



التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

Planning and Coordination Department



Spotlight
On

European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018







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Understanding the driving forces of terrorism around the world gains great importance as it provides us with a clear look of terrorism's dynamics and its development when the international community is working together to end its threat. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) published its annual report "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018" including the latest information not only about the types of various terrorist groups, but also about the change of strategy and financing methods of these groups in the European Union.

The report states five different kinds of terrorism facing the EU: jihadist, ethno-nationalist, separatist, left-wing, anarchist, right-wing and single-issue terrorism. In 2017, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist attacks outnumbered those committed by jihadists; however, killings and injuries often come as a result of what the report refers to as "jihadist attacks". Because of the special importance and attention given to this kind of terrorism, the report is focusing mainly on it.

The defeat of Da'esh is, no doubt, a global achievement. Yet the threat it forms together with other similar groups extends beyond the areas under its control in Iraq and Syria. In 2017, both al-Qaeda and Da'esh published instructions on how to launch attacks against citizens living in the west. Electronic propaganda of terrorist organizations openly calls on sympathizers to use easily applied tools to launch chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) small-scale attacks inside their communities, and even though no such planned or foiled attacks were reported by any EU member state, online propaganda inciting such attacks continues to rise. In 2017, a total of 705 people were arrested in 18 EU member states for suspicions of involvement in terrorist ac-

tivities or terrorist groups.

The countries that registered the highest numbers of arrests are: France (373), Spain (78) Germany (52), Belgium (50), and Austria (46). Despite the slightly decreased number of arrests compared to 2016, which amounted to 718, fear of foreign fighters or sympathizers' return from radicalized countries pre-

The number of those arrested on charges of involvement in terrorist acts or of being a terrorist organization in European Union countries allows from 718 people in 2016 to 705 people in 2017

vails especially that they might act as lone wolves that continue to reap innocent lives. The terrorist groups' promotion of low-cost attacks forms a new strategy for sympa-

thiziers, facilitates terrorist activity at a large-scale and raises the threat of terrorism.

It is true that terrorist organizations tend to use explosives that cause massive attacks and consequently larger numbers of deaths, stronger emotional response and bigger media coverage. However, the need to maintain their existence and enhance their credibility forced them to encourage the use of knives and vehicles as easy and effective weapons, and invitations to use them increased online despite the losses of the groups areas in Iraq and Syria.

Evidence of this threat is found in the acknowledgment that most terrorist attacks are launched by local terrorists who have been locally radicalized without a need to travel abroad. Those terrorism-prone individuals were born in EU countries, or lived there all their lives, and in most cases, have criminal records apart from their terrorist affiliations. Those terrorist use three main kinds of terrorist attacks:

1. Random killings
2. Attacks targeting western lifestyle
3. Attacks against symbols of authority



Terrorist groups seek to recruit lone sympathizers in hopes of hiding their plans and intentions from those around them who might have different opinions, prevent them from pursuing their violent acts or, least likely, might foil their operations through local authority.

The Threat of Foreign Fighters

Foreign fighters returning from hot areas form a major future terrorist threat. The EU estimates the total number of individuals who are thought to have traveled to conflict zones like Iraq and Syria to be around 5,000 persons. The EU believes that only 2,500 of those fighters fought for Da'esh, 1,500 returned and 1,000 killed in combat. Belgium, Germany, France, and the UK were the main sources of foreign fighters who travel to the Middle East and outside the EU. Even though the numbers of those who traveled and returned from the EU was much less than expected in 2017 due to the military situation, countries such as Hungary show greater interest in those who enter the country with the help of organized crime groups who are active in illegal emigration.

Those foreign fighters might enjoy various levels of expertise in combat and military operations, and were probably ripped of their humanity in their attempts to spread radical thought inside their communities and among individuals prone to terrorism. Regardless of their whereabouts, whether spread inside their communities or in prison, the EU countries are facing the threat that those returnees might serve as role model, recruitment liaisons, or donations collectors, and might be involved in terrorist attacks or creating local terrorist cells. Local terrorism is, indeed, a considerable threat, let alone the fear of returnees which makes the fragile situation worse in the EU, Africa, and south and southeast Asia. As the numbers of ousted fighters from Iraq and Syria increase, countries such as Afghanistan and Libya seem to be their preferred destination.

Defeating ISIS is a global achievement, but the threat it poses and other similar organizations go beyond the areas they controlled in Iraq and Syria

The Question of Terrorism Financing

Investigations in 2017 about terrorism financing operations proved that this issue is a complex one. A large network of Lebanese citizens was found to be involved in money-laundering services in favor of organized crime groups in return for a share or percentage that they use to finance the activities of Hezbollah. Another investigation conducted in the EU helped gain a deeper understanding of the number of foreign fighters who

There is no indication that terrorist groups within the European Union have benefited from virtual currencies

live and function in conflict zones in the Middle East, Iraq, Syria and Libya.

By conducting a surveillance of over 5,000 transactions by around 2,000 remitters from the EU to 1,000 beneficiaries, it turned out that the total remitted amount exceeded € 2 m. through a network of intermediaries and money collectors who work with the families that provide financial support to foreign fighters in conflict zones. This investigation not only proved the existence of suspect foreign fighters, but also helped identify unrecognized sympathizers and supporters of terrorism.

Diaspora communities retain a great importance and sensitivity, let alone their fragility towards conflict-related activities taking place in their home countries. They muster a lot of sympathy for what is going on back there, organize fund raising campaigns on websites and at mosques and, in some cases, facilitate money-laundering operations through non-profit organizations in the name of humanitarian relief. The EU is conducting numerous investigations of different levels of complexity to track such money across the international borders.

This kind of operations has become very well-known and popular because they are easy to get and characterized by confidentiality, safety, low-cost and the superfast international transactions. However, there is nothing to suggest that these terrorist groups in the EU have benefitted from this mechanism or developed in the same way and speed that organized crime groups have developed. Still, the EU is committed to include virtual currency and its relation to crime within its combating terrorism strategy.

Terrorism Encirclement in Cyberspace

Remarkable success has been achieved by the EU in combating social media content that propagates radicalism and recruits terrorists, and in blocking such users from having access to Facebook, YouTube or Twitter. Law enforcement and terrorist propaganda criminalization measures adopted by the EU helped decrease terrorists' misuse of prevalent applications. However, social media platforms and applications remain easy prey for terrorist groups despite the noticeable losses in lives and resources that hit Da'esh's infrastructure but did not curtail the organization's ability to regroup itself and its members. The terrorist

Emerging social media sites and apps are still a palatable front for the means to hunt terrorist groups

group showed evidence of launching a massive online campaign to preserve itself and its credibility, which proves that the internet is still seen by terrorists as a main tool to practice their activities publically. There is also fear that terrorists might launch cyber-attacks.

Terrorist cyber-attacks were limited to webpages dis-

tortion and social media hacking. Nothing shows that terrorist groups have found any ways to destroy any EU state's electronic infrastructure. The state of no cyber-attacks can be attributed to the lack of technical capabilities among those groups, which makes this threat relatively minimal. Yet, some studies point out that these groups might be thinking of recruiting skilled technicians in criminal groups instead of building their own capabilities.

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL)

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) is a European law enforcement agency. Its main goal is maintaining peace in Europe. It is based in The Hague, the Netherlands, and given support to 28 EU member states in their war on terrorism, cyber-crime and other forms of dangerous and organized crime.



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