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FOR GLOBAL  
CHANGE

# Violent Islamist Extremism: A Global Problem

CO-EXISTENCE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite major defeats against ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2018, at least 120 other violent Islamist groups are still inspiring and orchestrating attacks around the world. In response, security measures are vital. But the sheer volume of extremist incidents means that unless decision makers fully engage in the battle of ideas and tackle extremists' totalitarian thinking, recognising that these groups are bound together by a transnational religious-political ideology, the violence will continue to spread.

**This first part of the Global Extremism Monitor 2017 exposes the scale of violent Islamism. At least 84,023 people in 66 countries died during the year because of this problem.**

**Access the full Global Extremism Monitor 2017 here (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/collections/global-extremism-monitor>).**

As many as 64 of the world's extremist groups are active outside the world's major conflict zones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Beyond the major conflicts, groups operating in Egypt, Mali, Nigeria and Pakistan make these countries among the world's ten deadliest for violent Islamist extremism.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change is launching its annual Global Extremism Monitor (GEM). Each year, the monitor tracks violent Islamist extremism, and efforts to counter it, worldwide. Drawing on English-language open-source data, our analysis reveals the international spread and scale of Islamist extremist violence. In 2017, the GEM documented 27,092 incidents of violent Islamist extremism and state and nonstate efforts to combat it. At least 84,023 people in 66 countries died during the year because of this problem. Extremists accounted for 57 per cent (48,164) of those killed in 2017, while 26 per cent (21,923) were civilians, 12 per cent (10,337) were security personnel and 4 per cent (3,307) were nonstate actors. The identities of 292 of those killed could not be affirmed.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Violent Islamist extremism is a global problem.** There were 7,841 attacks in 48 countries in 2017, and related counter-measures in a total of 66 countries. Extremism affected 18 of the world's most developed countries. A total of 121 violent Islamist groups were active in 2017. Of these, 92 perpetrated violence in at least one country. Nigeria's Boko Haram and Mali's Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin demonstrated the fluidity of violence across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, instigating attacks in four countries each.
- **Intentional attacks on civilians killed at least 6,310 people in 2017.** At least 47 violent Islamist extremist groups deliberately orchestrated fatal campaigns against civilians, designed to instil fear and erode public morale. Seventy-one per cent of Boko Haram's violent actions targeted the public, affirming it as the group most engaged in a violent campaign against civilians. ISIS in Iraq and Syria's sectarian agenda and harsh interpretation of Islam led to the intentional killing of 2,080 civilians. An additional 15,613 civilians were killed by the actions of extremists and efforts to combat them.
- **Five of the ten deadliest countries are very fragile states, and four are outside major conflict zones.** Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq not only suffered high numbers of fatalities

in 2017 but were also ranked among the world's ten most fragile states. Beyond major conflict areas, Mali, Egypt, Nigeria and Pakistan were also on the list of countries most affected by violent Islamist extremism.

- **Muslims, more than anyone else, are the most frequent victims of violent Islamist extremist groups.** Nearly two-thirds of all attacks aimed at the public space in 2017 occurred in Sunni Muslim-majority states. An ideology that systematically legitimises the targeting of two broad groups—Muslims deemed to be heretics for failing to answer the call to jihad and non-Muslims of a faith or of no faith at all—is simultaneously exploiting and exacerbating community tensions around the world.
- **Sectarianism mobilises the deadliest and most active groups.** Over 95 per cent of sectarian attacks targeted Muslim Shia-minority populations, and a sizeable number of operations focused on the religious persecution of Christians. Tracking data of Islamist violence in 2017 reveals the capacity and intentions of groups to target individuals and symbols of the Christian faith and its denominations. Sixty-nine people were killed in just three assaults aimed at Egypt's Coptic community in 2017.
- **Executions and suicide attacks are tactics shared by Islamist extremist groups.** Thirty-seven groups exploited the Islamic concept of *istishhad* (martyrdom) to conduct suicide attacks. Twenty-one groups executed 1,976 people on charges including fleeing, spying and disobedience.
- **Many women plot and orchestrate deadly attacks targeting civilians.** The deployment of women on the battlefield shows violent Islamist groups adapting and strategically shifting their principles in favour of operational gains. Operational pressures have encouraged the most expansionist groups to adopt more flexible rulings on women and their place in the global violent jihadi movement. Boko Haram used women more than any other group in 2017. Of all suicide attacks conducted for Boko Haram last year, attacks by women had a 6 percentage point lower interception rate than those by men.
- **Syria remains the epicentre for violent extremism.** At least 34,853 people were killed in Syria in 2017 due to violent Islamist extremism, making it the country most affected by this problem. This puts the total death count as a result of violent Islamist

extremism outside Syria at 49,170. Over half of the world's civilian fatalities from Islamist extremism occurred in Syria.

The GEM makes plain the limits of military containment strategies in countering terrorist groups like ISIS. In Iraq, after the liberation of Mosul from ISIS in mid-2017, a reduction in ISIS attacks there was accompanied by an increase in attacks in neighbouring Baghdad and Anbar. Throughout the year, ISIS defeats in the Middle East coincided with attacks in support of the group across the West.

Geolocated tracking of violent Islamist attacks across the globe in 2017 reveals the extent of activity on state borders, where violence spills into new territories. At least 16 of the groups operating in 2017 have an expansionist agenda, conducting operations across frontiers. From local insurgencies to coordinated terrorist missions, the extremist ideology of these groups has found receptive audiences around the world.

Since 2017, ISIS has faced major defeats in Iraq and Syria. But it has gained strength in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Niger, Somalia and Yemen, where it continues to recruit and capture pockets of territory. Around the world, both ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to inspire attacks.

## **ABOUT THE GLOBAL EXTREMISM MONITOR**

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change aims to help make globalisation work for the many, not the few. We do this by helping countries, their people and their governments address some of the most difficult challenges in the world today. Violent extremism—both the violence and the underlying ideology that drives it—is an urgent and pressing challenge that holds back development, stability and opportunity for many around the world.

The GEM builds on previous work by the Institute that has highlighted the shared ideologies and international networks of the global violent jihadi movement.<sup>1</sup> The Institute presents and designs

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<sup>1</sup> Milo Comerford and Rachel Bryson, *Struggle Over Scripture: Charting the Rift Between Islamist Extremism and Mainstream Islam*, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 6 December 2017, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/>

evidence-based solutions to help defeat extremist ideologies. We lead research that harnesses innovative techniques to support decision makers and bolster programmatic interventions. The GEM provides data to explore and understand the process and conditions through which extremist groups spawn, thrive and mature.

The methodology for sourcing, recording and categorising each incident of violent Islamist extremism was designed and developed over two years. Every incident recorded in the GEM has been thematised and geocoded with coordinates of where the incident is reported to have taken place. Tracking and monitoring groups has allowed the GEM to attribute an instigator to an event when news reports are unclear. The GEM draws conclusions on the basis of location analysis and records the parties only if there is a high probability of Islamist extremist group involvement.

For Syria, a specific data set was designed to track and monitor the activities of groups in that country. The monitor captured data on all actors involved in the Syrian conflict, including rebel groups, nonstate militias and proxy actors.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

Violent Islamist extremism is not a new problem. Many of the groups monitored by the GEM can trace their origins back 30 to 40 years, and their genesis is intertwined through a convergence of networks and ideological agendas. Over that time, despite counter-terrorism efforts from local counter-insurgencies to international military coalitions, the challenge has proliferated.

Security measures can only hope to contain the problem. Solving it requires preparing for a generational struggle against the ideas that underpin extremist violence. Ideology is the greatest tool for the global jihadi movement. The long-term fight against it will need a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy.

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struggle-over-scripture-charting-rift-between-islamist-extremism-and; Mubaraz Ahmed, Milo Comerford and Emman El-Badawy, *Milestones to Militancy: What the Lives of 100 Jihadis Tell Us About a Global Movement*, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 23 April 2016, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/milestones-militancy-what-lives-100-jihadis-tell-us-about-global-movement>.

Education is one of the most effective instruments to counter extremist ideologies. National education systems that legitimise the stereotypes and prejudices that bolster extremist narratives are a major block to countering the spread of extremism. A global commitment to educating against extremism can build a road map for improving the capacity of education systems to prevent extremism, for the benefit of future generations.

Violent Islamist groups thrive on simplicity. The more they are forced to defend their interpretations of Islamic values, the harder it will be to maintain that simplicity. A critical response to counter the appeal of the ideology is to expose the contradictions and false readings groups use to justify their acts. Religious leaders and local imams are valuable partners for forming effective policy. They have the knowledge and interests to undermine the perverse interpretations of Islamic doctrine.

Groups gain local support by filling governance vacuums and undermining local leadership. The threat of Islamist violence cannot be solved from the outside. Empowering community leaders and government institutions is paramount. Community leaders are key to spotting signs of radicalisation, while government institutions can provide the resources and scalable support needed to widen the impact of counter-extremism efforts.

For policy initiatives to work, evidence-based research is critical. Big databases, such as the GEM, can help draw out salient trends over time, informing the design of policy and directing priorities that match the scale and nature of the threat.



## INTRODUCTION

In the early hours of New Year's Day 2017, Uzbekistan-born Abdulkadir Masharipov walked into an Istanbul nightclub and fired his AK-47 rifle at the crowd of 600 revellers. Masked amid the chaos and bloodshed, the 28-year-old then walked straight out. Masharipov, later identified and arrested by Turkish police, killed 39 and injured 70 others.<sup>2</sup> The nightclub massacre was only the first in a year of similarly motivated violent incidents across eight regions and 66 countries (see figure 1.1).

The landscape for violent Islamist extremism and terrorism in 2017 was crowded and complex, and the threat constant on multiple fronts. Using publicly available information, the Global Extremism Monitor (GEM) captured events of violent Islamist extremism over the year, and efforts to combat it. In 2017, an average of approximately 21 violent Islamist attacks occurred per day. Of all those killed during the year, 57 per cent (48,164) were extremists, 26 per cent (21,923) were civilians, 12 per cent (10,337) were security personnel and 4 per cent (3,307) were nonstate actors.

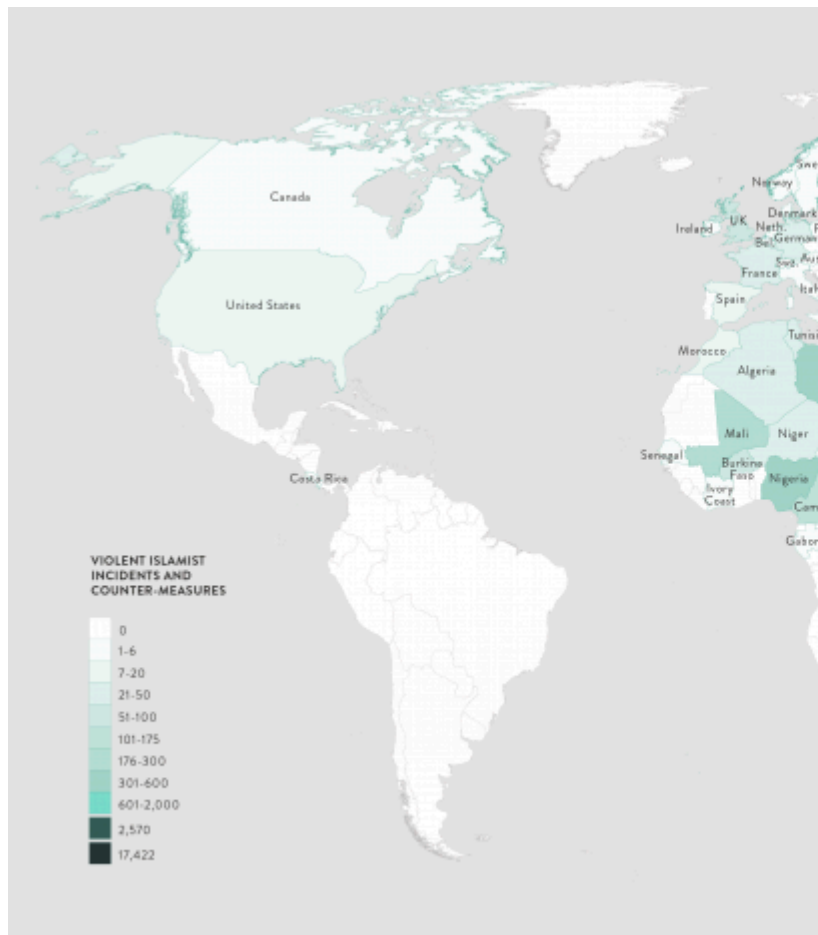
## COUNTRIES AFFECTED

Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of violent Islamist incidents and counter-measures at a national and subnational level in 2017. If you zoom in, you can see the distribution of attacks in a country.

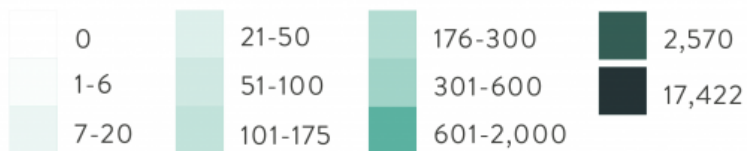
*Figure 1.1: Map of Countries Affected by Violent Islamist Extremism, 2017 (zoom in to see more detail)*

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<sup>2</sup> "Istanbul Reina nightclub attack suspect captured", BBC News, 17 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-38645787>.



## Violent Islamist incidents and counter-measures



Capturing and analysing all violent Islamist activity in 2017, the GEM highlights distinct commonalities in the way groups operate. This first annual report draws on the most salient of these trends. The monitor has uncovered how violent Islamists intentionally target the public and how their violence affects all segments of society. Although the targeting of civilians has created a contentious debate across ideologues in the global violent jihadi movement, attacks on non-combatants are common across the 121 groups in the monitor, and not limited to al-Qaeda or ISIS. To

coerce a state into a group's demands, divert resources away from conflict zones or damage public morale, extremists increasingly see civilians as legitimate and strategically valuable targets.

Of the attacks in 2017, the GEM data show that Sunni Muslim-majority countries continue to be the most affected by violent Islamist extremism. It is essential to acknowledge this reality to dispel the myth that non-Muslims are the prime targets. The extent of attacks that were justified by sectarian hatred and suspicion shows that despite the rhetoric of violent Islamist groups, attacks have sought to divide the global Muslim community, not unite or protect it.

The changing role of gender in extremist activities offers insights into what groups are doing to ensure their survival and expansion, and maximise damage. The 181 female suicide bombers identified by the GEM in 2017 expose the realities of extremism today. Recognising a strategic value in female recruits, groups are showing signs of a concerted effort to employ women for their ability to evade security and arouse less suspicion than men. This link between women and terrorism, borne out by the data, reflects a real shift in Islamist extremism. To the extent possible, all data in the GEM have been disaggregated when gender nuances are necessary. The value of women for suicide missions is a trend to watch, with serious implications for security measures.

Superficial definitions of terrorism fail to capture the daily activities of groups in their acquired territories. The GEM has sought to record all activities of violent Islamist groups, whether offensive, defensive or ritualistic. Consequently, the monitor recorded data on executions and punishments at the hands of extremist groups. The application of extreme punitive measures in 2017 was not unique to ISIS and its affiliates. The GEM captured data on all groups that meted out punishments on civilians and their own ranks. This trend has been relatively consistent across groups that espouse a Salafi-jihadi ideology, regardless of their affiliations. Groups that apply punishments have appropriated convenient aspects of Islamic legal jurisprudence to force discipline on their subjects and spread fear among people under their rule.<sup>3</sup> This trend reveals how efforts to hold onto territory are common across

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3 See also Comerford and Bryson, *Struggle Over Scripture*.

groups, signifying a long-term mission beyond insurgent activities.

The monitor analysed over 700 open-source documents and papers, and more than 400 news sources, to contextualise and corroborate all recorded incidents. Every incident was individually coded and analysed for its stated motives and target, its known or suspected perpetrators, its geolocation, its impact and the demographic make-up of its victims. In addition to tracking attacks and attempted attacks by violent Islamist groups, the GEM recorded counter-terrorism responses and offensives by states, coalitions and nonstate actors. For 2017, state-led coalitions included the US-led anti-ISIS coalition and French-led counter-offensives in the Sahel. Nonstate actors included Kurdish peshmerga in Iraq and Syria and vigilante groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria. The GEM also tracked tribal and clan factions working with or alongside multi-state coalitions.

Capturing trends simultaneously on both violent Islamist activity and efforts to counter it enables a better assessment of the efficacy of military responses to violent extremism. Understanding how violent Islamism responds and adapts to military measures is critical to developing sustainable, proportionate and effective policy that mitigates against displacement of violence across borders. While a military response to this global violence is vital, the cost of security measures internationally requires a sustained analysis. This cannot be done adequately without comparing data over time on violent Islamist activity and state and nonstate responses.

## **A UNIFYING IDEOLOGY**

This report looks at violent Islamist extremist groups from the Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf to Salafi-jihadi al-Qaeda franchises all over the world. Violent Islamist extremism comes in many varieties, but what drives all violent Islamists is a belief in the obligation, on theological and political lines, to establish and enforce an absolute reading of sharia law as the underlying principle of public and state life. Violent Islamists all seek a restoration of Muslim dignity through a return to the caliphate, and they believe that violence

and intimidation are legitimate methods to overcome perceived enemies of Islam that restrict the success of this project.

For many violent Islamist groups, enemies include Muslims who are seen to benefit from or facilitate non-Muslim rule over Muslim lands, and those who emulate the lifestyles of ‘disbelievers’. While some of these groups focus on struggles at the national level, many have an expansionist vision, crossing borders to secure territory and obtain recruits. Taken as a whole, violent Islamists make up a global movement of self-avowed outsiders who exploit political events and religious doctrine to further a socio-religious project of their making.

To explore the measure of ideological overlap across the groups active in 2017, we referenced official statements from, and literature on, a representative sample of 25 violent Islamist groups operating today in five regions across the world—from inaugural speeches to more recent propaganda. It is clear there are common ideological features that bind the movement. While many groups in the GEM started as insurgents against local governments, with national or separatist objectives, their ideologies have converged and developed in support of a broader global Islamist cause. Both al-Qaeda and ISIS have catalysed the convergence of these objectives, as groups pledged allegiance in accordance with their shared vision. However, within the sample, even groups that have remained decidedly independent from ISIS or al-Qaeda have subscribed to similar ideas propagated by the largest groups.

Each group in the sample was assessed to reveal to what extent its leadership subscribes to six key themes that form Salafi-jihadi ideology (see figure 1.2). The most divergence in the sample was over whether a group identified with a global struggle (theme 4), whether it supported an expansion of Muslim lands (theme 6), and whether it practised a narrow interpretation of who is a ‘good Muslim’ (theme 5). Despite this, 72 per cent of groups subscribed to all six ideological themes, and 100 per cent were committed to restoring Islamic governance (theme 1) and to waging war against perceived enemies of Islam (theme 2). When explicit references were not available to confirm a group’s subscription to a theme, that theme was not attributed.

Figure 1.2: Selected Violent Islamist Groups and Key Themes in Their Ideology



### Example Statements From Violent Extremist Groups on These Key Themes

*Theme 1: Restoration of Islamic governance as a religious obligation*

“The strategic position of Katibat Imam al Bukhari is to establish the Islamic state in Syria and in the homeland of Turkestan [Central Asia], where people would live and obey the laws of Allah. And only when the group achieves its goals, Allah would be pleased with the determination and faithfulness of his servants.”

— Imam Bukhari Jamaat, 2018

*Theme 2: Violent opposition to perceived enemies of Islam*

“The first priority and the main focus should be on America, then the United Kingdom, then France. . . . The Lions of Allah who are all over the globe—some call them lone wolves—should know that they are the West’s worst nightmare.”

— Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, 2014

“We must give sacrifices in the fight against the crusaders. In this fight, whether we are killed, martyred or thrown in jail we are proud of it.”

— Haqqani Network, 2010

*Theme 3: Violent jihad as every Muslim’s duty*

“The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.”

— Al-Qaeda, 1998

“We have made sure the floor of this hall is turned red with blood, and this is how it is going to be in all future attacks and arrests of infidels. . . . From now, killing, slaughtering, destructions and bombing will be our religious duty anywhere we invade.”

— Boko Haram, 2014

*Theme 4: Identification with a global struggle*

“At the hands of the savage Buddhists, thousands of Muslims, including many women and children, have fled their homes . . . their only crime being their adherence to Islam. . . . Take matters into your own hands, help your Muslim brothers and know that this is a religious obligation upon you for which you will be held fully

accountable in front of Allah on the day of judgement.”

— Al-Shabaab, 2015

*Theme 5: Narrow interpretation of who is a ‘Muslim’*

“We don’t kill Muslims but rather we kill people who claimed themselves to be Muslims. They are called MURTADIN. This kind of people—we see them praying five times a day, performing all Islamic rites, but working with the enemy and with the Shaytan Forces against the Muslims, especially fighting Mujahideen.”

— Abu Sayyaf (no date)

“O Sunnis of Iraq, the time has come for you to learn the lesson of the past . . . that nothing will work with the rafidah [pejorative for Shia] except slicing their throats.”

— ISIS in Iraq and Syria, 2014

*Theme 6: Support for expansion of Muslim lands*

“We are working to ensure that Hindustan, too, turns into a centre for Hijrat [migration for religious battle] and Jihad, so that we, as the people of India, can play a major role in the foundation of the next caliphate. . . . We started from Bangladesh but have now spread. Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen India is an example. Work is progressing elsewhere as well.”

— Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, 2018

## **GLOBAL EXTREMISM TODAY**

The data captured by the GEM and analysed in this first report present a bleak overall picture for international security and the spread of violent Islamist extremism. However, at the time of writing, 2018 has already seen noteworthy gains. Terrorist safe havens are being disrupted across the world, from Iraq to Syria to Afghanistan.

Yet despite symbolic military progress against ISIS in Iraq since mid-2017, signs in 2018 suggest the group is far from finished. In its former strongholds of Iraq and Syria, where many of the victories against ISIS have taken place, the group still held an estimated 2,600 square kilometres of land as of July 2018.<sup>4</sup> What is more,



progress in defeating the group raises the risk of the violence dispersing farther afield. The displacement of ISIS members from Iraq and Syria and emergency relocations appear to be causing more trouble in Afghanistan, where the group's local affiliate, ISIS-Khorasan, is ramping up its activities in the east and north of the country to undermine renewed efforts to bring peace to the Afghan people.

US President Donald Trump's deployment in April 2017 of a "mother of all bombs" in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, killing 36 ISIS militants and costing \$16 million, highlights the gap between the cost and long-term gains of a military-heavy response to terrorism.<sup>5</sup> GEM data show that since the massive ordnance air blast (MOAB) was deployed on ISIS hideouts, ISIS activity in the country has not slowed. On the contrary, the United Nations has estimated that a surge in ISIS suicide attacks in Afghanistan resulted in a 1 per cent increase in fatalities in the first half of 2018, reaching a record high of almost 1,700.<sup>6</sup>

The coming years will bring growing challenges, with the war in Syria persisting and sustained insurgencies intensifying in the Sahel, sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, combined with pressures of foreign fighters returning to Europe. Since its losses in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has been strengthening its grip and recruiting fighters in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Niger, Somalia and Yemen. The GEM data from 2017 and the analysis that follows will help those on the front line—in both decision-making and implementation—to design evidence-based responses and protection against future threats, and monitor the impact of counter-measures year on year. This analysis will also enable early

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4 Rukmini Callimachi, "The Case of the Purloined Poultry: How ISIS Prosecuted Petty Crime", New York Times, 1 July 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/middleeast/islamic-state-iraq.html>.

5 Peter Beaumont, "Moab attack on Isis was a baffling choice in cold-blooded terms of cost", Guardian, 14 April 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/14/moab-attack-isis-baffling-choice-cold-blooded-terms-cost-afghanistan>.

6 Reuters, "Civilian deaths in Afghanistan at record high, UN says", Guardian, 15 July 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/15/civilian-deaths-afghanistan-record-high-un-says>.

capture of trends that will help discern the long-term strategies of terrorist groups.

## **THE LONG WAR AGAINST EXTREMISM**

Most of the groups recorded in 2017 are not new. Over decades, groups have rooted themselves deep in the fabrics of societies and traversed borders in search of new conflicts and havens. The establishment of groups being fought today can be traced to networks and conflicts as far back as 30 to 40 years ago, with once-disparate localised insurgencies now stitched together through a grand mission and political-religious affinity. Despite semantic disputes and strategic rivalries within this broader movement, the groups that form this body of militants are more ideologically aligned than not.

The same Salafi-jihadi violence the world battles today began to take shape and affect world politics through Islamist movements established as early as the 1920s. These groups, and the thinkers who formed them, earned unprecedented social capital and leverage by reinterpreting Islam's sacred texts in a way that was both fringe and violently politicised.

As loose reinterpretations were gradually refined into a cohesive ideology through the 1980s and 1990s, Islamist violence came to dominate the dynamics in conflicts that marked the period, including the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the Algerian Civil War (1991–2002) and the Egyptian insurgency (1990–1998), as well as al-Qaeda's established global leadership. Al-Qaeda's shift from guerrilla insurgency to transnational terrorist movement in the 1990s led to the development of an ideology that legitimised killing Muslims and non-Muslims, soldiers and civilians.

## **A PLETHORA OF INSURGENCIES BEFORE 9/11**

The period of Islamist violence before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States is markedly different from the period since (see figure 1.3). Before 2001, governments—predominantly in the Middle

East and North Africa—were engaged in local counter-insurgencies, fighting groups that were indigenously formed and committed to uprooting national political systems through the conflicts that marked the period. Following then al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden’s 1996 and 1998 declarations of war against Americans, Jews and Crusaders—with leading signatories from violent Islamist groups in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia—the message was clear: “Fight the pagans all together . . . until there is no more tumult or oppression.”<sup>7</sup>

Six months after Bin Laden’s call for a united Islamic front, al-Qaeda suicide bombers drove truck bombs into US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people and wounding 2,500.<sup>8</sup> Far from its bases in Afghanistan and Sudan, al-Qaeda showed the world its commitment to its declaration and its resolve to inflict mass-casualty attacks abroad. Another attack followed on US assets in Yemen in 2000, as al-Qaeda entered a period of formal and informal organisational merges with smaller, local insurgent groups across the Muslim-majority world.

Throughout the 1990s, Bin Laden forged links with violent Islamist groups from Morocco to Iraq, Mali to Somalia and Myanmar to Indonesia, while providing resources and assistance for insurgencies in Pakistan, the Philippines and Tajikistan.<sup>9</sup> From 1998, the al-Qaeda network set about organising the 9/11 attacks.

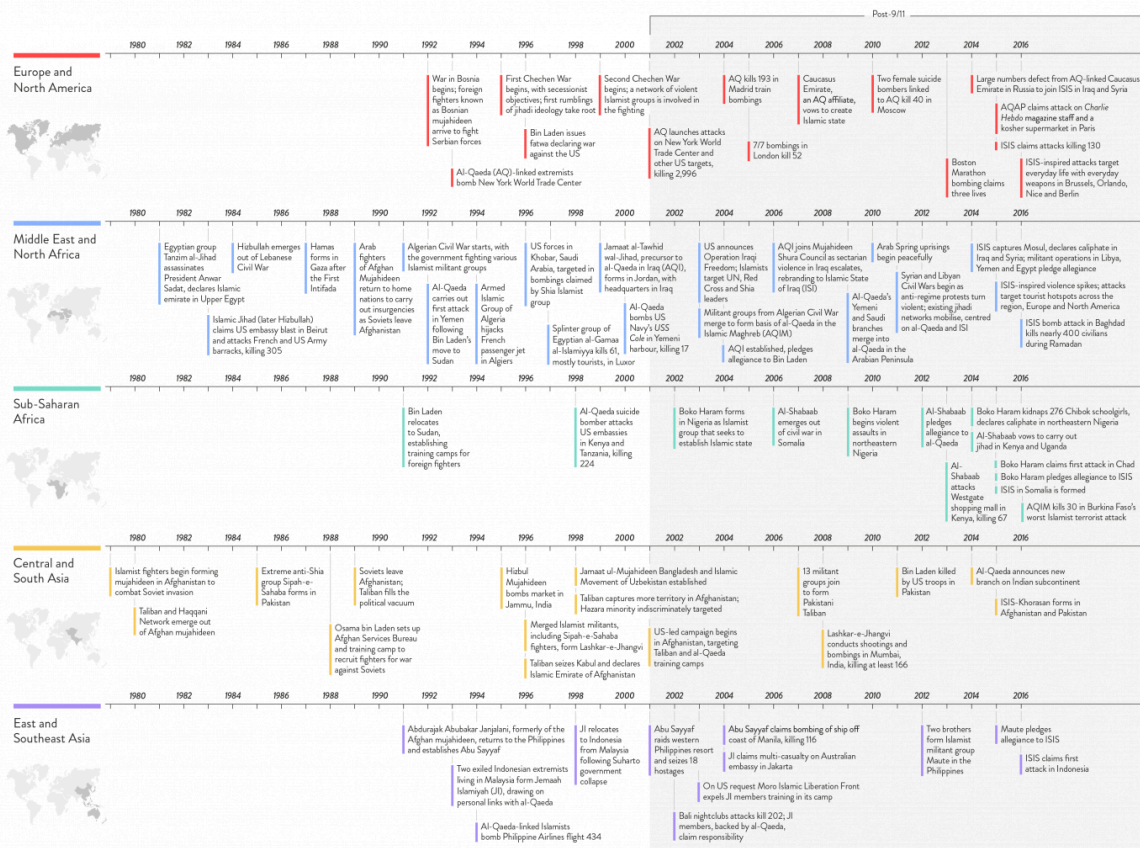
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7 Osama bin Laden’s 1996 religious ruling and his 1998 ruling titled “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders”.

8 “East African Embassy Bombings”, Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/east-african-embassy-bombings>.

9 “Mapping Militant Organizations: Al Qaeda”, Stanford University, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/21>.

Figure 1.3: Timeline of Selected Violent Islamist Incidents, 1979–2016



## A PROLIFERATION OF TERRORISM SINCE 9/11

The coordinated attacks in September 2001 on the World Trade Center that killed 2,996 propelled al-Qaeda and Islamist terrorism to the forefront of the international security agenda.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the structures of al-Qaeda changed critically, as did the landscape of global violent Islamism. The franchising of the al-Qaeda brand after 2001 leveraged the connections forged in the 1990s, creating an ideologically aligned but decentralised terrorist movement committed to targeting the West and its allies.

A year after the 9/11 attacks, several groups worldwide emerged or reconstituted themselves in line with Bin Laden's call to global

10 Brad Plummer, “Nine facts about terrorism in the United States since 9/11”, Washington Post, 11 September 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/09/11/nine-facts-about-terrorism-in-the-united-states-since-911/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.f12a7ed01310](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/09/11/nine-facts-about-terrorism-in-the-united-states-since-911/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f12a7ed01310).

jihad. Official al-Qaeda franchises emerged in Yemen, Iraq and northwest Africa. Insurgent leaders in almost every continent, historically focused on local issues, began to shift their worldview to incorporate Bin Laden's globalist jihadi ideology, while continuing to carry out local attacks on Western interests. With this growing network, al-Qaeda inspired and facilitated a wave of attacks worldwide throughout the early 2000s, on targets from Bali nightclubs to London buses.

Bin Laden's death in 2011 came amid a wave of Arab-majority protests for political reform across North Africa and the Middle East. Under the administration of former US President Barack Obama and after the assassination of Bin Laden, a campaign of drone strikes on al-Qaeda killed at least 34 of the group's leaders in Pakistan and 230 of its fighters.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the culmination of civil war following the Syrian uprisings in 2012 gradually provided an opportunity for a revival of al-Qaeda networks in Syria and Iraq. From mergers to splits, within two years al-Qaeda faced a new rival heavyweight in the global jihadi movement. Still aligned on a fundamental ideology to fight the West and all its allies—from fellow Muslims to the “Crusader-Zionist alliance”—al-Qaeda lost its monopoly, as its former Iraqi franchise split off, rebranded as ISIS, announced the establishment of a so-called Islamic state and drew pledges of allegiance from all over the world, including from some groups formerly allied to al-Qaeda.<sup>12</sup>

The rivalry between ISIS and al-Qaeda continues to shape the structure of terrorism networks today, as groups splinter over which brand to pledge allegiance to. Despite the fault lines in the movement, the ideas and objectives across the groups have never been clearer and more unified. Previous research by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change on the ideologies of ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates shows the deep ideological alignment and cohesion between them.<sup>13</sup> The GEM data from 2017 reveal how alike they are operationally and strategically, despite the factionalism that has

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11 Bruce Hoffman, “Al Qaeda's Uncertain Future”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 8 (2013): 636.

12 Emman El-Badawy, Milo Comerford and Peter Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding Ideology and Propaganda*, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 6 October 2015, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/inside-jihadi-mind-understanding-ideology-and-propaganda>.

13 Ibid.

marked the period since 2011. The tactics and priorities, shaped by their common ideology, are plain to see in the data captured in one year, from the targeting of civilians to the enactment of punishments.

## **THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM**

Throughout the 30- to 40-year history of global terrorism, counter-terrorism efforts have adopted varied strategies, from amnesties and sustained local counter-insurgencies throughout the 1990s to international coordinated military coalitions and targeted drone strikes on training camps and strongholds throughout the 2000s. Yet despite a variety of approaches to tackle Islamist violence in an array of local contexts, the challenge is growing. In devising sustainable strategies to fight the terrorists, it is critical to understand the forces that ideologically drive and unite them.

The scale of the challenge is clear from the data in 2017. Now, it is vital to acknowledge the depth and origins of the problem, to prepare for what has been—and will continue to be—a long-term struggle against not only the violence but also the ideas and beliefs that have come to justify this mass call to arms.

## THE FULL REPORT

Download the full Global Extremism Monitor 2017 (<https://institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files/Global%20Extremism%20Monitor%202017.pdf>) or browse individual chapters:

- Foreword by Tony Blair (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/global-extremism-monitor-foreword-tony-blair>)
- Violent Islamist Extremism: A Global Problem
- Islamist Extremism in 2017: The Ten Deadliest Countries (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/islamist-extremism-2017-ten-deadliest-countries>)
- How Islamist Extremists Target Civilians (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/why-islamist-extremists-target-civilians>)
- Islamist Extremist Strategy: Suicide Bombing (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/islamist-extremist-strategy-suicide-bombing>)
- Islamist Extremist Strategy: Executions (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/islamist-extremist-strategy-executions>)
- Global Extremism Monitor: Methodology (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/global-extremism-monitor-methodology>)





This first part of the Global Extremism Monitor 2017 exposes the scale of violent Islamism. At least 84,023 people in 66 countries died during the year because of this problem.

Access the full Global Extremism Monitor 2017 [here](#).

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