlikely to Be Stalled by Recent Loss of Members," *Africa Defence Forum*, May 28, 2024, <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/05/analyst-iswaps-momentum-unlikely-to-be-stalled-by-recent-loss-of-members/>.
- ⁴ Luminous Jannamike, "Nigeria's Recurring Nightmare: The Return of Suicide Bombings," *Vanguard*, July 13, 2024, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/07/nigerias-recurring-nightmare-the-return-of-suicide-bombings/>.
- ⁵ Anwar Auwalu, "From Maitatsine to Boko Haram: Examining the Socio-Economic Circumstances of Religious Crisis in Northern Nigeria" (unpublished paper, March 2013), p. 40.
- ⁶ See *Dabiq* (2015), pp. 14-16.
- ⁷ Natasha Booty, "Attack on Chad Military Base Kills at Least 40 Soldiers," *BBC News*, October 28, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz7wqqvq2vo>.
- ⁸ Reports have shown that ISGS is an affiliate of this group and attacks by the group are often attributed to IS-Sahel.
- ⁹ Clayton Thomas and Abigail G. Martin, "The Islamic State: Background, Current Status, and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, May 6, 2024, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/terror/IF10328.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Liam Karr, "Africa File, August 29, 2024: North African Competition in the Sahel; Libya on the Edge; Burkina Faso is Spiralling," *Institute for the Study of War*, August 29, 2024, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/africa-file-august-29-2024-north-african-competition-sahel-libya-edge-burkina-faso>.
- ¹¹ The Center for Preventive Action, "Violent Extremism in the Sahel," *The Global Conflict Tracker*, October 23, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>; Aidan Lewis, "Egyptian Guard Killed in Shooting on Rafah Border, Israel and Egypt Investigating," *Reuters*, May 8, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/egyptian-guard-killed-shooting-rafah-border-israel-egypt-investigating-2024-05-27/>.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Lukáš Tichý, "The Islamic State Oil and Gas Strategy in North Africa," *Energy Strategy Reviews*, Vol. 24, (2019), pp. 254-260, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2019.04.001>.
- ¹⁴ Ladd Serwat, "Democratic Republic of Congo: Re-Elected President Tshisekedi Faces Regional Crisis in the East," *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data*, January 17, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2024/drc/>.
- ¹⁵ "Extremist Group Increases Attacks in Western Uganda," *Africa Defence Forum*, January 3, 2024, <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/01/extremist-group-increases-attacks-in-western-uganda/>.
- ¹⁶ David McKenzie and Radina Gigova, "Worshippers Killed as Bomb Detonates During DRC Church Service," *CNN*, January 16, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/16/africa/drc-church-attack-deaths-intl/index.html>.
- ¹⁷ "Al-Shabab: Are Militant Attacks on the Rise in Somalia?" *BBC News*, November 2, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49908716>.
- ¹⁸ "US Conducts Precision Airstrike Against Al Shabaab Movement in Somalia," *Global Defense News*, August 30, 2024, <https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/aerospace-news/2024/us-conducts-precision-airstrike-against-al-shabaab-movement-in-somalia>.
- ¹⁹ "Seven Killed in Suicide Bombing at Cafe in Somalia's Mogadishu," *Al Jazeera*, October 18, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/18/seven-killed-in-suicide-bombing-at-cafe-in-somalias-mogadishu>.
- ²⁰ Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Describes Intense Campaign Against Shabaab in Northern Somalia," *FDD's Long War Journal*, February 2, 2024, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/02/islamic-state-describes-intense-campaign-against-shabaab-in-northern-somalia.php>.
- ²¹ "At Least 53 Burkina Faso Soldiers, Volunteers Killed in Clashes with Rebels," *Al Jazeera*, September 5, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/5/over-50-burkina-faso-soldiers-volunteers-killed-in-clashes-with-rebels>.
- ²² George Wright, "At Least 49 Civilians Reported Dead in Attack on River Boat," *BBC News*, September 8, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66747884>.
- ²³ Olugbenga Ige, "DHQ Confirms Emergence of New Terrorist Group in Sokoto, Others," *Punch*, November 7, 2024, <https://punchng.com/dhq-confirms-emergence-of-new-terrorist-group-in-sokoto-others/>.
- ²⁴ Abiodun Jamiu, "Lakurawa: Once Called Harmless Herders, Now a Deadly Terror Group in North West Nigeria," *HumAngle*, November 9, 2024, <https://humanglemedia.com/lakurawa-once-called-harmless-herders-now-a-deadly-terror-group-in-north-west-nigeria/>.
- ²⁵ "Terrorism in Nigeria: Emergence of New Group Lakarawas Alarms Security Experts," *News Central TV*, YouTube video, November 11, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2yAvPa02VQ>.
- ²⁶ Jamiu, "Lakurawa: Once Called Harmless Herders."
- ²⁷ Odita Sunday, "Sokoto LG Chair Alleges N1m Youth Inducement from New Terrorist Group," *The Guardian*, November 6, 2024, <https://guardian.ng/news/sokoto-lg-chair-alleges-n1m-youth-inducement-from-new-terrorist-group/>.
- ²⁸ Jamiu, "Lakurawa: Once Called Harmless Herders."

²⁹ David Lewis, Jessica Donati and Kaylee Kang, "Why West Africa Is Now the World's Terrorism Hotspot," *Reuters*, September 24, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/west-africa-becomes-global-terrorism-hotspot-western-forces-leave-2024-09-24/>.

³⁰ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024), <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>.

³¹ Shola Lawal and Sani Adamu, "Nigeria's Chibok Girls Kidnapping: 10 Years Later, a Struggle to Move on," *Al Jazeera*, April 14, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/4/14/nigerias-chibok-girls-kidnapping-10-years-later-a-struggle-to-move-on>; John Shiklam and Linus Aleke, "Nigerian Troops Kill 8 Terrorists, Rescue 16 Hostages Amid Ongoing Operations," *Arise News*, September 24, 2024, <https://www.arise.tv/nigerian-troops-kill-8-terrorists-rescue-16-hostages-amid-ongoing-operations/>.

³² Timothy Obiezu, "Nearly 600 Former Boko Haram Militants Graduate from Nigeria Rehab," *VoA*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/nearly-600-former-boko-haram-militants-graduate-from-nigeria-rehab/7024167.html>.

³³ "France Outside Niger: The End of Western Counterterrorism in the Sahel," *Africa News*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/12/22/france-outside-niger-the-end-of-western-counterterrorism-in-the-sahel/>.

³⁴ Tyler Alexander, "The French War on Terror in Africa," *Onero Institute*, February 26, 2024, <https://www.oneroinstitute.org/content/french-war-on-terror-africa>.

³⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Lack of Coordinated Regional Responses in West Africa Increases Risk of Further Terrorist Expansion in Central Sahel Region, Delegate Tells Security Council*, SC/15764, July 12, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15764.doc.htm>.

³⁶ Shola Lawal, "Can the US Find New Partners in West Africa After Niger Exit?" *Al Jazeera*, September 15, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/15/can-the-us-find-new-partners-in-west-africa-after-niger-exit>.

Key Trends in Digital Extremism 2024: The Resilience and Expansion of Jihadist and Far-Right Movements

Ahmad Helmi bin Mohamad Hasbi, Nurrisha Ismail and Saddiq Basha

In 2024, violent extremist narratives and networks continued to expand and persist online, despite efforts by tech companies to implement robust moderation frameworks. Terrorist and extremist groups from both the militant jihadist and far-right milieus have increasingly relied on interdependent strategies of decentralisation and diversification, to evade threat detection mechanisms while maximising message reception.

Strategic Decentralisation and Diversification

Militant jihadist groups online have continued to capitalise on geopolitical and domestic upheaval to reinforce their ideological narratives. The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict has fuelled propaganda by Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS), with the former aligning itself with Hamas' "Operation Flood of Al-Aqsa", and the latter exploiting the conflict to advance its narratives and inspire lone-wolf attacks. Decentralised unofficial affiliates have proven critical in expanding propaganda dissemination for AQ and IS. These supporters have continued reinforcement and circulation of extremist messaging amidst online moderation, by evading detection and circumventing takedowns.

In Southeast Asia, conservative Islamist groups harbouring sympathies for extremist ideologies have also capitalised on mainstream discontent, pushing narratives that further entrench social division and exclusivism. These groups have continued to call for the overthrow of Western democratic systems and the installation of a transnational Islamic caliphate, highlighting a dangerous overlap with extremist narratives.¹

Far-right extremism (FRE) has also continued to proliferate across the digital sphere, including in Southeast Asia. Contentious actors are increasingly difficult to identify, yet maintain easy access to vast online audiences. They have cultivated communities united by prejudices and have used them to foment violence. Additionally, international links between various far-right movements online have promoted on-ground violence during times of political upheaval.²

Across the board, Islamist and FRE groups have demonstrated success with their use of borderline content to propagandise across mainstream social media platforms. This has been reinforced by regional affiliates working to localise narratives, maximising their reach and appeal.³

Ongoing Israel-Hamas War: A Catalyst for Propaganda

In 2024, AQ and IS exploited the Israel-Hamas conflict to disseminate their ideologies and incite violence.⁴ AQ has emerged as a key source of propaganda surrounding the conflict,⁵ with branches across various continents aligning themselves with Hamas. This follows the group's publicised support for Hamas in late 2023. For instance, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)'s media section, Al-Malahem, has released videos discussing the significance of engaging in jihad to defend Islam, inciting attacks against perceived enemies of Islam. AQ propagandists have also consistently rehashed the "Flood of Al-Aqsa" and "O Al-Aqsa, we are coming" slogans in their online content. AQ's de-facto chief Sayf al-Adl has also published a series of essays which has been circulated online, detailing plans for capitalising on the Israel-Hamas war. In it, he encouraged AQ affiliates and followers to exploit military conscription in their own nations, execute assaults on Western targets and enhance collaboration among jihadists worldwide.⁶

Due to ideological differences, IS has not explicitly aligned itself with Hamas. The conflict has nevertheless afforded IS new opportunities to advance its “us versus them” narrative. In late January 2024, a pro-IS film titled *The State* was disseminated online, extolling the establishment of IS and honouring individuals like Omar bin Hussein Al-Hadid, who embodied IS’ opposition to Western influence.⁷ While the video did not directly mention the Israel-Hamas war, it should be noted that in 2015, an IS military unit emerged in Gaza calling itself the “Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade”.⁸ The video was likely an attempt to revive a sense of affiliation to IS given that the Gaza-based brigade has been dormant since a series of attacks in September 2015.⁹ In March 2024, images and videos of a Palestinian pro-IS citizen named Ezzaddin Baalusha were also circulated online, including a photoshoot of Baalusha posing with the IS flag, pledging allegiance to IS.¹⁰

The conflict has also sparked online discussions in Southeast Asia, with many users in the region expressing sympathies for Hamas and viewing the group as a legitimate resistance movement.¹¹ Some have espoused anti-Semitic rhetoric, while other users have called for the vilification of Israeli delegates and the cutting off of diplomatic relations with the country.¹² Netizens from these nations have been engaging in aggressive doxing¹³ of pro-Israeli social media accounts, including personnel of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).¹⁴ Some Malaysian netizens have also employed anti-Semitic tropes as well as Malay supremacist narratives. Conversely, there were also Islamophobic sentiments expressed by internet users within the region, highlighting the conflation between pro-Palestinian sentiments and the Islamic faith.¹⁵

Islamic State (IS)

IS propaganda has grown more decentralised and diverse despite the group’s hierarchal structure in recent years. IS leadership continues to establish the tone for its global agenda via editorials and speeches, but most propaganda emanates from a diverse network of independent yet interrelated content creators. This decentralisation strategy has allowed propaganda dissemination to circumvent counter terrorism initiatives.

Declining But Still Important: The Ministry of Media Bureau and the Provincial Media Offices

IS’ so-called Ministry of Media Bureau has exhibited further decline in its propaganda efforts, particularly in Iraq and Syria. The Al-Furqan Foundation for Media Production, IS’ oldest media branch, has declined significantly. Since IS’ loss of physical ground, Al-Furqan has been restricted to releasing audio speeches of its leaders. Its last video release was in April 2019, featuring the first IS “caliph”, Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi.¹⁶ The IS spokesperson known solely by his nom de guerre, Abu Hudhayfah al-Ansari, has only delivered a total of three audio speeches since his first public statement in August 2023. Two of these were released in 2024.

Al-Amaq Agency, the production in charge of managing news linked to IS’ global expansion and military activities, has published a total of 47 updates in video and bulletin formats since October 2023 (see Figure 1). It should be noted that Al-Amaq reporting often uses first-hand videos or images provided by or attained from IS fighters during skirmishes or before attacks.

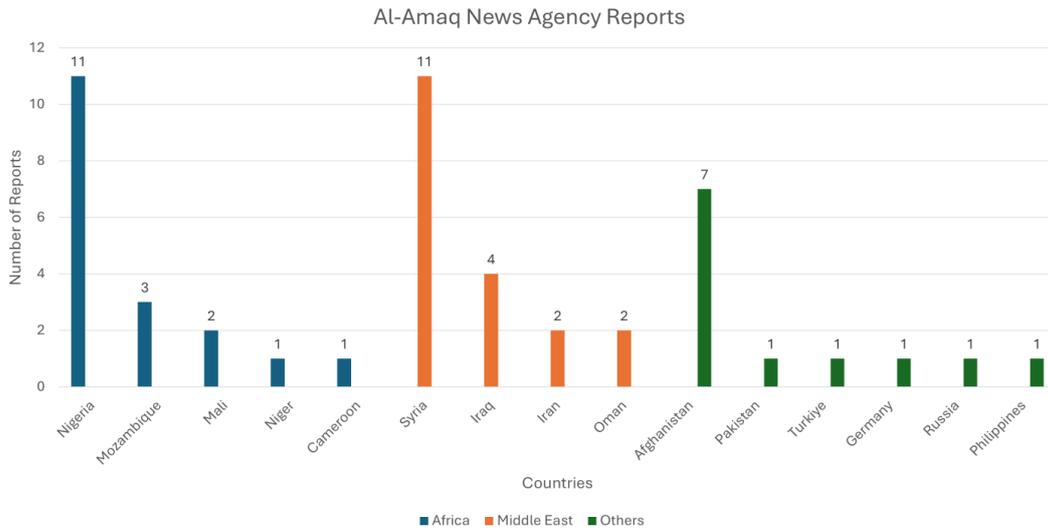


Figure 1: Al-Amaq News Agency Videos and Bulletin Reports from October 2023 – October 2024

Furthermore, IS’ “provincial” media offices, which are tasked with producing web content in compliance with IS’ bureaucratic norms and are required to report to the central media bureau,¹⁷ have also exhibited a decline, particularly in the Middle East. IS provinces in Africa remain the primary source of propaganda, producing a total of 114 photo reports (see Figure 2).¹⁸

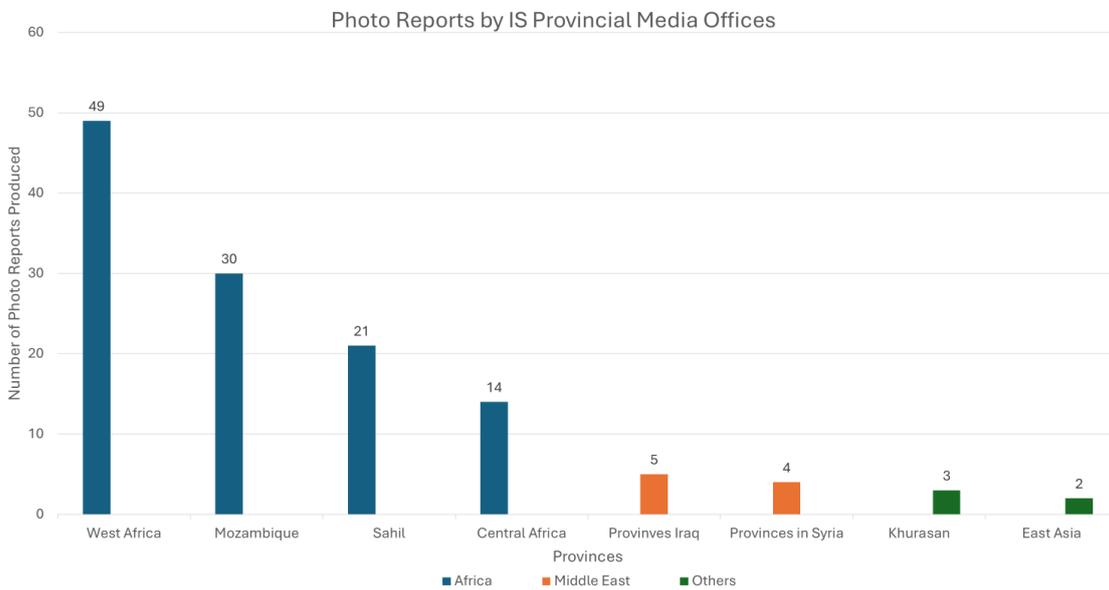


Figure 2: Islamic State Provincial Photo Reports from October 2023 – October 2024

al-Naba editorials remain the only consistent and direct source of top-down communication from IS leaders. These articles frequently use impassioned language to reinforce IS’ goal of establishing a self-styled Sunni caliphate. Beyond its traditional focus on the West and Jews, central IS propaganda in 2024 has repeatedly focused on targeting Shia-majority Iran. For example, following the Hamas incursion on October 7, *al-Naba* issued eight editorials specifically about Iran and Shiite adherents.¹⁹ IS refers to Iran as “*Shia Rafida*”, a derogatory epithet used to label Shia adherents as heretics, and accuses the country of being deceitful and making false promises to Palestinians.

IS has described Iran's struggle with Israel as “theatrical”, with the goal of preserving political capital rather than bringing about substantive change.²⁰ IS continues to seek a segregationist agenda to sustain its cause and to weaken the Shia majority country's influence. By vilifying Iran, IS hopes to increase its appeal to Sunni Muslims, heightening sectarian tensions.

Additionally, the regular infographic featured in *al-Naba*, which highlights attacks conducted in various IS provinces, also indicated considerable momentum in the African provinces as compared to the others (see Figure 3).²¹

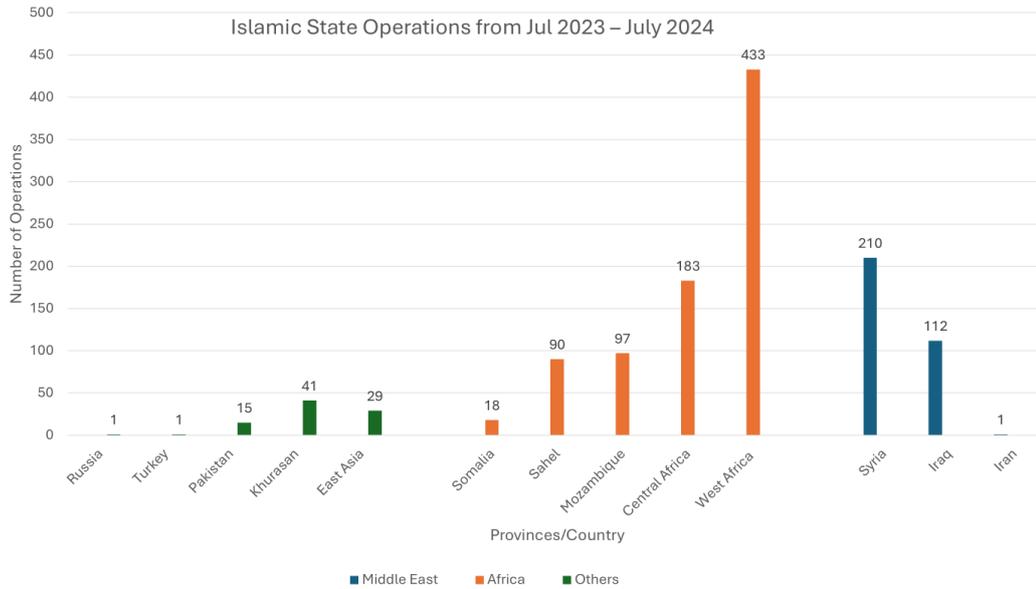


Figure 3: IS Military Operations from July 2023 – July 2024, as reported by *al-Naba* 451

Expansion Through Unofficial Outfits

Unofficial productions by IS supporters – commonly known as Al-Ansar – have emerged as the main vitalising force in IS propaganda. Such content constantly reshapes and recreates central IS propaganda to correspond with local contexts and has played a crucial role in reaching a wider audience. In March 2023, the establishment of the Fursan al-Tarjuma (Knights of Translation) brought together various IS media entities working in different languages.²² The latest incorporation to this umbrella organisation was the Tamkin Malay Media Foundation in late April 2024, although analysis indicates that the Tamkin Malay’s activity was short-lived.²³

Additionally, the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK)’s propaganda wing, the Al-Azaim Media Foundation, has produced an extensive volume of pro-IS content. Though regarded as unofficial, Al-Azaim publishes a monthly e-magazine, the *Voice of Khorasan*, in English and Pashto, focusing on anti-Taliban sentiments while frequently addressing Muslims in South Asia. In March 2024, the outfit started producing content in Turkish, underscoring its proactive outreach.²⁴ Materials created by Al-Azaim are stored in a repository website accessible through Telegram bot registration.²⁵ Moreover, the alleged takedown of Al-Raud and l’lam, two prominent IS propaganda repositories, since July 2024²⁶ has created a vacuum that has been filled by unofficial outfits like Al-Azaim. The archival website has become an essential alternative for users looking for IS materials online.

In terms of narratives, unofficial IS propagandists continue to creatively reproduce official IS media, primarily in poster format, to capitalise on mainstream and local grievances. For instance, these supporters created posters that prominently featured Palestinian icons and included excerpts from *al-Naba* editorials or speeches of IS leaders, all of which emphasised conquering Palestine and

vilifying Jews.²⁷ With the emergence of Fursan al-Tarjuma, there has also been evidence that different media agencies are focusing on recirculating propaganda in a wide range of languages.²⁸

Pro-IS Sentiments in Southeast Asia: Leveraging Regional Grievances

Online IS sympathisers in Southeast Asia have continued to leverage the ongoing Israel-Hamas war as well as domestic issues to demonise existing modes of secular democratic governance and to fortify the perceived legitimacy of IS' ideology.

In Indonesia, tensions across the Muslim-majority state escalated in July 2024 when a delegation from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the country's largest Islamic organisation, met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog in an unsanctioned meeting.²⁹ Indonesian IS supporters condemned the incident via Facebook and depicted the traditionally moderate NU as complicit in the Israel-Hamas war. These supporters shared narratives suggesting that NU is closely associated with the Jewish and Catholic religious establishments as their "souls" are inherently corrupt.³⁰ Comments on these posts were explicitly violent, with users calling for the necks of NU members to be slit, and others declaring the group as *munafik* (traitors) who deserve to be "crushed" by God's will.³¹ Notably, some conservative Islamists who call for the establishment of the *khilafah* (caliphate) through peaceful means also denounced the actions of the NU delegation, claiming that the group had committed apostasy. In August 2024, IS supporters also capitalised on public agitation in response to proposed legislative revisions to regional election laws.³² Narratives opposing the validity of democratic governance were reiterated, while *hadiths* (Prophetic traditions) were employed to persuade netizens that those who support secular nationalism are effectively apostates.

In Malaysia, the sale of socks bearing the word "Allah" at a KK Super Mart in March 2024 went viral on social media and generated inflammatory reactions from the Malay-Muslim community. The controversy resulted in violence, including petrol bomb attacks on three KK Super Mart franchises.³³ Pro-IS netizens leveraged the incident to assert that "enemy groups" would continue to defile Islam in the absence of a caliphate.³⁴ They also employed violent imagery to promote a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, with one user stating that with the *khilafah*, non-Muslims would not dare to insult Islam as the "sword will surely land on their necks".³⁵

The salience of anti-establishment sentiments within both countries is concerning, as political discontentment can easily be manipulated by terrorist groups to increase their appeal and influence.

Counter-Deplatforming Efforts and IS' Response

IS actors online have, in 2024, demonstrated a variety of techniques to evade mainstream platforms' content moderation efforts. One common tactic involves manipulating textual content by intentionally misspelling words, combining letters and numbers, and using emoji codebooks.³⁶ These strategies are designed to confuse AI-based filters that are primarily trained in English and struggle to accurately identify extremist content in other languages.³⁷

IS has also been adept at manipulating audiovisual media content. By blurring or obscuring faces and locations in photographs and videos, IS can circumvent AI facial recognition and geolocation identification. This allows the group to disseminate sensitive content without being detected.³⁸

In response to increased pressure from law enforcement authorities, IS actors have also refined their approach to online platforms. The I'lam website, prior to its recent takedown, exhibited increasing sophistication in its domain mirroring tactics, frequently changing its domains to avoid bans. IS propagandists have also been adept in registering multiple domains for websites, making sure that if one is taken down, the site can rapidly switch to another.³⁹ Despite repeated deplatforming attempts, repository sites like I'lam and Al-Raud managed to retain a persistent internet presence due to such foresight. However, the recent takedown of Al-Raud and I'lam has had a significant impact on the group's online activities. Reports suggest that internal infighting and suspicions among IS propaganda officials may have contributed to these disruptions.⁴⁰

Offline Impact

Numerous individuals inspired by IS propaganda have either attempted or carried out attacks in various countries. In June 2023, there was an upsurge in online chatter among IS supporters driven by a campaign called “Supporting Ribat and Jihad”. The campaign aimed to mobilise support for media jihad and defend IS’ online platforms, in response to intensified moderation and takedowns. While the objective of this campaign was clearly focused on online resilience, the campaign potentially inspired supporters to launch physical attacks in Europe, such as the lone-actor attacks in Brussels,⁴¹ Germany⁴² and Moscow,⁴³ as well as failed attempts in Vienna⁴⁴ and Paris.⁴⁵

Al-Qaeda (AQ)

While IS maintains a more extensive and sophisticated digital ecosystem, AQ has remained resilient within the online domain primarily through its “open-source jihad” strategy, relying on “tried-and-tested” social platforms such as Telegram, Facebook and Chirpwire to consistently push out large volumes of content.⁴⁶ Hence, IS-affiliated channels attract a higher number of unique visitors online per month, but AQ has largely been able to better preserve its online presence in contrast to IS. For instance, a coordinated effort by Europol and participating governments launched in June 2024 wiped out over 2.1 terabytes of IS online content, yet AQ websites associated with Al-Shabaab, AQAP and relevant archive forums remained virtually untouched.⁴⁷

On its propaganda front, AQ’s media apparatus has been persistent in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. As-Sahab Media, the primary propaganda arm of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), has continued to produce materials in multiple languages, including English, Bengali, Urdu and Arabic. AQAP has also increased its media output. A study conducted by VOX-Pol indicated that between January 21 to March 21, 2023, all AQ branches produced a total of 54 materials disseminated online.⁴⁸ Conversely, from October 2023 to October 2024, AQAP media outlets, namely Al-Malahem and Ansar Shariah Correspondent, produced 118 materials in various formats, while continuing to provide updates on its military operations (see Figure 4).⁴⁹

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) Media Output

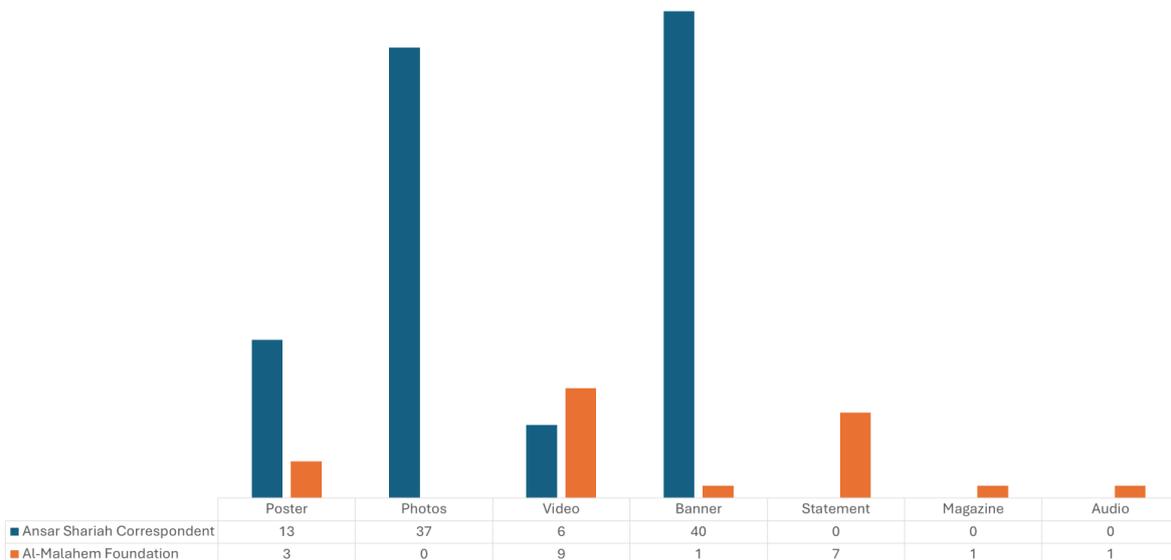


Figure 4: AQAP Propaganda Output from October 2023 – October 2024

In addition, an emerging unofficial production, Al-Aqsa Media, has been producing materials in the Turkish language. Since its inception in late July 2024, the agency has released a series of "Tweets" posters, featuring the logos of Al-Malahem and AQ's *Inspire* magazine.

There was also an attempt to revive AQ's notorious *Inspire* magazine on December 30, 2023, when Al-Malahem released a 45-minute video titled "What America and the West Does Not Expect" with the *Inspire* logo. The video highlighted the supposed ongoing war against Islam by the West and called on Muslims worldwide to rise up against the perceived enemy. It also included a detailed bomb-making tutorial using pentaerythritol tetranitrate.⁵⁰

Far-Right Extremism (FRE): Online Cross-Pollination and Real-World Impact

In 2024, Western FRE⁵¹ actors and groups continued to mobilise on digital platforms, exploiting the anonymity and reach these spaces offer. Scholars have observed that Western far-right groups have increased their production of "grey-area" content on mainstream social media, with the aim of broadening their audiences and increasing support for FRE movements.⁵² This, for instance, was evident in the riots that erupted across the United Kingdom (UK) in August, where social media served as a catalyst, enabling various FRE actors to mobilise support through the dissemination of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic misinformation.⁵³ Scholars have also increasingly recognised that FRE is a globally interconnected phenomenon, shaped by local contexts while sharing overlapping ideas, narratives and activities.⁵⁴ Although FRE movements may manifest differently across regions, they are generally rooted in the "definitional foundations of othering, nativism, and authoritarianism".⁵⁵ This shared root is particularly significant in light of the global interconnectedness of the online sphere.

Recent incidents highlight such interconnections. For instance, an 18-year-old Turkish youth sporting neo-Nazi symbols was arrested for conducting a mass stabbing in Eskişehir, north-western Turkey – an act reminiscent of previous lone-actor attacks in the West.⁵⁶ Analysis of his manifesto revealed references to various FRE ideologies, including militant accelerationism and anarcho-primitivism.⁵⁷ Furthermore, in South America, FRE influencers in Argentina and Brazil have been observed mirroring the tactics of United States (US)-based FRE figures and groups by using conspiracy theories and misinformation to promote extremist views on social media.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, in South and Southeast Asia, the rising influence and tangible impact of regional FRE – evident in the continued digital activism of pro-Hindutva communities and the increasing visibility of FRE online communities across Southeast Asia⁵⁹ – underscore its growing security significance in the region.

Hindutva's Continued Weaponisation of Hate Speech and Disinformation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's weakened mandate in the 2024 general election – where the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a majority only through coalition partners – highlights the limits of the party's divisive Hindutva rhetoric.⁶⁰ Yet, pro-Hindutva online communities have remained active, illustrating that Hindutva as a movement transcends BJP's political confines.⁶¹ In particular, these online communities have continued to mobilise on both mainstream and encrypted platforms, surveilling, targeting and policing perceived adversaries, with occasionally violent spillovers into public spaces.

A key instance of such mobilisation occurred during the inauguration of the Ram Mandir on January 22, 2024, constructed on the controversial site of the Babri Masjid. In the lead-up to and aftermath of the inauguration, online discourse celebrated Hindu civilisational supremacy while targeting detractors for not supporting the ceremony.⁶² Additionally, calls were circulated to "reclaim" 40,000 temples which were allegedly converted into mosques during Mughal rule, often veiled with implicit threats of violence.⁶³

Such online mobilisation has also extended to international issues perceived as relevant to the *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu Nation). For instance, following the ousting of Bangladeshi Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, violence against Bangladeshi Hindus for their affiliation with the Awami League was seized upon by pro-Hindutva online communities.⁶⁴ They employed doctored footage and recycled images to frame the violence as part of a broader Hindu “genocide” perpetrated by “Islamists”.⁶⁵ This victimhood narrative heightened fears among Bangladesh’s Hindu community and posed additional challenges for Muhammad Yunus’ caretaker regime.⁶⁶ Notably, these genocide claims were also rehashed by Western FRE figures such as Tommy Robinson.⁶⁷ Such connections between pro-Hindutva and Western FRE were also evident during the riots in the UK, where an “alliance” formed as both groups mobilised digitally around shared Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments, using misinformation to incite further violence.⁶⁸

On less regulated platforms like the IndiaChan imageboard, pro-Hindutva extremists have propagated and normalised overt calls for violence and genocide.⁶⁹ Following the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, multiple posts advocated for the violent reclamation of Hindu sites and featured memes depicting saffron-clad Hindutva militants armed with AK-47 assault rifles.⁷⁰ Hindutva-aligned Telegram channels have also engaged in online intimidation, using doxing to coerce “anti-Hindus”.⁷¹ They also exacerbated communal tensions during conflicts like the Mira Road clashes in Mumbai,⁷² by explicitly encouraging users to commit acts of violence against the so-called “Jihadi Mob”.⁷³

Southeast Asia’s Patchwork of Far-Right Extremist Online Ecosystems

In 2024, Southeast Asia witnessed multiple real-world manifestations of far-right ideologies. These included the disinformation-induced xenophobic attacks on Rohingya refugees in Indonesia,⁷⁴ the vigilante arson attacks and death threats sparked by Malaysia’s “Allah” socks controversy,⁷⁵ and the case of a “self-radicalised” 16-year-old Chinese Singaporean who identified as a white supremacist and planned to carry out attacks abroad.⁷⁶ Underlying these incidents was the role of FRE online communities in disseminating and normalising disinformation, violent hate speech and promoting nativist narratives across various social media platforms.

In mid-March 2024, the “Allah” socks controversy sparked the online mobilisation of Malay-Muslim ethno-religious nationalists,⁷⁷ including political figures who framed the incident as a deliberate act of disrespect by minority groups, particularly Malaysian Chinese, towards the Malay-Muslim majority.⁷⁸ While frustration over the insensitivity was anticipated, the excessively inflammatory and divisive reactions that followed – including derogatory references to minority groups as *kafir* (unbelievers), implicit threats against them by invoking the “rightful” Malay-Muslim ownership of the land and calls for further arson attacks – highlights the enduring influence of *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay-Muslim supremacy) ideology.⁷⁹

Beneath the surface of such mainstream political FRE, a variety of regional extreme-right online subcultures thrive. These subcultures draw inspiration from and adapt the aesthetics, narratives and modus operandi of Western FRE meme subcultures.⁸⁰ For example, the Austronesian supremacist community⁸¹ on platforms like TikTok has effectively adopted the Western FRE playbook, using memes as a strategic online tool to disseminate extremist propaganda.⁸² They infuse these viral memes with localised interpretations of Western FRE narratives, such as employing the Great Replacement conspiracy theory to demonise local Rohingya refugees and other perceived non-indigenous communities, justifying calls for “Total Rohingya Deaths” or “Total Chinese Deaths”.⁸³

Notably, these regional FRE subcultures are far from monolithic; they draw inspiration from a multitude of influences, often sharing a common disdain for liberal democratic values. Within the aforementioned Austronesian supremacist community itself, there exists a hybridised subgroup that draws influence from both far-right and Islamist extremism.⁸⁴ Additionally, on Chan imageboard sites like Endchan – notorious for its role in facilitating and promoting FRE discourse⁸⁵ – regional FRE users have been observed creating threads that not only advocate Javanese and Austronesian supremacy, but also promote incel and libertarian right beliefs.⁸⁶ In these threads, some users have asserted that feminism is part of a destructive Jewish conspiracy aimed at

undermining the traditional role of women, while others have called for the legalisation of personal firearms in Indonesia, with one user even sharing blueprints for a 3D-printed gun.⁸⁷

Outlook

As threat actors employ increasingly sophisticated tactics, monitoring and threat identification have inevitably become more difficult. Convoluted ecosystems of extremist-related materials are masked by strategic evasion techniques, designed to circumvent automated threat detection algorithms. Meanwhile, extremist actors continue to further splinter and decentralise their activities, complicating identification and takedowns.

Tech companies must continue to work with security practitioners to facilitate knowledge-sharing across their platforms, especially regarding the latest tactics employed by threat actors. It is particularly important to refine incidence response evaluation alongside the evolving threat landscape and implement meaningful transparency frameworks within the tech industry.⁸⁸

It also remains vital for policymakers to triage global and domestic issues that may aggravate intercommunal tensions and potentially contribute to extremist narratives. Policy interventions should ensure that guardrails are in place at the societal level, to inhibit online extremism and corresponding expressions of violence. As such, initiatives centred on building social cohesion and religious tolerance should be critical considerations.

About the Authors

Ahmad Helmi Bin Mohamad Hasbi and Nurrisha Ismail are Senior Research Analysts and **Saddiq Basha** is a Research Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. They can be reached at isahmadhelmi@ntu.edu.sg, isnurrisha.ismail@ntu.edu.sg and issaddiqbasha@ntu.edu.sg, respectively.

Citations

¹ ICPVTR internal monitoring.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Gaza War Has Jump-Started a Weakened Al-Qaeda," *The Washington Institute*, October 4, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gaza-war-has-jump-started-weakened-al-qaeda>.

⁵ Rohan Gunaratna, "Al Qaeda's Stance in the Gaza War," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 26 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/al-qaedas-stance-in-the-gaza-war/>.

⁶ Zelin, "The Gaza War."

⁷ ICPVTR internal monitoring.

⁸ Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "New Salafi Jihadi Group in Gaza: The Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade," *Jihad Intel*, June 2, 2015, <https://jihadintel.meforum.org/164/new-salafi-jihadi-group-in-gaza-the-sheikh-omar>.

⁹ Global Terrorism Database, GTD ID: "201509010063," "201509180032," "201509180033," "201509290001," https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?page=1&casualties_type=&casualties_max=&perpetrator=40489&charttype=line&chart=overtime&ob=GTDID&od=desc&expanded=yes#results-table.

¹⁰ Paolo Ganino, "(Photos & Video) Palestinian Resident of Gaza Circulates a Photoshoot, Featuring His Pledge of Allegiance to the Islamic State (IS), Palestinian Territories, Gaza Strip – 25 March 2024," *TRAC*, March 25, 2024, <https://trackingterrorism.org/chatter/palestinian-photoshoot-allegiance-the-islamic-state-is-gaza-trac/>.

¹¹ ICPVTR internal monitoring.

¹² Subhas Nair, "Singapore Must End Diplomatic Relations with Israel," *Change.org*, November 5, 2023, <https://www.change.org/p/singapore-must-end-diplomatic-relations-with-israel>; see also "Petition Calls for Singapore to End Diplomatic Ties with Israel in Light of 'Genocide' at Gaza," *Gutzy*, November 7, 2023, <https://gutzy.asia/2023/11/07/petition-calls-for-singapore-to-end-diplomatic-ties-with-israel-in-light-of-genocide-at-gaza/>.

¹³ Refers to the practice of publicly revealing private information about a person or entity, often with malicious intent.

- ¹⁴ Rhea Yasmine Alis Haizan, "Some Netizens in Southeast Asia Form Groups of Cyber Warriors to Dox Israeli Soldiers, Cyberbully Opponents," *Channel News Asia*, December 2, 2023, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/southeast-asia-social-media-online-activism-dox-israel-hamas-war-palestinians-3958491>.
- ¹⁵ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ¹⁶ "In the Hospitality of Amir Al-Mu'minin," *Furqan Media Foundation*, April 29, 2019; see also Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter, "The Guerrilla 'Caliph': Speeches That Bookend the Islamic State's 'Caliphate' Era," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (2019), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/querrilla-caliph-speeches-bookend-islamic-states-caliphate-era/>.
- ¹⁷ Laura Wakeford and Laura Smith, "Islamic State's Propaganda and Social Media: Dissemination, Support, and Resilience," in *ISIS Propaganda: A Full-Spectrum Extremist Message*, eds. Stephane J. Baele, Katharine A. Boyd and Travis G. Coan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 155-187.
- ¹⁸ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ¹⁹ "Al-Naba Newsletter," No. 425, January 11, 2024; No. 429, February 8, 2024; No. 439, April 18, 2024; No. 444, May 23, 2024; No. 452, July 18, 2024; No. 454, August 1, 2024; No. 459, September 5, 2024; and No. 462 (2024).
- ²⁰ "Al-Naba Newsletter," No. 439, April 18, 2024.
- ²¹ "Al-Naba Newsletter," No. 451, July 11, 2024.
- ²² Lucas Webber and Daniele Garofalo, "Fursan Al-Tarjuma Carries the Torch of Islamic State's Media Jihad," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, June 5, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/06/05/fursan-al-tarjuma-carries-the-torch-of-islamic-states-media-jihad>.
- ²³ Benjamin Mok, "Strategic Shift or Short-Lived Endeavour: Islamic State's Media Strategy in Southeast Asia," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, October 2, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/10/02/strategic-shift-or-short-lived-endeavour-at-tamkin-malay-media-foundation-and-islamic-states-media-strategy-in-southeast-asia/>.
- ²⁴ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ²⁵ Refers to the software application that interacts with users through the Telegram messaging app. It is able to perform various tasks like providing information or automating processes.
- ²⁶ Steven Humphrys, "Analysis: IS Online Supporters and the Infighting Talk That Won't Go Away," *BBC Monitoring*, August 13, 2024, <https://monitoring.stage.bbc.co.uk/product/b00023y0>.
- ²⁷ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ²⁸ Mok, "Strategic Shift."
- ²⁹ Amy Sood, "Tone-Deaf: Indonesia's Largest Islamic Group Apologises After Members Meet Israel Leader," *South China Morning Post*, July 18, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3270841/tone-deaf-indonesias-largest-islamic-group-apologises-after-members-meet-israel-leader>.
- ³⁰ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Nick Marsh and Viriya Singgih, "Indonesia Election Law Changes Spark Mass Protests," *BBC News*, August 22, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8er13zy1gxo>.
- ³³ Hadi Azmi, "Third Malaysian KK Super Mart Store Petrol Bombed as 'Allah Socks' Row Rages On," *South China Morning Post*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3257541/third-malaysian-kk-super-mart-store-petrol-bombed-allah-socks-row-rages>.
- ³⁴ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Attila Gulyás, Márton Demeter and Janos Besenyő, "The Lernaean Hydra on the Internet: Deplatformization-Resistant Media Ecosystem of the Islamic State," *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2024), pp. 310-333.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Humphrys, "Analysis: IS Online."
- ⁴¹ Alexandra Brzozowski, "Two Dead in Brussels Terrorist Attack with Gunman at Large," *Euractiv*, October 17, 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/two-dead-in-brussels-terrorist-attack/>.
- ⁴² Jaroslav Lukiv, "Man Surrenders and Confesses to Germany Stabbing Attack," *BBC News*, August 25, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crlr2z23ykno>.
- ⁴³ Mariya Knight, Anna Chernova and Darya Tarasova, "ISIS Claims Responsibility for Attack at Moscow-Area Concert Venue That Left at Least 60 Dead," *CNN*, March 24, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/22/europe/crocus-moscow-shooting/index.html>.
- ⁴⁴ Mia Alberti, "Iraqi Teen Arrested in Vienna After Taylor Swift Terror Attack Plot Thwarted," *CNN*, August 9, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/09/europe/taylor-swift-plot-vienna-iraqi-detained-intl/index.html>.
- ⁴⁵ "France Says It Foiled Three Plots to Attack Paris Olympics," *Al Jazeera*, September 11, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/11/france-says-it-foiled-three-plots-to-attack-paris-olympics>.
- ⁴⁶ Moustafa Ayad, "From Message Boards to TikTok: Al-Qaeda's Two Decades of Internet Exploitation," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, September 13, 2024, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/from-message-boards-to-tiktok-al-qaedas-two-decades-of-internet-exploitation/.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.

- ⁴⁸ Stuart Macdonald and Sean McCafferty, *Online Jihadist Propaganda Dissemination Strategies* (Dublin: VOX-Pol, 2024), <https://voxpath.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DCU-PN0752-Online-Jihadist-WEB-240305.pdf>.
- ⁴⁹ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Drawing on Andrea Pirro's definition, the term "far right" is used here as a catch-all term encompassing both the "(populist) radical right" and the "extreme right", given the increasingly porous boundaries and connections between the two. Both share a common foundation of nativism and authoritarianism, but differ in their approach to democracy: the radical right is illiberal democratic, while the extreme right is explicitly anti-democratic. For more, see Andrea L. P. Pirro, "Far Right: The Significance of an Umbrella Concept," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2023), pp.101-112, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860>.
- ⁵² William Allchorn, "Global Far-Right Extremist Exploitation of Artificial Intelligence and Alt-Tech," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2024), p. 13.
- ⁵³ Mariam Shah, "Fanning the Flames: Online Misinformation and Far-Right Violence in the UK," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, August 28, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/08/28/fanning-the-flames-online-misinformation-and-far-right-violence-in-the-uk/>; Martin Lindsay and Calum Grewar, "Social Media Misinformation Fanned Riot Flames, in North East," *BBC News*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70jz2r4lp0o>.
- ⁵⁴ Claudia Wallner and Jessica White, *Global Violent Right-Wing Extremism: Mapping the Threat and Response in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and South Africa* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2022), p. 42, <https://ctmorse.wpeenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/global-vrwe-threat-and-response-mapping-think-piece-final-17022022.pdf>.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ "Far-Right Extremism Is Also a Growing Problem Throughout the Global South," *The Soufan Center*, August 30, 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-august-30/>.
- ⁵⁷ Arthur Bradley, "Dead Society: Tracing the Online Dimension of a Militant Accelerationist-Inspired Attack in Turkey," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, August 16, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/08/16/dead-society-tracing-the-online-dimension-of-a-militant-accelerationist-inspired-attack-in-turkey/>.
- ⁵⁸ Ariel Goldstein, "The Hate Ministries: Far-Right Social Media Extremism in Argentina and Brazil," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, July 9, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/07/09/the-hate-ministries-far-right-social-media-extremism-in-argentina-and-brazil/>.
- ⁵⁹ Saddiq Basha, "The Creeping Influence of the Extreme Right's Meme Subculture in Southeast Asia's TikTok Community," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, April 8, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/04/08/the-creeping-influence-of-the-extreme-rights-meme-subculture-in-southeast-asias-tiktok-community/>; Suyin Chia and Daniel Teoh, *Trends & Dynamics of Far-Right Extremism in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: INITIATE.MY, 2024), <https://initiate.my/trends-dynamics-of-far-right-extremism-in-malaysia/>.
- ⁶⁰ Chietigj Bajpae, "India's Shock Election Result Is a Loss for Modi but a Win for Democracy," *Chatham House*, June 6, 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/06/indias-shock-election-result-loss-modi-win-democracy>.
- ⁶¹ Kiran Vinod Bhatia and Payal Arora, "Clip the Blue Bird: Discursive Strategies of Hindutva Digital Mobilization against Twitter in India," *The Information Society*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2024), p. 241, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2024.2327852>.
- ⁶² ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ⁶³ Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan, "Hindu Nationalists Push Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation Ahead of Elections," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, April 15, 2024, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/hindu-nationalists-push-conspiracy-theories-and-misinformation-ahead-of-elections/.
- ⁶⁴ Nazneen Mohsina and Roshni Kapur, "Disinformation About Attacks on Minorities Threaten Stabilization Efforts in Bangladesh," *The Diplomat*, August 26, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/disinformation-about-attacks-on-minorities-threaten-stabilization-efforts-in-bangladesh/>.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.; Abdul Basit, "Agent Provocateurs: Online Hindutva Groups' Misinformation Campaign Amid Bangladesh's Political Crisis," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, October 8, 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/10/08/agent-provocateurs-online-hindutva-groups-misinformation-campaign-amid-bangladeshs-political-crisis/>.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Rajiv Sinha, "Hindu Supremacists and White Supremacists Have One Thing in Common for Now: Islamophobia," *The Wire*, September 17, 2024, <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindutva-white-supremacists-islamophobia>; Shah, "Fanning the Flames."
- ⁶⁹ For more on Hindutva's extreme-right online subculture, see Benjamin Mok, "Exploring Hindutva Online Subculture," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2022), pp. 9-16.
- ⁷⁰ ICPVTR internal monitoring.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Coinciding with the consecration of the Ram Mandir, the Mira Road clashes began on January 23 when several young men blared loud music and chanted "Jai Sri Ram" in an area with a sizeable Muslim community,

resulting in rising tensions. Over the following three days, fuelled by social media misinformation and provocation, violence spread as Hindutva mobs vandalised shops, vehicles and homes, escalating hostilities between the Hindu and Muslim communities. For more on the Mira Road clashes, see Sukanya Shantha, "Police Didn't Stop the Mob': Shopkeepers, Injured Recount Hindutva Violence at Mumbai's Mira Road," *The Wire*, January 25, 2024, <https://thewire.in/communalism/police-didnt-stop-the-mob-shopkeepers-injured-recount-hindutva-violence-at-mumbais-mira-road>.

⁷³ ICPVTR internal monitoring.

⁷⁴ Pizaro Gozali Idrus, "Angry Indonesians in Aceh Again Storm a Shelter, Push Rohingya Out," *Benar News*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/acehnese-again-storm-rohingya-shelter-03272024143138.html>.

⁷⁵ Aizat Shamsuddin, "KK Mart Debacle: Blasphemy, Boycott and Violence," *INITIATE.MY*, April 3, 2024, <https://initiate.my/kk-mart-debacle-blasphemy-boycott-violence/>.

⁷⁶ Jean Iau, "Self-Radicalised S'porean, 16, Who Identified as White Supremacist, given Restriction Order under ISA," *The Straits Times*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/self-radicalised-s-porean-16-who-identified-as-white-supremacist-given-restriction-order-under-isa>.

⁷⁷ Chia and Teoh, *Trends & Dynamics*.

⁷⁸ Shamsuddin, "KK Mart Debacle."

⁷⁹ ICPVTR internal monitoring.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Suseno Sarwono, "Yup, Another Far-Right Classic: The Propagation of Far-Right Content on TikTok in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET)*, November 8, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/11/08/yup-another-far-right-classic-the-propagation-of-far-right-content-on-tiktok-in-malaysia-indonesia-and-the-philippines/>.

⁸¹ The Austronesian supremacist community advocates for the ethnic superiority of Austronesians – an ethno-linguistic group comprising significant populations in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

⁸² Sarwono, "Yup, Another Far-Right Classic"; Basha, "The Creeping Influence."

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Florence Keen, Guillermo Suarez-Tangil and Blyth Crawford, *Memetic Irony and the Promotion of Violence Within Chan Cultures* (London: Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 2020), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/memetic-irony-and-the-promotion-of-violence-within-chan-cultures/>.

⁸⁶ ICPVTR internal monitoring.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Tom Thorley, *Social Media and Its Impact On Terrorism and Violent Extremism in the Next 2-5 Years* (Washington, D.C.: Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, 2023), pp. 1-11, <https://gifct.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GIFCT-23WG-0823-SocialMedia-1.1.pdf>.

Reintegrating Extremists in Southeast Asia: Lessons in Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation

Mohamed Feisal Mohamed Hassan and Ahmad Saiful Rijal Hassan

Introduction

Terrorist activity in Southeast Asia remained on the decline in 2024, following sustained counter terrorism (CT) efforts by regional governments. In the Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)'s operational capability has been significantly weakened following years-long security operations that have targeted senior and experienced leaders. Indonesia has also not suffered any terror incidents in the past two years, with the authorities taking pre-emptive CT operations against various terrorist elements.¹ The most significant development in Indonesia was the announcement of the dissolution of one of its most notorious terror groups, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

Singapore reported three cases of arrests of self-radicalised individuals in 2024, highlighting a low-grade but persistent threat from online radicalisation. Lastly, a minor uptick in extremist activity was observed in Malaysia. Malaysia suffered its second successful Islamic State (IS)-related terror attack since 2016 in May, when a self-radicalised individual attacked a police station in Ulu Tiram, Johor, killing two police officers. This was followed by a wave of preventive arrests by the Malaysian security services. Overall, however, there remains an existing but muted threat environment compared to the years preceding 2019, during the height of IS activity.

This shows that regional terrorist elements remain resilient and adaptive, and retain the capacity to conduct attacks. As such, Southeast Asian governments and non-governmental organisations continue to engage in deradicalisation and rehabilitation efforts to prevent radicalisation and to assist former terrorism detainees' reintegration into society. This article looks at how the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore are tackling the issues of radicalisation and rehabilitation. Overall, a whole-of-society approach and community-based initiatives are emphasised across the various regional programmes, which seek to address the deeper issues fuelling radicalisation, such as economic inequality, social exclusion and the influence of international terror networks.

The Philippines

The Philippines' approach to rehabilitation and reintegration is based on a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders, including the detainees, their families and several government agencies. It stems from the country's long history of internal conflict, with the Mindanao region being a significant focal point.²

The 2017 Marawi Siege emphasised the importance of rehabilitation efforts in the Philippines. The siege, which was led by IS-affiliated militants, devastated the city and displaced thousands. It highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive deradicalisation and reintegration programmes for those apprehended by the authorities. These programmes are part of the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP P/CVE), which involves government agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs) and religious institutions.³

Local governments and civil society play an important role in the reintegration of former combatants in the southern Philippines. In Basilan, through the Program Against Violent Extremism (PAVE), former

combatants have access to public goods, community engagement and financial assistance in exchange for surrendering.⁴ During the initial stage of its implementation in 2018, more than 100 ASG members joined PAVE.⁵ Similarly, Sulu's local reintegration initiative led to over 200 ASG members surrendering between 2019 and 2022.⁶ Across the southern Philippines, over 1,600 combatants from groups such as the ASG, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute Group (DIMG) surrendered to the government between 2018 and 2023, with all returnees profiled and sentenced before entering the local rehabilitation programme.⁷

Despite efforts by local governments and civil society to reintegrate former combatants, concerns persist within local communities. Local communities can in some circumstances be apprehensive of rehabilitated individuals, as many are unfamiliar with the reintegration process and may feel that their safety is being compromised. Additionally, victims and survivors of violence, particularly those affected by the ASG and the DIMG, may struggle to accept former militants associated with those groups. Families of fallen victims, most of whom are still grieving, have expressed resistance to reintegration efforts, creating tension with local authorities trying to foster reconciliation.⁸ This creates a significant challenge for the authorities which can only be overcome by increasing public awareness and engagement with local communities.

Malaysia

The national deradicalisation programme in Malaysia is aimed at addressing the root cause of radicalism, which is the misconstrued understanding of religious ideologies perpetrated by extremists.⁹ One of the main components of the deradicalisation and rehabilitation programme is the Religious Rehabilitation Programme (RRP), which aims to correct detainees' "political and religious misconceptions" while in detention. After their release, detainees are assisted by various entities for their reintegration into society.¹⁰

The RRP is divided into four stages. The first stage involves an ideological assessment of the detainees by religious counsellors from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (known as JAKIM). The second stage involves interaction with the detainees, where concepts such as jihad, *hijrah* (emigration) and martyrdom are discussed. The third stage involves correcting their understanding of those concepts and instilling the right and proper belief system in the detainees.¹¹

In September 2024, the Malaysian government launched the Malaysian Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (MyPCVE).¹² The programme takes a holistic approach in tackling violent extremist ideologies. The strategy is built upon four pillars, namely, prevention, enforcement, rehabilitation and reinforcement.¹³ It consists of a mix of hard and soft strategies, and emphasises multi-stakeholder and inter-agency cooperation.¹⁴

There are several challenges faced by the government in reintegrating detainees into society. These are often socioeconomic and psychosocial in nature. Some former detainees find themselves estranged from their loved ones and return to severely disrupted personal lives.¹⁵ The loss of income during their detention often results in financial strain, which further affects their relationships and personal ties.¹⁶ In this regard, terrorism detainees also face significant challenges in seeking employment post-release.¹⁷

In overcoming these challenges, government agencies including the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia and the Prisons Department have been providing social and financial support to former detainees to start small-scale businesses to help them begin a life post-release. Local police officers are also tasked with establishing regular contact with them and ensuring that their well-being is taken care of.¹⁸

Indonesia

Indonesia's deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes have progressed considerably, moving from ad-hoc initiatives led separately by the government and CSOs to a more institutionalised, collaborative approach between sectors, ministries and civil society.

In 2013, the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT) published the "Deradicalisation Blueprint" for convicted terrorists, which focuses on neutralising radical ideologies through interdisciplinary efforts involving law, psychology, religion and social culture.¹⁹ Targeting former terrorists, including prominent figures such as Ali Imron, Aman Abdurrahman and Para Wijayanto, the programme first identifies the individual's ideological commitment, then provides rehabilitation and re-education to "develop moderate understandings and attitudes" among the detainees and their families, and finally reintegrates the detainees into society upon completion of their sentences.²⁰

Ex-convicts play a crucial role in engaging current inmates, fostering credibility and rehabilitation. This approach, combined with socioeconomic support, reduces recidivism and builds trust between communities and the state.

CSOs in Indonesia play an active role in the reintegration of former terrorists. One such example is the Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian. This organisation focuses on providing life skills and business opportunities for extremists who have decided to disengage from extremist groups and violence.²¹ Some examples include initiatives to start cafes and restaurants or engage in craftwork such as t-shirt printing.

Indonesia also has a specialised deradicalisation programme for children, catering to children who have been exposed to radicalism, children affiliated with terrorists through family ties and children who have directly engaged in extremist activities.²² Such customisation to the different profiles and backgrounds of extremists during rehabilitation is important as Indonesia readies itself to repatriate children and women from Syria.

Overall, though Indonesia's deradicalisation programmes have improved significantly, challenges remain as many participants are unwilling to participate in programmes or only do so to deceive the authorities, a practice known as *taqiyyah*.²³ Moreover, some programmes are often run ineffectively due to lack of expertise, overlapping initiatives and resource constraints.²⁴

Singapore

Singapore adopts a whole-of-society approach involving the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community stakeholders in its rehabilitation programme.²⁵ The approach to the rehabilitation and reintegration process in Singapore is three-pronged, consisting of three main stakeholders: the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) specialising in religious interventions; the inter-agency Aftercare Group (ACG) focusing on social interventions; and experts from the Ministry of Home Affairs managing psychological interventions.²⁶ This holistic process is targeted at the hearts and minds of those who were formerly indoctrinated and facilitates their successful reintegration into society.

The RRG was formed to develop a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programme. Community engagement is a vital pillar of the RRG's work to ensure that members of society remain engaged, well-informed on social and religious matters, and opposed to extremist and radical ideologies.²⁷ The organisation has initiated both offline and online platforms for dialogue with the community to fulfil four key objectives. These consist of informing the community about the threat of radical ideologies, assuring the community of the need to counter these ideologies, preventing the spread of extremist thought and encouraging collaborative efforts to counter extremism.

There are five key points pertaining to the importance of reintegrating rehabilitated individuals into society. These include the prevention of recidivism, mitigating further radicalisation, building resilience to violent extremism, facilitating acceptance and trust from the community, and instilling a sense of appreciation. This can be achieved through fostering a strong sense of identity where there is no dissonance between personal beliefs and one's role as a contributing member of society. There is also a need to embody a contextualised understanding of Islam, given Singapore's status as a secular and pluralistic country where diverse communities coexist.

The rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalised offenders in Singapore requires a multidisciplinary approach that relies on strong coordination and collaboration across various stakeholders. Countering violent extremism (CVE) programmes in Singapore remain a key aspect of community engagement, while families and close friends act as the first line of defence against extremism and radicalisation.²⁸ Increasingly in Singapore and around the region, youth radicalisation and the complexities of reintegrating youth into society have been highlighted in recent years. As some policymakers and practitioners have observed, an increasingly complex internet environment has introduced new challenges. Many youth today are reliant on bite-sized online content that is easy and fast to consume, typically in the form of short videos or reels on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. As extremist elements consolidate their outreach efforts on social media, youth who struggle with identity and interpersonal relationships are particularly vulnerable to such radical content. In response, community stakeholders such as the RRG have launched their own content through the same platforms to counter radical ideologies and teach more responsible social media use.²⁹ These developments will require greater attention by the authorities going forward.

Policy Recommendations

Successful reintegration programmes should focus on several components with the aim of providing former terrorist detainees with the tools and support necessary to rebuild their lives and become productive members of society. First is psychological and religious support. Many individuals involved in terrorism have experienced a certain level of trauma or manipulation leading to their radicalisation.³⁰ A mixture of psychological and religious support would help them reinterpret religious texts, reject radical ideologies and promote mental healing from past trauma.

Second, education and vocational training are essential in helping former terrorist detainees reintegrate into society. Many individuals who turn to terrorism do so due to a lack of economic opportunities and a sense of disenfranchisement.³¹ By equipping them with essential life skills, reintegration programmes can reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Community acceptance is also a vital component of successful reintegration.³² Programmes that foster community engagement help former terrorists rebuild trust and establish a sense of belonging. These programmes should focus on building relationships, offering mentorship and involving community leaders to create a supportive environment. This community-centric approach helps prevent recidivism by addressing the social isolation and alienation that leads to radicalisation.

Familial and social networks should also be incorporated into reintegration programmes. Programmes that engage families can help rebuild trust and provide a strong support system for former terrorists. This approach not only facilitates the reintegration process, but also strengthens community ties and reduces the stigma associated with former terrorists. Finally, ongoing monitoring and support are key in ensuring continuity and preventing recidivism.

Conclusion

Continued geopolitical volatility, particularly in the Middle East and centred around the Israel-Hamas conflict, must be monitored closely for its attendant impact around the region. Terrorist groups such

as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and their affiliates are actively attempting to manipulate these conflicts into drivers of radicalisation targeted at vulnerable communities through various means, including social media. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) adds another layer of complexity, with the rise of AI-generated videos and propaganda produced by terrorist groups with the aim of radicalising sympathisers.³³ There are also concerns that these groups may be using AI-powered chatbots for recruitment.³⁴

Thus, governments must remain vigilant and ensure that a robust preventive framework remains in place. This includes continued efforts at deradicalisation and rehabilitation. In this regard, investing in community-based deradicalisation and rehabilitation strategies, backed by continuous research and support, is essential in the fight against terrorism in Southeast Asia. One issue that has been highlighted by some regional practitioners in recent years is the need for more effective risk assessment tools for radicalised individuals and metrics for measuring behavioural change following rehabilitation. Through more targeted resource investments, addressing the root causes of radicalisation and fostering inclusive environments, these programmes offer a promising path toward long-term stability and security in the region.

About the Authors

Mohamed Feisal is a Research Fellow and **Ahmad Saiful Rijal** is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Both are also counsellors with the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG). They can be reached at ismfeisal@ntu.edu.sg and isahmad@ntu.edu.sg, respectively.

Citations

¹ Internal Security Department, *Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2024* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024), <https://www.mha.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sttar-2024.pdf>.

² Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy, *Policy Brief: Deradicalization Initiatives in Conflict Areas in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy, 2024), <https://www.pcid.com.ph/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Deradicalization-initiatives-in-conflict-areas-in-the-Philippines.pdf>.

³ Ann Bajo, "Rethinking Philippine Counterterrorism Strategy After the Marawi Siege," *Fulcrum*, June 11, 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/rethinking-philippine-counterterrorism-strategy-after-the-marawi-siege/>.

⁴ Teofila Garcia Jr, "ARMM Launches Program vs. Violent Extremism," *Philippine News Agency*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1032269>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Addressing Islamist Militancy in the Southern Philippines," *International Crisis Group*, Report No. 323, March 18, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/addressing-islamist-militancy-southern-philippines>.

⁷ Nurhati Tangging and Kenneth Yeo, "Reintegrating Former Terrorist Combatants in Mindanao," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2023), p. 31.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, "Malaysia's Policy on Counter Terrorism and Deradicalisation Strategy," *Journal of Public Security and Safety*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2016), <https://www.moha.gov.my/images/terkini/WORD.ARTIKEL-TPM-JURNAL-VOL.6-2016.pdf>.

¹⁰ Mohd Mizan Bin Mohammad Aslam, "Deradicalization Programs for SOSMA, POTA, and POCA Detainees in Malaysia," *Middle East Institute*, June 23, 2020, https://www.mei.edu/publications/deradicalization-programs-sosma-pota-and-poca-detainees-malaysia#_ftnref1.

¹¹ Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin and Kartini Aboo Talib Khalid, "Combating Daesh: Insights Into Malaysia's Counter-Terrorism Experience and the Deradicalisation of Former Detainees," *Religions*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2023), p. 367, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030367>.

¹² "Malaysia Launches Action Plan to Tackle Violent Extremism, PM Anwar Calls for Early Intervention," *Malay Mail*, September 30, 2024, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2024/09/30/malaysia-launches-action-plan-to-tackle-violent-extremism-pm-anwar-calls-for-early-intervention/152162>.

- ¹³ *Malaysia Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (MyPCVE) 2024-2028* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Home Affairs Malaysia, 2024).
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Aizat Shamsuddin, Mukhriz Mat Rus and Debbie Affianty, *Reintegrating Former Security Detainees in Malaysia: The Challenges & Opportunities* (Kuala Lumpur: INITIATE.MY, 2024), <https://initiate.my/download/policy-brief-issue-5-2024/>.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Afzal Izzaz Zahari et al., "Challenges to Reintegration: A Case Study of Violent Extremist Detainees and Their Reintegration into Malaysian Society," *Safer Communities*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2024), pp. 1-22.
- ¹⁸ Ahmad El-Muhammady, *Managing the Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families: Malaysian Experience* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2023), <https://www.ict.nl/sites/default/files/2023-01/El-Muhammady%20Malaysian%20FTFs.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ Lakshmi Priya Vijayan, "Counterterrorism and Deradicalisation: The Indonesian Way," *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, July 13, 2023, <https://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/Counterterrorism-and-Deradicalisation-The-Indonesian-Way-lpvijayan-130723>.
- ²⁰ Cameron Sumpter, "Indonesia's De-Radicalisation Blueprint," *The Interpreter*, February 5, 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indonesia-s-de-radicalisation-blueprint>.
- ²¹ Ilyas Mohammed, "Critical Reflections on De-Radicalisation in Indonesia," *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2020), pp. 43-57, <https://journal.unismuh.ac.id/index.php/Otoritas/article/view/3097/3072>.
- ²² ICPVTR internal report.
- ²³ V. Arianti and Unaesah Rahmah, "Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2022), p. 17.
- ²⁴ Alif Satria, "Two Decades of Counterterrorism in Indonesia: Successful Developments and Future Challenges," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 14, No. 5 (2022), p. 10.
- ²⁵ Andrew Wong, "Community Support Key to Dealing with Roots of Terror Threats in Singapore: SM Teo," *The Straits Times*, September 28, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/community-support-key-to-dealing-with-roots-of-terror-threats-in-singapore-sm-teo>.
- ²⁶ Shashi Jayakumar, *Deradicalisation in Singapore: Past, Present and Future* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2020), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ICSR-Report-Deradicalisation-in-Singapore-Past-Present-and-Future.pdf>.
- ²⁷ Mohamed Bin Ali, "The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG): A Community-Government Partnership in Fighting Terrorism," in *Majulah!: 50 Years of Malay/Muslim Community in Singapore*, eds. Zainul Abidin Rasheed and Norshahril Saat (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2016), pp. 243-55.
- ²⁸ "Heart of the Matter: Family Is 'First Line of Defence' Against Radicalisation Among Youths," *Channel News Asia*, March 4, 2023, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/radicalisation-youths-roblox-islamic-state-family-heart-matter-3321516>.
- ²⁹ "DPM Lawrence Wong at the Religious Rehabilitation Group's 18th Annual Retreat," *Prime Minister's Office Singapore*, June 21, 2023, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/DPM-Lawrence-Wong-at-the-Religious-Rehabilitation-Groups-18th-Annual-Retreat-June-2023>.
- ³⁰ Edward D. Barker and Heidi Riley, *The Role of Trauma and Mental Health in Violent Extremism* (London: King's College London, 2022), https://www.xcept-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-07-19_FINAL_Briefing-note-Trauma-Jul19.pdf.
- ³¹ Mario Arturo Ruiz Estrada, Donghyun Park and Alam Khan, "The Impact of Terrorism on Economic Performance: The Case of Turkey," *Economic Analysis and Policy*, Vol. 60 (2018), p. 78.
- ³² Gordon Clubb et al., "Combating the Terrorist Stigma: Communicating Rehabilitation and Reducing Barriers to Reintegration," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2024), p. 2.
- ³³ Pranshu Verma, "These ISIS News Anchors Are AI Fakes. Their Propaganda Is Real," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/05/17/ai-isis-propaganda/>.
- ³⁴ Catherin Schaer, "How Extremist Groups Like 'Islamic State' Are Using AI," *Deutsche Welle*, October 7, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-extremist-groups-like-islamic-state-are-using-ai/a-69609398>; "Terrorist Groups Looking to AI to Enhance Propaganda and Recruitment Efforts," *The Soufan Center*, October 3, 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-october-3/>.

Assessing the Extreme Right in the West in 2024

Kalicharan Veera Singam

Violence associated with the extreme right varied across the West in 2024. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), extremist mobilisation, including those linked to extreme right-wing ideologies, dropped by 35 percent in the United States (US) in 2024 when compared to the previous year.¹ In particular, groups involved in the January 6, 2021 insurrection, such as the Proud Boys, Three Percenters and Oath Keepers, “lost steam”,² with a significant drop in activities. The threat environment, however, remained volatile in the lead-up to November’s highly polarised and contentious US presidential election, with reported increases in disinformation campaigns by white supremacist groups, and attacks and threats on election-related targets.³ The situation in Europe was similarly volatile, although unlike in the US, a steady pattern of extreme-right activity and violence was witnessed akin to previous years.⁴ However, the United Kingdom (UK)⁵ and a few European Union (EU) countries such as Germany⁶ and France,⁷ witnessed a rise in extreme-right activities and violence, especially towards the end of the year. Across the West, 2024 also saw a further mainstreaming of the far right, with a few far-right parties that espouse hardline agendas winning or performing well in elections.

Political Inroads of the Far Right in 2024

One of the most notable political developments in large parts of the West in 2024 was the apparent further mainstreaming and normalisation of far-right politics, as some gripes found in the far right’s rhetoric, such as anti-immigration and economic issues, intersected with wider social sentiments. In some countries in Europe, far-right political parties have been the principal beneficiaries of the rising disenchantment and frustration with establishment parties and their perceived and real failures in dealing with bread-and-butter issues. Some far-right ideas have been gaining popularity, especially among youth voters, who see the prevailing political establishment as ineffective and having failed to deliver on social and economic issues.⁸ But the growth of far-right parties has also generated a strong pushback from segments of Western societies, with more counter-protests and far-left political mobilisation, which have added to the social schisms and political volatility.

Far-Right Political Surge in Europe

In the European Union (EU)’s parliamentary election in June 2024, the European People’s Party (EPP) emerged as the clear winner and, with the support of other pro-European and centrist parties and groupings, will be able to set the EU’s agenda for the current term.⁹ However, the election also showed a significant rise in support for far-right parties and coalitions, which collectively gained a third of the seats in the EU Parliament. The two largest far-right groupings, the Identity and Democracy (ID) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), won 131 seats in the 720-strong chamber, and have risen to be a formidable political force. While the far right may not be able to set the agenda of the bloc, they are in a position to influence some of the decision-making and direction of the bloc, especially on matters like immigration, military aid for Ukraine, governing powers ascribed to the EU vis-à-vis national governments, and the bloc’s relations with the rest of the world.

At the national level, too, far-right parties made notable strides across Europe. Austria’s far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) secured the largest percentage of vote shares in national elections in September 2024.¹⁰ The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) won in the eastern German state of Thuringia and also performed well in elections in other states in East Germany. The AfD’s outright win in Thuringia was to some extent also driven by pro-Russia sentiments amidst the Russia-Ukraine war, given the former Soviet Union’s historic influence over the region.¹¹ Far-right politicians and groups in the West have largely sided with Vladimir Putin, seeing him as a “strong

and conservative leader”,¹² and have been critical about their governments’ support for Ukraine in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.¹³ In France, President Emmanuel Macron called for a snap parliamentary election following the French far right’s surge in the EU parliamentary election, but there, the far right was handed a surprising defeat from a well-mobilised left alliance.¹⁴

Political Volatility in the US

In the United States (US), the 2024 election year witnessed several unexpected events and developments, with the political schisms between the Democratic and the Republican political parties even more pronounced than in the previous two presidential elections contested by Donald Trump. Current Vice President Kamala Harris became the Democratic presidential nominee in August, following President Joseph Biden’s late withdrawal amidst widespread concerns over his health and ability to complete another term in office if re-elected.¹⁵ Trump reclaimed the US presidency following a sweeping electoral victory in the November polls.

Earlier in the year, President-elect Trump had been hit with a litany of criminal charges, a first for a presidential candidate of a major party, which he and his followers were quick to characterise as a political witch hunt and election interference. Amidst the highly polarised and divisive political climate in 2024, Trump was also targeted in two separate assassination attempts. In the first incident in July, which happened at a political rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, Trump was shot and wounded in his upper right ear by a lone gunman, who fired eight bullets using an AR-15-style rifle from the roof of a nearby building.¹⁶ Trump escaped with a bullet scraping the side of his ear, leaving his face bloodied but without any life-threatening injuries. The shooting was among the most serious acts of political violence in the country since 9/11 and the most noteworthy assassination attempt since the 1981 shooting of then President Ronald Reagan.¹⁷ No clear ideological motives were established in the first attempt as the shooter “did not display a consistent political focus” and may not have had a political motive.¹⁸ The assassin, however, killed one of the rally attendees.

Trump survived another assassination attempt on September 15 while golfing in Florida. A 58-year-old suspect was spotted in a nearby bush, aiming a rifle at a member of Trump’s security detail. He was pre-emptively arrested by the authorities. In this instance also, the precise motive of the would-be gunman was unclear, although reports suggest that he might have become disenchanted with Trump.¹⁹ The suspect’s strong aversion to Russia and support for Ukraine in the ongoing war might also have been a factor. Trump has repeatedly blamed the Democratic Party leaders’ rhetoric for the assassination attempts.²⁰

The two assassination attempts were not the only instances of political violence during the 2024 US election cycle. In May, for example, law enforcement arrested a white supremacist travelling to Georgia to commit a mass shooting against minority communities.²¹ Moreover, while white supremacists and other elements of the extreme right have been the likeliest attack perpetrators in recent years, violence from far-left networks cannot be discounted as an added threat vector. For example, the harassment and violence against American Jews on US college campuses over the past year have brought into focus a “more militant political left that has historically been quite open to violent action”.²² According to scholars such as Bruce Hoffmann, the current divisive and hostile political climate in the US has raised the spectre of further violence, wherein a “range of sufficiently alarming violent scenarios” cannot be discounted.²³

Extreme-Right Violence in 2024

As of the time of writing, 2024 did not witness any major extreme-right terrorist incidents on the scale of the 2019 Christchurch or the 2011 Norway attacks, which had among the largest numbers of casualties. However, in a continuation of a trend observed in recent years, there were multiple extreme-right terrorist attacks and rioting incidents in 2024, which showed that the violent orientation of the extreme-right movement is still active and will continue to pose security concerns.

Terrorist Violence by the Extreme Right

In 2024, there was a continuous stream of sporadic, small-scale violent attacks across the West, aimed at targets and the advancement of ideologies and goals²⁴ that were largely similar to previous years. While ACLED data showed a precipitous drop in extremist mobilisation in 2024 in the US and a largely similar level of mobilisation in Europe when compared to the previous year, groups like the Proud Boys, The Base, the Atomwaffen Division,²⁵ the Nordic Resistance Movement²⁶ and Generation Identity²⁷ have continued to incite and engage in violence. The monthly reports by the International Observatory of Studies on Terrorism, which documents incidents of extreme-right terrorism and violence (and violence of other ideological types), showed that neo-Nazi groups and other white supremacists engaged in a stream of violence and altercations, primarily in Europe and the US.²⁸ A significant proportion of these attacks were targeted at Jewish communities (such as at synagogues), Muslims, non-whites and migrant communities. Accelerationism, the Great Replacement, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-LGBTQ+ were some dominant themes, while eco-fascism and Christian nationalism were other sentiments that underpinned parts of some extreme-right groups' ideologies.

Additionally, a few new movements emerged in the past year or so as some extreme-right groups came under increased law enforcement scrutiny. In the case of the Proud Boys, for instance, following the incarceration of key leaders of the group for their participation in the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol, a number of its members left the organisation to join more obscure and "hardcore" groups like Blood Tribe.²⁹ In the United Kingdom (UK), the Active Club (AC), a neo-Nazi and white supremacist militia-like group that operates under the guise of a sports club, has grown rapidly over the past year or so.³⁰ The AC, which is linked to other extreme-right groups like the Rise Above Movement (RAM), is attempting to revive England's "warrior culture" and could be preparing for organised violence.³¹ The growth of such far-right-linked fitness clubs has prompted calls for counter-messaging targeted at young men.³²

Following the US Supreme Court ruling that ended the constitutional right to abortion in 2022 and the extensive political debates around abortion rights in the US, a few new anti-abortion extremist groups have also emerged in the US. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identified groups such as the Abolitionists Rising, End Abortion Now, Foundation to Abolish Abortion and Operation Save America³³ as part of a growing anti-abortionist extremist movement linked to the broader extreme right movement. These anti-abortionist groups take an extreme hardline position on abortion, calling for women to be charged with murder and even the death penalty for undergoing abortion.³⁴ Anti-abortion extremism has renewed concerns that misogyny and violence against women could worsen.³⁵

Riots and Social Tensions

The far right's ability to contribute to social upheavals and large-scale unrest played out on an alarming scale in the riots witnessed in the UK in August 2024. Widespread protests erupted in over 20 cities across the country following a mass stabbing attack in the town of Southport, in which three young girls were killed.³⁶ Disinformation about the attacker's identity, including erroneous claims that he was an asylum seeker, had proliferated online and fuelled public outrage. These sentiments were adeptly exploited by some far-right actors to mobilise their followers to take to the streets. Altogether, several hundred rioters were arrested in over a dozen cities, including London, Manchester and Belfast.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer referred to the riots as "far-right thuggery" and not as protests.³⁷ The riots also sparked anti-racist counter-protests from groups opposed to the far right, as well as public debate on the importance of managing misinformation in social media spaces and the need for legislative changes to better deal with it. At the same time, there was some opposition to the possibility of restrictions on free speech.³⁸ The role of some right-wing figures and politicians who indirectly lent credence to the narratives that fuelled the riots also came under some scrutiny. These elements had tapped into strong public opposition and anger against prevailing social policies, particularly on immigration, as well as frustrations over the soaring cost of living and economic malaise.

Australia saw less extreme-right related violence when compared to other Western countries, but a few incidents provided cause for concern. Early in 2024, Australia was rocked by two back-to-back stabbing incidents.³⁹ The first incident on April 13 resulted in six people being killed and 12 others wounded, mostly women, “revealing a gender-based dimension to the violence”.⁴⁰ While Australian authorities classified the stabbing attack as non-terrorist in nature, others pointed out possible similarities in the attacker’s motivation with violent misogyny or incel movements in the country and elsewhere, which in some instances have violently targeted women.⁴¹ Soon after the first attack at a Sydney mall, Australia also witnessed another stabbing incident at an Assyrian church, where an alleged anti-Muslim firebrand pastor was stabbed by a Muslim teenager during a livestreamed sermon. The stabbing of the pastor ignited tensions between the local Muslim community and far-right elements, with some in the latter calling for the bombing of mosques.⁴²

Responses

Extreme-right violence presents unique challenges; notable among them are the mainstreaming and normalisation of far-right sentiments, the widening left-right political rift, and a weak political centre in the US and across Europe. The threat from some extreme-right groups in 2024 was assessed to be severe enough for their banning across various jurisdictions.

More Banning of Extreme Right Individuals and Entities in 2024

With increasing scrutiny from governments, more extreme-right groups in recent years have been entirely or partially proscribed. In 2024, additional extreme-right groups and individuals faced new bans. A particularly significant one was the EU’s banning of The Base, a neo-Nazi group founded in America with an active presence in several other countries. The Base, which has a stated goal of overthrowing the US government and establishing a white ethno-state, was already banned in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand prior to 2024, but the ban by the EU in 2024 is the largest in terms of geographical coverage.⁴³ The Base is also the first far-right entity to be banned by the EU, which is a recognition of the threat posed by such groups to the region and a possible shift in the EU’s counter terrorism priorities.⁴⁴

In Germany, a campaign initiated by lawmakers to ban the partially right-wing extremist AfD also gained momentum in 2024.⁴⁵ This followed the political inroads made by the far-right party in the 2024 German and EU elections, which the political left and others opposed to the group see as a grave threat to Germany’s democracy. Additionally, in a rare move, the Biden administration designated the transnational neo-Nazi organisation, the Nordic Resistance Movement, as a terrorist organisation for threatening the security of the US.⁴⁶ A few extreme-right activists also faced sanctions. Martin Sellner, an Austrian far-right activist and leader of the Identitarian Movement, was banned from Germany for addressing a neo-Nazi event in the country that called for mass deportations of immigrants and incited mass protests across Germany.⁴⁷

Softer Approaches Necessary but Harder to Implement

While hard responses are used to control the threat, underlying grievances related to lack of employment, rising cost of living, demographic changes owing to rapid immigration that make it harder for immigrant populations to integrate, and evolving value systems that traditional and conservative groups find hard to accept, need greater recognition. But given the political divide in some Western countries, finding political common ground to recognise and address such concerns is proving to be increasingly hard. Political compromises are also likely to be criticised as acceding to the demands of the far right. It is also unlikely that some in the far right will be placated by compromises and may thus try to seek more. The conspiratorial orientation of a few extreme-right movements and the lack of consideration given to facts, amidst an array of misinformation, can also fuel extremism. However, soft approaches, such as creating awareness, appropriate counternarratives and rehabilitation efforts⁴⁸ can have an impact in managing the threat.

Outlook

There is considerable uncertainty on what the extreme-right landscape will look like moving forward. Incidents of violence from the extreme right have not notably increased, although violence persists and continues to pose security concerns across the West with possible influences and spillovers outside of the West as well.⁴⁹ The mainstreaming of some far-right ideas and political movements and the attendant societal impacts perhaps pose a longer-term concern, as they could undo or worsen relations and trust between communities and accentuate enmity between groups. There is also a rising perception that mainstream political parties – whether centre, left or right – may be becoming somewhat receptive and accommodative to some far-right political demands, seeing them as necessary compromises to attain and maintain power. In other cases, the possibility of political deadlocks which may end up affecting governance is also observable, as centrist parties try to erect firewalls for fear of legitimising the far right. It is also unclear as to how the far right, buoyed by its current achievements in mainstream politics, will impact terrorist violence from the extreme right. While the far right, for the large part, works within the established political processes of their countries, extreme-right groups operate outside of the political process and are ideologically against established democratic processes.

Separately, the social media space continues to be another battlefield for the extreme right and the extreme left as well as other violent movements such as militant Islamist groups. Social media is globally accepted by right-wing and left-wing groups as their news source,⁵⁰ making it potentially a conduit for activists who sympathise with extremist ideas to spread their goals and strategies and to recruit from a wider population.⁵¹ In particular, the return of right-wing activists and leaders to X, a platform that has decisively shifted to the political right in the type of messaging it promotes since its acquisition by Elon Musk,⁵² did raise concerns in the lead-up to the 2024 US presidential election.⁵³ However, right-wing figures have pointed to mainstream media's bias, alleging that they also engage in inflammatory rhetoric of their own.⁵⁴

Targeted counter-responses will be required to address the complex and evolving extremist milieu developing online, particularly given the instrumental role social media has played in the spread of direct violence in 2024. This was seen in the far-right riots in the UK and with the innovative use of decentralised Telegram channels and groups (or Terrorgram) to spread radical information and inspire attacks.⁵⁵ Moreover, the use of more advanced emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) tools, remains an area of concern, although the extent to which they would be employed remains to be seen. At present, generative AI is already being used by some groups for purposes like propaganda and image creation as well as to formulate recruitment methods.⁵⁶

About the Author

Kalicharan Veera Singam is a Senior Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at isveera@ntu.edu.sg.

Citations

¹ Kieran Doyle, "When Is Quiet Too Quiet? Understanding Shifts in Extremist Mobilization in 2024," *ACLEd*, September 18, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/2024/09/18/when-is-quiet-too-quiet-understanding-shifts-in-extremist-mobilization-in-2024/>.

² Ibid.

³ "The State of Domestic Terrorism as the U.S. Presidential Election Approaches," *The Soufan Center*, October 23, 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-october-23/>.

⁴ ACLED data shows that in the EU, violence linked to the extreme right remained somewhat similar to the past few years. See Nichita Gurcov et al., "Is Radical Group Violence on the Rise in the EU? | ACLED Insight," *ACLEd*, May 31, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/2024/05/31/is-radical-group-violence-on-the-rise-in-the-eu-acleddata-brief/>.

- ⁵ Elizabeth Pearson, “British Disorder: Why We Need to Take Far Right Violence More Seriously,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*, August 7, 2024, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/british-disorder-why-we-need-to-take-far-right-violence-more-seriously>.
- ⁶ Ayhan Şimşek, “Germany Reports Rise in Number of Far-Right Extremists,” *Anadolu Agency*, June 18, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/germany-reports-rise-in-number-of-far-right-extremists/3252545>.
- ⁷ Anders Ravik Jupskås, “Extreme Right Violence in France Is on the Rise,” *Le Monde*, April 22, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/04/22/extreme-right-violence-in-france-is-on-the-rise_6669155_23.html#.
- ⁸ Pilar Montero Lopez, “Why is the Far Right Gaining Popularity Among Young People?” *Euro News*, June 21, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/06/21/why-is-the-far-right-gaining-popularity-among-young-people>.
- ⁹ “EPP Wins European Parliament Elections, Strengthening Pro-European Majority,” *EFE*, June 10, 2024, <https://efe.com/en/latest-news/2024-06-10/epp-wins-european-parliament-elections-strengthening-pro-european-majority/>.
- ¹⁰ Liana Fix and Sophia Winograd, “How Far-Right Election Gains Are Changing Europe,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/how-far-right-election-gains-are-changing-europe>.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Natasha Lindstaedt, “European Populists Back Putin as They Roll out Their Anti-Ukraine Positions,” *The Conversation*, June 14, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/european-populists-back-putin-as-they-roll-out-their-anti-ukraine-positions-232301>.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Sophie Binet, “The French Far Left Has Lessons for How to Defeat the Far Right,” *The Guardian*, September 13, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/sep/13/france-far-right-left-election>.
- ¹⁵ Jeremy Herb et al., “Inside Biden’s Unprecedented Exit from the Presidential Race,” *CNN*, July 21, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/21/politics/inside-bidens-exit-from-2024-race/index.html>.
- ¹⁶ “Shooting at Donald Trump Rally in Pennsylvania Was ‘Assassination Attempt’: FBI,” *Channel News Asia*, July 14, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/world/donald-trump-rally-shooting-assassination-attempt-fbi-secret-service-pennsylvania-4478591>.
- ¹⁷ Jacob Ware, “The Trump Assassination Attempt Represents a Dark New Chapter in American Politics,” *TIME*, July 15, 2024, <https://time.com/6998930/the-trump-assassination-attempt-represents-a-dark-new-chapter-in-american-politics/>.
- ¹⁸ Perry Stein and Devlin Barrett, “FBI Identifies No Motive or Foreign Links in Trump Assassination Attempt,” *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/08/28/trump-rally-shooting-motive-unknown-thomas-matthew-crooks/>.
- ¹⁹ Marin Cogan, “Who Is Ryan Wesley Routh? The Suspect in the Trump Florida Assassination Attempt, Explained,” *Vox*, September 17, 2024, <https://www.vox.com/politics/371981/trump-shooting-ryan-wesley-routh-golf-club>.
- ²⁰ Lalee Ibssa, Kelsey Walsh and Soo Rin Kim, “Trump Says Biden-Harris ‘Rhetoric’ to Blame for Florida Assassination Attempt,” *ABC News*, September 17, 2024, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-biden-harris-rhetoric-blame-florida-assassination-attempt/story?id=113727515>.
- ²¹ Jacob Ware, “Trump Assassination Attempt Poses New Test for U.S. Democracy,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 14, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/trump-assassination-attempt-poses-new-test-us-democracy>.
- ²² Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, “How Bad Will Political Violence in the U.S. Get?” *Foreign Policy*, June 28, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/06/28/civil-war-political-violence-u-s-2024-election/>.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ The extreme right’s broad goals are to pose a violent challenge to undermine the democratic order in Western liberal democracies and replace them with autocratic and fascist political systems that embrace “racism, xenophobia, exclusionary nationalism, conspiracy theories, and authoritarianism”. See Anders Ravik Jupskås and Iris Beau Segers, “What is Right Wing Extremism?” *C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism University of Oslo*, <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-is-right-wing-extremism.html>.
- ²⁵ “Atomwaffen Division,” *SPLC*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/atomwaffen-division>
- ²⁶ Kacper Rekawek and Morgan Finnsjö, “An Interview with Morgan Finnsjö on the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM),” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*, July 19, 2024, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/interview-morgan-finnsio-nordic-resistance-movement-nrm>.
- ²⁷ Heidi Beirich and Wendy Via, *Generation Identity* (Montgomery, Alabama: Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, 2020), <https://globalextrremism.org/reports/generation-identity/>.
- ²⁸ Maria Canto Martinez, *Monthly Report: Analysis of Far-Right Violence and Terrorism June 2024* (Madrid: Observatorio Internacional De Estudios Sobre Terrorismo, 2024), <https://observatorioterrorismo.com/analisis/far-right-violence-and-terrorism-june-2024/>.
- ²⁹ “Blood Tribe,” *Anti-Defamation League*, August 28, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/blood-tribe>.

- ³⁰ Daniel O'Donoghue, "Far-Right Group Using Sports to 'Build Militia'," *BBC News*, October 1, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ydnqdq38wo>.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ben Quinn, "Growth of Far-Right 'Active Clubs' in UK Prompts Call to Tackle Misogyny," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/05/growth-of-far-right-active-clubs-uk-misogyny>.
- ³³ "SPLC Releases New Report Exposing Anti-Abortion Extremist Movement," *SPLC*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/splc-releases-new-report-exposing-anti-abortion-extremist-movement>.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Rachael Fugardi, "Anti-Abortion Rhetoric on 4Chan Stretches Beyond Single-Issue Extremism," *SPLC*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2024/09/05/anti-abortion-rhetoric-4chan-stretches-beyond-single-issue-extremism>.
- ³⁶ Following the Southport attack, riots erupted in various parts of the country, with mobs smashing car windshields and house windows, targeting mosques and setting fire to two hotels that housed asylum seekers. See "Far-Right Riots Fueled by Disinformation Proliferate in the UK After Stabbing Attack," *The Soufan Center*, August 7, 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-august-7/>.
- ³⁷ Alistair Smout, "Keir Starmer Condemns 'Far Right Thuggery' as Unrest Flares Across Britain," *Reuters*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/dozens-arrested-after-uk-protests-turn-violent-wake-child-murders-2024-08-04/>.
- ³⁸ Ryan Sabey, "SPEECH 'PERIL': Britain Faces Freedom of Speech Crisis, Says Suella Braverman as Pulls Out of Addressing Students," *The Sun*, October 5, 2024, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/31055510/suella-braverman-free-speech-crisis-cambridge/>.
- ³⁹ Kalicharan Veera Singam, "Stabbing Incidents in Australia Reignite Low-Tech Terrorism Concerns," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 53, April 22, 2024, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CO24053.pdf>.
- ⁴⁰ Kristy Campion, "Right-Wing Extremism in Australia: Current Threats and Trends in a Diverse and Diffuse Threatscape," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/cta-newsarticle/right-wing-extremism-in-australia-current-threats-and-trends-in-a-diverse-and-diffuse-threatscape/>.
- ⁴¹ Hilary Whiteman, "Australia's Problem with Male Violence Is Getting Worse. So, What's the Solution?" *CNN*, April 29, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/04/29/australia/australia-women-gendered-violence-intl-hnk/index.html>.
- ⁴² Mark Baker and Rod McGuirk, "Sydney Teen Accused of Stabbing 2 Clerics Showed No Signs of Radicalization, Muslim Leader Says," *The Associated Press*, April 18, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/church-stabbing-sydney-australian-assyrian-orthodox-dab2ae61707fd9f1f196226e897c3833>.
- ⁴³ Sanctions include a travel ban, asset freezing in Europe, and banning EU citizens or companies from funding the group. See "EU Adds Neo-Nazi Group 'The Base' to Terrorism List," *The Times of Israel*, July 27, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-adds-neo-nazi-group-the-base-to-terrorism-list/>.
- ⁴⁴ Thomas Renard and Kacper Rekawek, "The Base, and the Basis for Listing Far-Right Terror Groups," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*, July 26, 2024, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/base-and-basis-listing-far-right-terror-groups>.
- ⁴⁵ Thomas Wieder, "Campaign to Ban AfD, Germany's Far-Right Party, Gains Momentum," *Le Monde*, June 23, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/23/the-campaign-to-ban-the-afd-germany-s-far-right-party-has-been-gaining-momentum-since-the-eu-elections_6675484_4.html#.
- ⁴⁶ Jennifer Hansler, "US Designates Nordic Neo-Nazi Group as Terrorists," *CNN*, June 14, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/14/politics/us-designates-nordic-neo-nazi-group-terrorists/index.html>.
- ⁴⁷ Jon Henley, "Far-Right Austrian Nationalist Banned from Germany After Neo-Nazi Meeting," *The Guardian*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/19/far-right-austrian-nationalist-banned-from-germany-after-addressing-neo-nazi-meeting>.
- ⁴⁸ Nadya Radkowska et al., *Spotlight: Rehabilitation and Reintegration* (Brussels: Migration and Home Affairs – European Commission, 2024), https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8379618f-31f2-48dc-a8d6-83d6a541643d_en?filename=spotlight_on_rehabilitation_and_reintegration_042024_en_0.pdf.
- ⁴⁹ The spillover of extreme-right violence to other parts of the world from the West and its appeal to non-white communities is a growing area of concern. See Kalicharan Veera Singam, "Why Would a Singaporean Youth Identify as a White Supremacist?" *Channel News Asia*, January 26, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/singapore-youth-far-right-radicalise-white-supremacy-isd-4073716>.
- ⁵⁰ Judy Woodruff and Connor Seitchik, "Social Media's Role in Fueling Extremism and Misinformation in a Divided Political Climate," *PBS News*, September 11, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/social-medias-role-in-fueling-extremism-and-misinformation-in-a-divided-political-climate>.
- ⁵¹ Robert Muggah, "Guns, Militia and Social Media Amplify the Risks of Political Violence During the US Election," *The Conversation*, November 1, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/guns-militia-and-social-media-amplify-the-risks-of-political-violence-during-the-us-election-242722>.
- ⁵² Arnaud Leparmentier, "How Elon Musk Uses X to Support the Far Right and Its Financial Interests," *Le Monde*, August 13, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/13/how-elon-musk-uses-x-to-support-the-far-right-and-its-financial-interests_6714673_4.html.

⁵³ Barbara Ortutay, "How Elon Musk Uses His X Social Media Platform to Amplify Right-Wing Views," *PBS News*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/how-elon-musk-uses-his-x-social-media-platform-to-amplify-right-wing-views>.

⁵⁴ Kristine Parks and Hanna Panreck, "WATCH: 5 of the Most Inflammatory Moments from MSNBC Hosts During the RNC," *Fox News*, July 20, 2024, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/watch-5-most-unhinged-moments-from-msnbc-hosts-during-rnc>.

⁵⁵ Ali Winston, "'Terrorgram' Charges Show US Has Had Tools to Crack Down on Far-Right Terrorism All Along," *Wired*, September 13, 2024, <https://www.wired.com/story/terrorgram-collective-indictments/>.

⁵⁶ William Allchorn, "Global Far-Right Extremist Exploitation of Artificial Intelligence and Alt-Tech: The Cases of the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2024), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/cta-newsarticle/global-far-right-extremist-exploitation-of-artificial-intelligence-and-alt-tech-the-cases-of-the-uk-us-australia-and-new-zealand/>.

Submissions and Subscriptions

Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses

L launched in 2009, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses (CTTA) is the journal of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR). Each issue of the journal carries articles with in-depth analysis of topical issues on terrorism and counter-terrorism, broadly structured around a common theme. CTTA brings perspectives from CT researchers and practitioners with a view to produce policy relevant analysis.

The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research has entered into an electronic licensing relationship with EBSCO, the world's largest aggregator of full text journals and other sources. Full text issues of Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses can be found on EBSCOhost's International Security and Counter-Terrorism Reference Center collection.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses (CTTA) welcomes contributions from researchers and practitioners in political violence and terrorism, security and other related fields. The CTTA is published quarterly and submission guidelines and other information are available at www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta. To pitch an idea for a particular issue, please write to us at ctta@ntu.edu.sg.

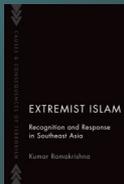
For inclusion in the CTTA mailing list, please send your full name, organisation and designation with the subject 'CTTA Subscription' to ctta@ntu.edu.sg.

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific. For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.

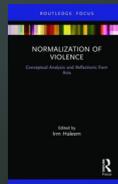


The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist research centre within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. ICPVTR conducts research and analysis, training and outreach programmes aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and mitigating its effects on the international system. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with field research, which is essential for a complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically-motivated groups. The Centre is staffed by academic specialists, counter-terrorism analysts and other research staff. The Centre is culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising of functional and regional analysts from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America as well as Islamic religious scholars. Please visit www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ for more information.

STAFF PUBLICATIONS



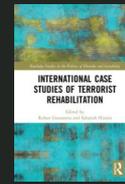
Extremist Islam
—Recognition and Response
in Southeast Asia
Kumar Ramakrishna
(Oxford, 2022)



Normalization of Violence
—Conceptual Analysis and
Reflections from Asia
Irm Haleem (ed)
(Routledge, 2019)



Terrorist Deradicalisation
in Global Contexts
—Success, Failure & Continuity
Rohan Gunaratna, Sabariah
Hussin (eds)
(Routledge, 2019)



**International Case
Studies of Terrorist
Rehabilitation**
Rohan Gunaratna,
Sabariah Hussin (eds)
(Routledge, 2019)



**Deradicalisation and Terrorist
Rehabilitation—A Framework
for Policy Making &
Implementation**
Rohan Gunaratna, Sabariah
Hussin (eds) (Routledge, 2019)



**Civil Disobedience in
Islam—
A Contemporary Debate**
Muhammad Haniff
Hassan (Palgrave
Macmillan, 2017)



**Handbook of Terrorism
in the Asia-Pacific**
Rohan Gunaratna and
Stefanie Kam (eds)
(Imperial College Press,
2016)



Resilience and Resolve
Jolene Jerard and Salim
Mohamed Nasir
(Imperial College Press,
2015)

Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Tel: + 65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg