

Patterns of Islamic State-Related Terrorism, 2002–2015

For more than a decade, the organization now known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or simply the Islamic State, has carried out deadly terrorist attacks. Beginning as a small network led by Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the first terrorist attack attributed to this group was the assassination of American diplomat Laurence Foley in Amman, Jordan in October 2002. Since then, the group initially known as Tawhid and Jihad (Jama’at al-Tawhid w’al-Jihad (the Party of Monotheism and Jihad)) has undergone a complex evolution, including name changes, leadership changes, and shifts in allegiance to other Salafi-jihadist organizations, most notably al-Qaida. In addition, the reach of ISIL’s violence surpasses its own membership, to include attacks carried out by other groups and individuals who have pledged allegiance to ISIL regardless of whether or not formal ties exist.

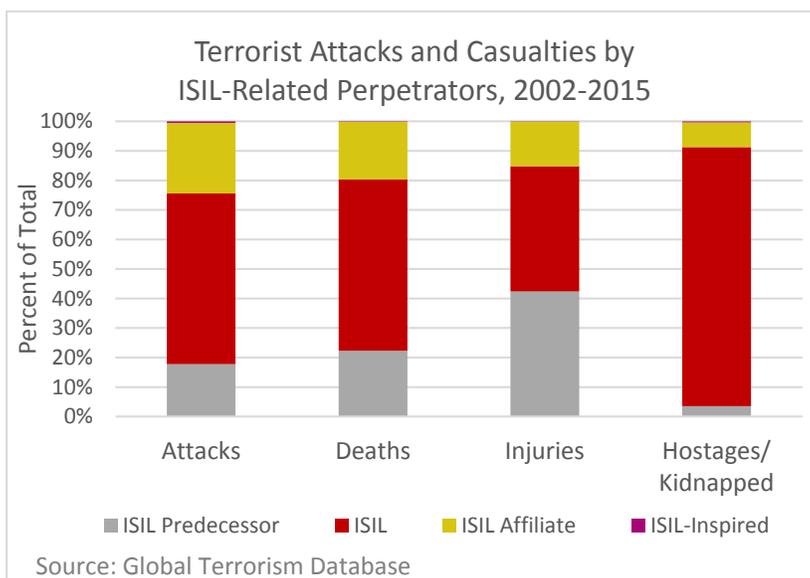
This complexity makes it difficult to comprehensively and systematically place into context the violence of one of the most active and deadly terrorist organizations in recent history. For the purpose of this report, we have classified the terrorist attacks in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) into four ISIL-related perpetrator categories:

- ISIL Predecessor:** attacks by organizations that were part of the ISIL lineage prior to adoption of the ISIL name in 2013
- ISIL:** attacks by operatives of the “core” of the organization, based in and primarily active in Iraq and Syria
- ISIL Affiliate:** attacks by organizations that have declared allegiance to ISIL¹
- ISIL-Inspired:** attacks by individuals who have indicated that they were motivated by allegiance to ISIL
- ISIL-Related:** any of the above

This report presents data that illustrate the dynamics of ISIL-related terrorism over time and place, from 2002 to 2015. In particular, we investigate trends in the number of attacks and deaths caused by ISIL-related terrorism over time, the geographic spread of ISIL-related terrorism, and patterns of tactics, targets, and lethality of ISIL-related terrorism.

ISIL-RELATED TERRORISM: OVERVIEW

Between 2002 and 2015, more than 4,900 terrorist attacks were carried out by groups or organizations affiliated with the organization now known as the Islamic State. These attacks caused more than 33,000 deaths and 41,000 injuries (including perpetrator casualties), and involved more than 11,000 individuals held hostage or kidnapped. Excluding incidents where the perpetrator group was not identified, these attacks represented 13 percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide, 26 percent of all deaths, 28 percent of all injuries, and 24 percent of all kidnap victims or hostages due to terrorism during the same time period.



Among ISIL-related perpetrators of terrorism, “core” ISIL was responsible for the majority of attacks (58%), deaths (58%), and especially hostages (88%), compared to ISIL predecessor groups, ISIL-affiliated groups, and individuals inspired by ISIL. Attacks carried out by ISIL and ISIL predecessor groups each comprised 42 percent of all injuries caused in ISIL-related terrorist attacks.

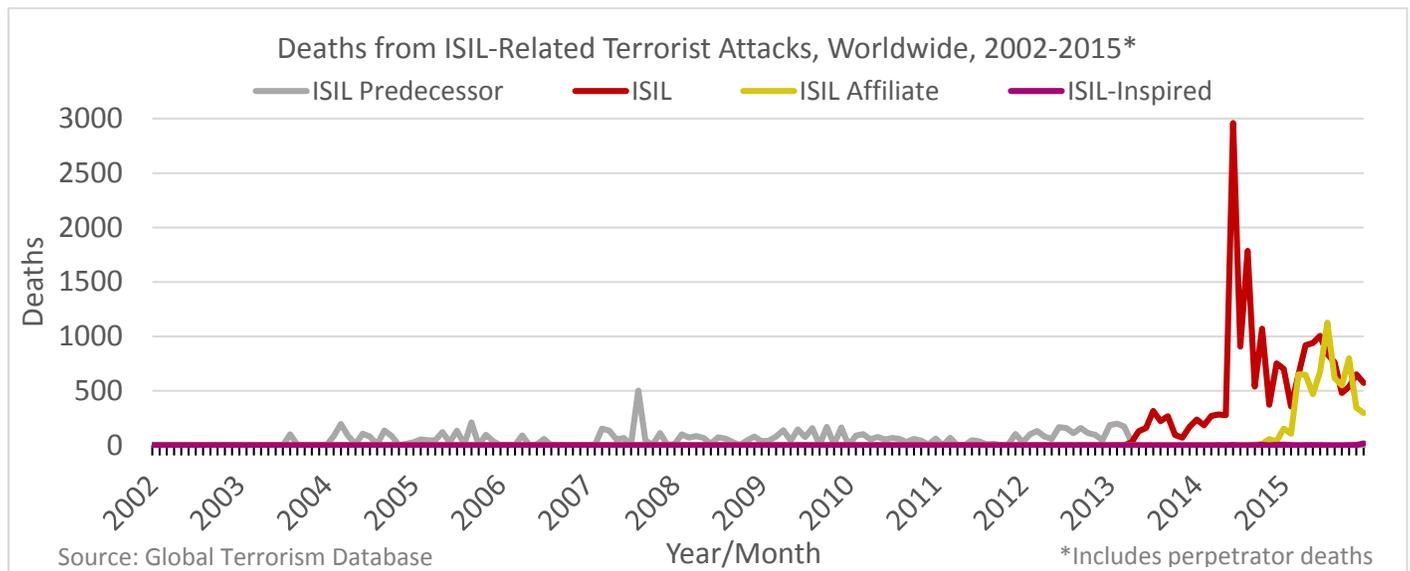
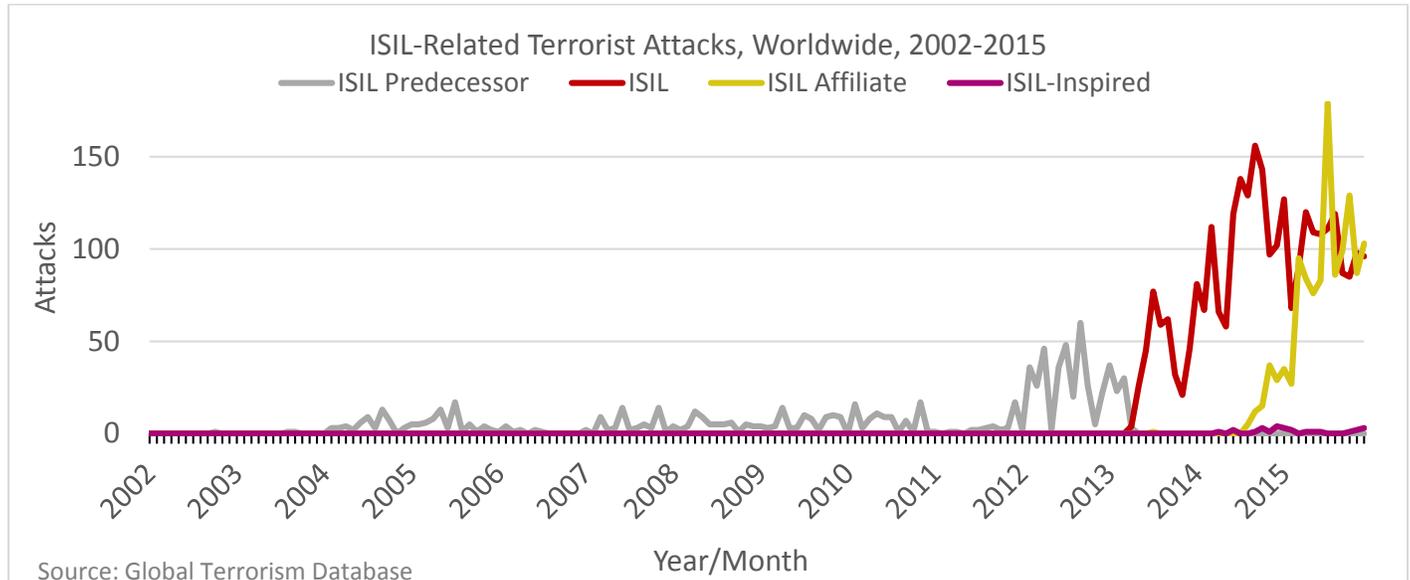
Although attacks carried out by individuals who claimed allegiance to ISIL have drawn considerable media attention in recent months, these perpetrators were responsible for less than 1 percent of all ISIL-related attacks and casualties between 2002 and 2015. In addition, attacks carried out by individuals inspired by ISIL were 74 percent less deadly on average than ISIL-related attacks in general (1.9 deaths per attack on average, compared to 7.3).

¹ Note: in statistics for ISIL-affiliated perpetrators we only included attacks that took place *after* a group declared allegiance. Detailed information about the methodology of this classification can be found in the “Methodological Note” below.

PATTERNS OF ISIL-RELATED TERRORISM OVER TIME AND LOCATION

The graphs below illustrate patterns of ISIL-related terrorist attacks and total deaths over time, highlighting the perpetrators' relationship to ISIL.² Between October 2002 and April 2013, ISIL predecessors (primarily known as al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)) carried out attacks almost exclusively in Iraq (95%). An additional 5 percent of attacks carried out by the perpetrator organizations that would become ISIL took place in Syria beginning in December 2011. Initially sources attributed responsibility for the attacks in Syria to AQI, and in 2012 al-Nusrah Front began claiming responsibility for attacks in Syria. In addition, four attacks were carried out in Jordan—one in 2002 (by Tawhid and Jihad) and three in 2005 (by AQI). Two men reportedly linked to AQI carried out an attack in the United Kingdom in 2007.

In April 2013, ISI leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced the expansion of ISI to include al-Nusrah Front in Syria.³ Although al-Nusrah Front's leadership ultimately rejected this alliance, and al-Qaida leadership subsequently disowned ISIL, this marked the beginning of the organization's dramatic expansion in terms of frequency and lethality of attacks, as well as geographic scope.

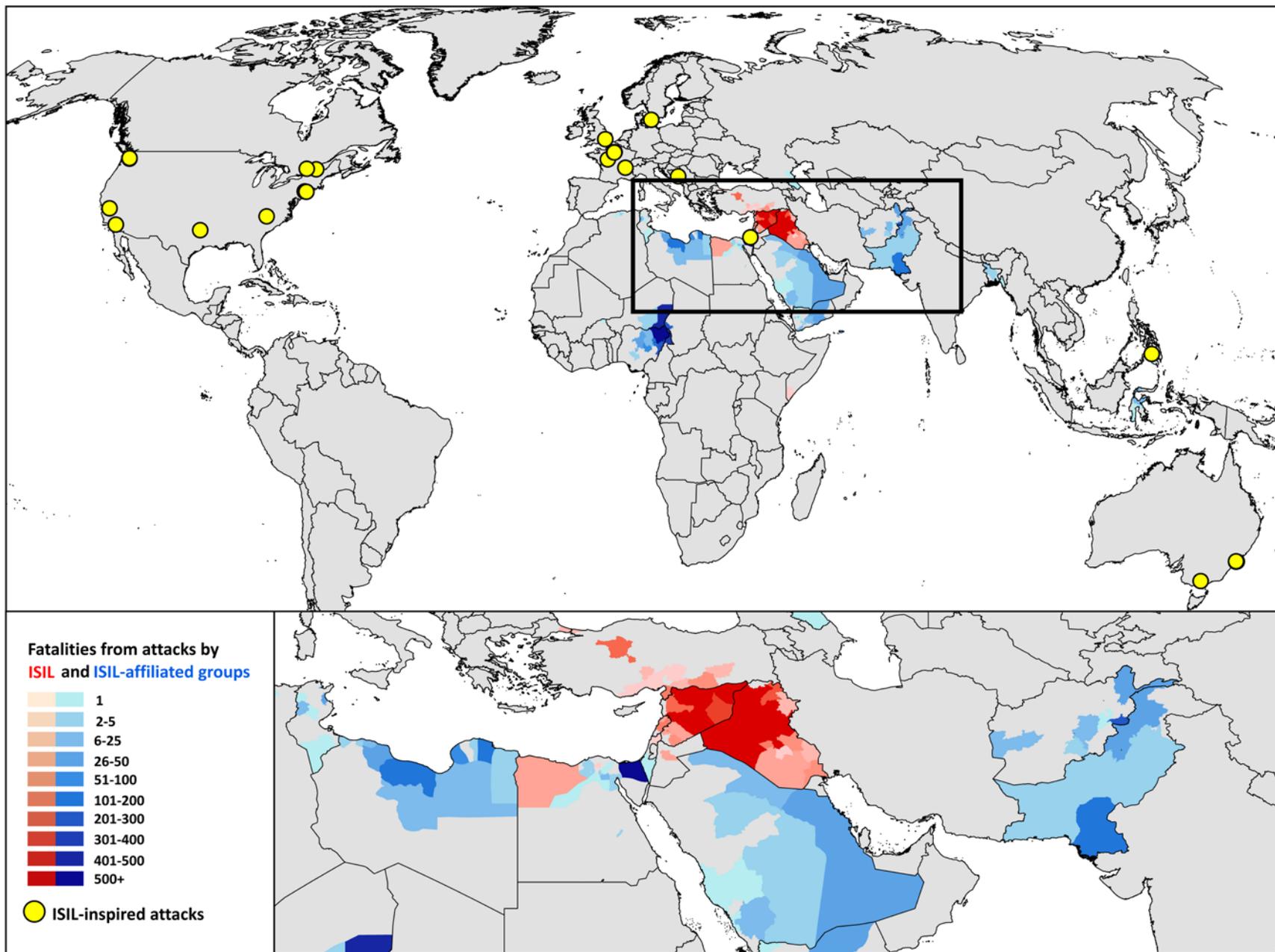


² Keeping in mind the potential impact of increasing access to media sources on which the GTD is based, we encourage readers to interpret trends over time with caution. For more information please see:

Jensen, M. (2013, November 25). The benefits and drawbacks of methodological advancements in data collection and coding: Insights from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Retrieved from <http://start.umd.edu/news/discussion-point-benefits-and-drawbacks-methodological-advancements-data-collection-and-coding>

³ Joscelyn, T. (2014, February 3). Al Qaeda's general command disowns the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham. Retrieved from http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/02/al_qaedas_general_co.php

ISIL-Related Terrorism, 2013-2015



⁴ An interactive version of this map is available at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/interactive/ISILmap.html>

From May 2013 through the end of the year, ISIL carried out an average of 46 attacks per month. In 2014, the frequency of attacks more than doubled to 106 attacks per month, and in 2015, ISIL carried out 102 terrorist attacks per month. The map above illustrates the geographic concentration of ISIL-related terrorism, focusing on the 2013 to 2015 time period. Like attacks by its predecessors, ISIL's terrorist attacks between 2013 and 2015 (shown in red on the map) were heavily concentrated in Iraq (86%) and Syria (12%).⁵ ISIL was also responsible for terrorist attacks in neighboring countries such as Lebanon (1%) and Turkey (1%), as well as in Bahrain, Belgium, Egypt, France, Israel, Jordan, Libya, and Somalia, each of which comprised less than 1 percent of ISIL's terrorist attacks.

In mid-2014, increasing numbers of attacks were carried out by new and existing organizations that pledged allegiance to ISIL, loosely described here as ISIL affiliates. Among the first of these organizations to declare allegiance to ISIL was the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM), active in the Philippines. In August 2014, BIFM spokesperson Abu Misry Mama stated "We have an alliance with the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi."⁶ Later that year, the Barqa Province of the Islamic State and the Tripoli Province of the Islamic State emerged in Libya, while Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in Egypt pledged allegiance to ISIL and became the Sinai Province of the Islamic State.⁷

Shown in blue on the map above, the terrorist activity of ISIL affiliates increased dramatically in March 2015 when Abubakar Shekau, then-leader of the extremely violent Nigerian organization Boko Haram, announced "allegiance to the caliph."⁸ Following this development, Boko Haram's terrorist activity was a significant driver of the overall trend of violence carried out by ISIL affiliated groups. In 2015, each of these ISIL-affiliated groups—Boko Haram, Sinai Province, Tripoli Province, Barqa Province, and BIFM—ranked among the 20 most active perpetrator organizations worldwide in terms of number of attacks.

Due primarily to ISIL's expanded operations beyond Iraq and Syria and the addition of numerous allied organizations, ISIL-related terrorist attacks took place in four countries in 2013, in 19 countries in 2014, and in 33 countries in 2015.

The first attack carried out by an individual who was reportedly inspired by ISIL, though not directly linked to the organization, took place in April 2014 in the United States. In Seattle, an assailant shot and killed a civilian and later claimed he had done so in response to U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sources also indicated that the perpetrator had written in his journal that he intended to "follow" ISIL. Two months later, the same assailant carried out similar attacks in Seattle and West Orange, New Jersey before being apprehended, tried, and convicted.

A total of 26 attacks, marked in yellow on the map above, were carried out in 2014 and 2015 by individuals inspired by ISIL. These attacks killed 50 people, including 13 perpetrators, and took place primarily in the United States (8 attacks), France (6), Australia (4), Denmark (2), and Canada (2).

TACTICS, TARGETS, AND LETHALITY

Terrorist attacks by ISIL, its predecessors, and affiliated groups are known to be particularly deadly and involve especially intimidating tactics, including suicide attacks, hostage-taking, and multi-part, coordinated events. The table below describes differences between ISIL-related attacks and non-ISIL-related attacks with respect to these dimensions.

While approximately half (51%) of attacks carried out by perpetrators not linked to ISIL were lethal, three-quarters (75%) of ISIL-related attacks were deadly. The highest proportion of lethal attacks were those carried out by ISIL-inspired individuals, whose attacks resulted in at least one death 85 percent of the time. Note, however, that despite this relatively high prevalence of deadly attacks, the average lethality of attacks carried out by ISIL-inspired individuals between 2002 and 2015 was 1.9 deaths per attack. This is much more similar to the lethality of attacks by perpetrators not linked to ISIL (2.1 deaths per attack). In contrast, the average number of deaths per attack carried out by ISIL predecessor groups was 8.6, the average number of deaths caused by attacks carried out by ISIL "core" was 7.5, and attacks by ISIL affiliated groups caused 5.8 deaths per attack, on average.

⁵ Given the limitations of media coverage in Syria, the data presented here are conservative estimates of terrorism in Syria. Consistent with START's practice of including in the GTD only those attacks that have been verified by at least one well-regarded source, these statistics represent those incidents that were reported by independent news outlets.

⁶ GMA News Online. (2014, August 16). BIFF, Abu Sayyaf pledge allegiance to Islamic State jihadists. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/375074/news/nation/biff-abu-sayyaf-pledge-allegiance-to-islamic-state-jihadists>

⁷ BBC Monitoring. (2016, May 12). Sinai Province: Egypt's most dangerous group. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25882504>

⁸ BBC. (2015, March 7). Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538>

Attack Patterns of ISIL-Related and Non-ISIL-Related Terrorist Attacks, 2002-2015

	Total Attacks	% Lethal	Total Deaths per Attack	% Suicide	% Hostages/ Kidnapping	% Coordinated Attacks
ISIL-Related	4943	74.7	7.3	19.3	11.5	38.5
<i>ISIL Predecessors</i>	877	81.6	8.6	23.8	6.2	51.7
ISIL	2858	75.7	7.5	19.0	12.8	38.6
<i>ISIL-Affiliated</i>	1182	67.1	5.8	17.2	12.5	29.2
<i>ISIL-Inspired</i>	26	84.6	1.9	0.0	11.5	11.5
Non-ISIL-Related	78345	51.4	2.1	4.6	7.5	13.3
Total	83288	52.7	2.4	5.4	7.8	14.8

None of the attacks by ISIL-inspired individuals were suicide attacks, compared to approximately 24 percent of attacks by ISIL predecessors, 19 percent of attacks by ISIL “core,” and 17 percent of attacks by ISIL affiliates. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the weapons used in the ISIL-inspired attacks were firearms. Seven of these attacks involved “melee” weapons—knives or other sharp objects. Two involved explosives, and in one of these (the San Bernardino attack in the United States), the explosives failed to detonate. Two attacks involved vehicles used as weapons.

In addition to the prevalence of suicide attacks, ISIL-related terrorist attacks between 2002 and 2015 were also distinguished by the frequent taking of hostages and commission of multi-part events comprised of coordinated attacks. In approximately 12 percent of ISIL-related attacks, including those carried out by individuals inspired by ISIL, the assailants either kidnapped victims or held hostages at the site of the attack. This tactic was 50 percent more prevalent in ISIL-related attacks than in attacks that were not linked to ISIL.

Likewise, the prevalence of coordinated attacks was three times as high for ISIL-related attacks (39% of all attacks were part of a coordinated event) compared to attacks that were not carried out by ISIL-linked perpetrators (13%). In general, attacks that were part of a coordinated event were 22 percent deadlier, on average, than isolated attacks. However, with respect to ISIL-related attacks, those that were part of coordinated events were actually 38 percent less deadly, on average, compared to isolated attacks. This somewhat counter-intuitive finding stems from the fact that ISIL and its predecessors have carried out a number of exceptionally deadly isolated attacks, causing hundreds of casualties.

TERRORIST ATTACKS BY ISIL PREDECESSORS

The organizations that would become ISIL—primarily AQI, and later ISI—carried out devastating attacks in Iraq that were designed to intimidate citizens and undermine security. Not only were more than half (52%) of the attacks that were carried out by ISIL predecessors part of coordinated events, on 15 separate occasions between 2010 and 2013 AQI carried out more than 10 attacks in a single day. Four days saw more than 30 AQI attacks across Iraq.

These extensive multi-part events in which more than 10 attacks took place on the same day all involved explosives as the primary weapon type. Assailants detonated bombs in 92 percent of the individual attacks that comprised the 15 multi-part events. The remaining 8 percent of individual attacks were armed assaults involving firearms. The primary targets of these attacks were most frequently private citizens and property (44%), police (23%), military targets (11%), and businesses (10%).

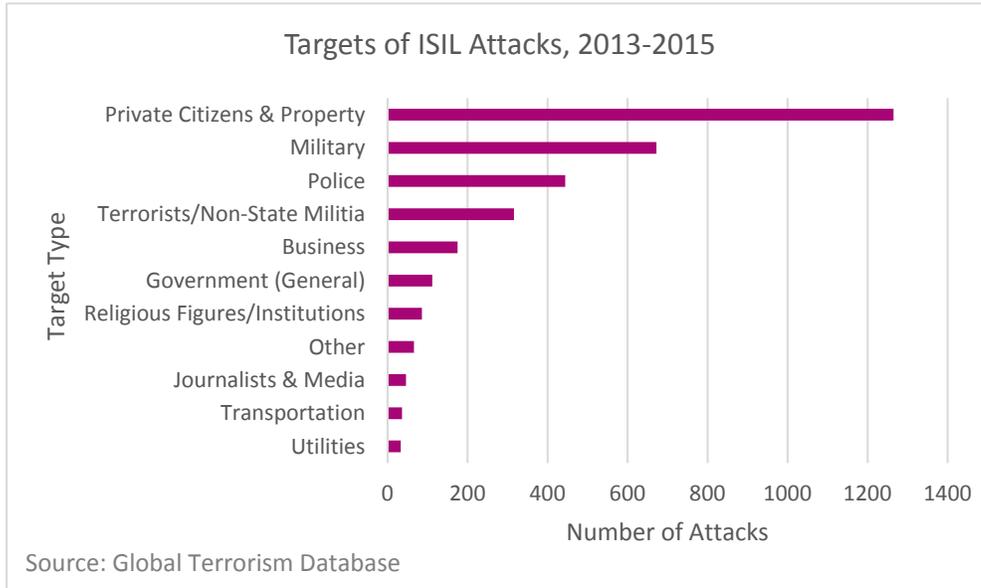
*ISIL Predecessors:
Attacks on a Single Day, 2002-2013*

Number of Attacks	Frequency
1	299
2-3	67
4-6	13
7-10	4
11-15	7
16-21	3
22-28	1
29-36	2
37-45	2

TERRORIST ATTACKS BY ISIL

As ISI evolved into ISIL, the group's tactics remained extraordinarily destructive. Between 2013 and 2015, there were 32 occasions on which ISIL carried out more than 10 attacks in a single day, all in Iraq. Furthermore, the number of cases in which ISIL attacks resulted in more than 100 deaths increased from six to 16 between 2013 and 2015. These attacks targeted private citizens (6 attacks), military (5), police (3), business (1), and government (1) targets.

The deadliest attacks attributed to ISIL took place in Iraq in June 2014, when assailants abducted more than 1,600 Iraqi Air Force recruits at Camp Speicher in Tikrit and ultimately killed most, if not all of them. In a separate attack earlier that month, ISIL operatives killed more than 600 Shia prisoners at Badush prison in Nineveh.

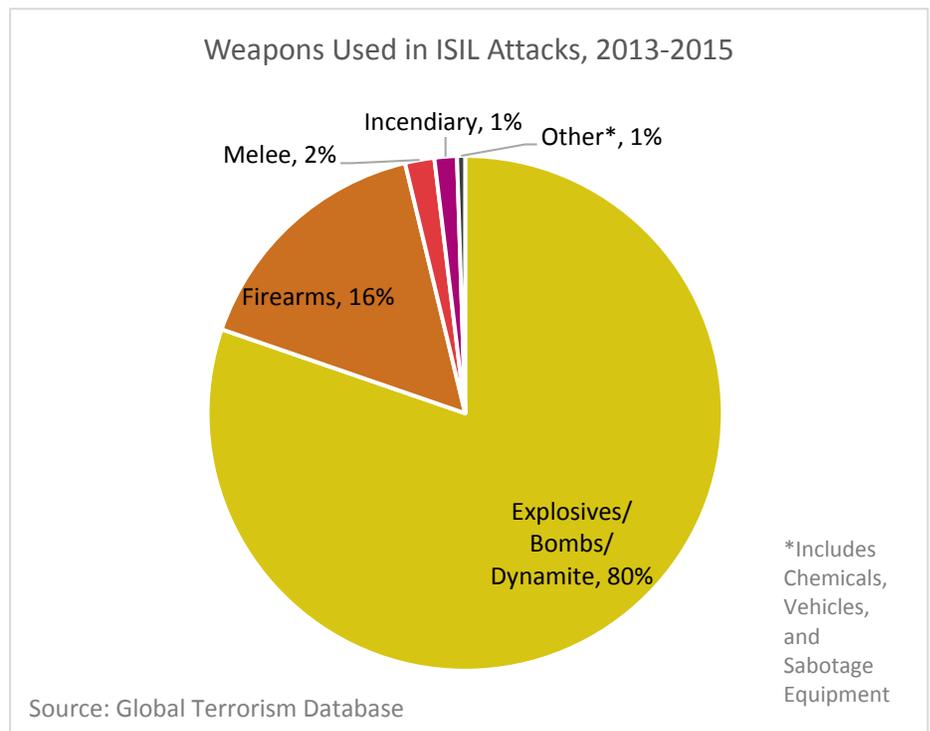


The most frequent targets of ISIL attacks between April 2013 and the end of 2015 were private citizens and property (39%). Perhaps most notably, attacks primarily targeting private citizens resulted in more than 6,100 people held hostage or kidnapped. Available sources indicate that approximately 1,200 of these victims were subsequently released. The remaining victims were either killed or their status is unknown.

Along with private citizens and property, military targets (21%) and police targets (14%) comprise nearly three-quarters of all attacks carried out by ISIL.

In comparison to global patterns during the same time period, the weapons used by ISIL in terrorist attacks between 2013 and 2015 were disproportionately explosives rather than firearms and incendiaries. Specifically, the vast majority (80%) of weapons used in ISIL's attacks were explosives, compared to 58 percent of weapons used worldwide. An additional 16 percent of weapons used by ISIL were firearms, compared to 33 percent globally, and 2 percent involved "melee" weapons (usually sharp or blunt objects). Only 1 percent of the weapons used in ISIL's attacks were incendiaries, much lower than the usage of incendiary weapons in 6 percent of terrorist attacks worldwide.

Chemicals, vehicles as weapons, and sabotage equipment comprised less than 1 percent of the weapons used in attacks by ISIL between 2013 and 2015. Note, however, that recent reports indicate that ISIL's use of chemical weapons became more common in 2016.⁹



⁹ Vickery, M. (2016, March 10). Eyewitness account: ISIL steps up chemical weapons attacks on Kurds in Iraq. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/03/10/eyewitness-account-isil-steps-up-mustard-gas-attacks-kurds-iraq/81579492/>

TERRORIST ATTACKS BY ISIL-AFFILIATED GROUPS

As new and established organizations began making declarations of allegiance to ISIL, the network expanded dramatically. In 2014, 11 ISIL-affiliated perpetrator groups carried out terrorist attacks in eight different countries, and in 2015 a total of 27 ISIL-affiliated groups carried out attacks in 20 different countries. The 10 most active ISIL affiliates are listed in the table below, along with information about their attack patterns. Note that for organizations that existed prior to pledging allegiance to ISIL, such as Boko Haram, the table includes only those attacks that they carried out as ISIL affiliates. Thus, the time periods included for each group are not directly comparable.

Ten Most Active ISIL Affiliates, 2014-2015

Perpetrator Group	Location	Total Attacks	Total Deaths	Perpetrators Killed	Total Hostages/Kidnapped
Boko Haram	West Africa	397	4242	1001	405
Sinai Province of the Islamic State	Egypt	173	624	168	33
Tripoli Province of the Islamic State	Libya	145	184	28	239
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM)	Philippines	136	105	37	4
Barqa Province of the Islamic State	Libya	94	230	23	66
Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	Af/Pak	86	390	184	142
Sanaa Province of the Islamic State	Yemen	29	304	12	0
Tehrik-e-Khilafat	Pakistan	14	8	0	0
Islamic State in Bangladesh	Bangladesh	13	8	1	0
Adan-Abyan Province of the Islamic State	Yemen	11	33	4	1

The ISIL affiliates responsible for the most terrorist attacks and deaths are certainly those that were the most well-established organizations prior to indicating their allegiance to ISIL, and/or had declared allegiance to ISIL the earliest. These include Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Sinai Province (formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) in Egypt, and BIFM in the Philippines. ISIL's presence in Libya was precipitated by Libyan fighters returning from Iraq and Syria—militants who had organized as the Islamic Youth Shura Council, which splintered from Ansar al-Sharia.¹⁰

Terrorist attacks by both ISIL and ISIL affiliates were characterized by a high proportion of perpetrator deaths—24 percent and 23 percent of total deaths, respectively—compared to attacks that were not linked to ISIL, in which 17 percent of all deaths were perpetrator deaths. The affiliates whose attacks resulted in the highest proportion of perpetrators among those killed were the Khorasan Chapter in Afghanistan and Pakistan (47% of those killed in attacks were perpetrators), BIFM (35%), the Sinai Province (27%), and Boko Haram (24%). More than one-fifth (22%) of the Boko Haram and Sinai Province assailants who were killed died in suicide attacks. Attacks in which especially large numbers of perpetrators were killed typically involved numerous assailants attacking a security target, or security forces responding to a major attack targeting civilians.

TERRORIST ATTACKS BY ISIL-INSPIRED PERPETRATORS

A key distinction of the attacks by ISIL-inspired perpetrators, all of which occurred in 2014 and 2015, is that they took place in locations where terrorist attacks were relatively rare compared to where ISIL and ISIL affiliates were typically active. Eight of the ISIL-inspired attacks took place in the United States, six in France, four in Australia, two in Denmark, two in Canada; the Gaza Strip, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the United Kingdom, and the Philippines each experienced one ISIL-inspired attack.

Terrorist attacks carried out by individuals inspired by ISIL were also typically far less lethal than other ISIL-related attacks. In the United States, seven of the eight attacks resulted in one or two deaths, including three attacks that were carried out by the same assailant in Washington state and New Jersey, and three attacks in New York, California, and Texas in which only the perpetrators were killed. In the eighth attack, two assailants killed 14 people and injured more than 20 others in San Bernardino, California before being killed in a shoot-out with police.

In France, where ISIL “core” operatives orchestrated and carried out a series of extremely deadly coordinated attacks in November 2015, six attacks by ISIL-inspired assailants killed nine people, including two perpetrators. Three of the six attacks were the work of a single perpetrator, who attacked a jogger, a police officer, and a kosher supermarket on three consecutive days in January 2015.

¹⁰ Cruickshank, P., Robertson, N., Lister, T., and Karadsheh, J. (2014, November 18). ISIS comes to Libya. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/18/world/isis-libya/index.html>

Four ISIL-inspired attacks took place in Australia. In one, an assailant stabbed and wounded two police officers before being shot and killed by authorities. Another attack, targeting a Shia religious leader, was non-lethal. In December 2014, 18 people were held hostage in a Sydney café. The assailant and two hostages were killed. And, in October 2015 an attacker shot a civilian police employee; both the assailant and the victim were killed.

Two separate attacks in Canada in October 2014 targeted Canadian Armed Forces soldiers and a ceremonial guard at a National War Memorial. In each of these attacks, the assailant and one victim were killed. In February 2015, two people were killed by an ISIL-inspired assailant who targeted a synagogue and a cultural center in Copenhagen, Denmark. Two soldiers were killed in an ISIL-inspired attack in Bosnia-Herzegovina in November 2015, and two soldiers were killed at a fruit market in the Philippines in December 2015. The ISIL-inspired attacks in Gaza, targeting the French Cultural Center, and in the United Kingdom, targeting tube passengers in London, were non-lethal.

Eighteen of the 26 ISIL-inspired attacks were followed by terrorist attacks against Muslim targets, particularly mosques, in subsequent weeks and months. In contexts where anti-Islam attacks were not especially uncommon, it is not possible to distinguish the attacks that followed ISIL-inspired attacks as specifically retaliatory actions. However in certain cases, particularly in France, the increase in attacks against Muslims was stark and sudden, and source materials noted the likelihood of retaliatory motives.

ATTACK PATTERNS DURING RAMADAN

ISIL leaders past and present have encouraged fighters to carry out attacks during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. For example, in October 2005, a statement posted on an AQI website read, "Tuesday is the first day of the blessed month of Ramadan ... a month of serious work, jihad and initiative."¹¹ In June 2015, ISIL released a statement calling on jihadists to make Ramadan in Iraq, Syria, and Libya a time of "calamity for the infidels ... Shi'ites and apostate Muslims."¹² While major attacks have taken place during Ramadan, we have also observed major attacks outside the month of Ramadan, and periods during which Ramadan was relatively calm. Thus, it remains an open question whether Ramadan is a period of heightened risk.

Average Number of Attacks per Day during Ramadan and not during Ramadan, 2003-2015

Year	Ramadan Dates	ISIL Predecessor Attacks			ISIL Attacks			ISIL Affiliate Attacks			ISIL-Inspired Attacks			ISIL-Related Attacks			Non-ISIL-Related Attacks		
		NR	R	Δ	NR	R	Δ	NR	R	Δ	NR	R	Δ	NR	R	Δ	NR	R	Δ
2003	10/26 – 11/26	0.01	0.00	-									0.01	0.00	-	3.45	3.19	-	
2004	10/15 – 11/15	0.14	0.09	-									0.14	0.09	-	3.02	3.06	+	
2005	10/04 – 11/04	0.21	0.00	-									0.21	0.00	-	5.42	4.25	-	
2006	09/23 – 10/24	0.03	0.00	-									0.03	0.00	-	7.59	5.94	-	
2007	09/12 – 10/13	0.16	0.19	+									0.16	0.19	+	8.80	7.75	-	
2008	09/01 – 10/02	0.17	0.19	+									0.17	0.19	+	13.29	8.66	-	
2009	08/21 – 09/21	0.23	0.09	-									0.23	0.09	-	12.78	11.81	-	
2010	08/11 – 09/11	0.24	0.09	-									0.24	0.09	-	12.75	14.22	+	
2011	07/31 – 08/30	0.10	0.10	-									0.10	0.10	-	13.87	10.94	-	
2012	07/19 – 08/18	0.79	2.13	+									0.79	2.13	+	21.87	27.19	+	
2013	07/08 – 08/07				0.92	2.10	+	0.00	0.03	+			1.20	2.13	+	31.12	36.42	+	
2014	06/28 – 07/28				3.35	4.77	+	0.29	0.00	-	0.036	0.000	-	3.68	4.77	+	41.53	51.32	+
2015	06/17 – 07/17				3.28	3.94	+	2.81	4.61	+	0.039	0.032	-	6.13	8.58	+	34.41	32.19	-

NR= Not Ramadan; R=Ramadan; Δ= Difference between Ramadan and Not Ramadan

+ Increase during Ramadan

- Decrease or no change during Ramadan

To examine this question, the table above shows the average number of attacks per day for days that fell during Ramadan and days that did not, broken down by year. The table further divides these figures by type of perpetrator, including attacks by ISIL

¹¹ ABC. (2005, October 4). Al Qaeda calls for more Iraq attacks during Ramadan. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2005-10-04/al-qaeda-calls-for-more-iraq-attacks-during-ramadan/2117636>

¹² Abdelaty, A. and Al-Khalidi, S. (2015, June 23). Islamic State urges followers to escalate attacks in Ramadan. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-ramadan-idUSKBNOP31YH20150623>

predecessors, attacks by ISIL, attacks by ISIL affiliates, attacks by those inspired by ISIL, and overall those attacks linked to ISIL in any way compared to those not linked to ISIL. Note that the statistics for the lethality of terrorist attacks during Ramadan are not shown here in the interest of brevity, but results are very similar.

Attack patterns over time are a product of numerous contextual factors, so this information alone cannot provide a definitive conclusion about a causal link between Ramadan and the threat of terrorism. However, it is noteworthy that during the first 10 years of this analysis there appears to be no consistent pattern. In 2007, 2008, and 2012 there were increases in the number of attacks carried out by the groups that would later become ISIL, but in 2007 and 2008 these increases were very slight and most other years saw decreases in attacks during Ramadan by groups like AQI. This pattern is similar to that of attacks by perpetrators who were *not* ISIL's predecessors during that time period. Likewise, despite concerns raised among observers during Ramadan in 2016,¹³ attacks by individuals who were inspired by ISIL in 2014 and 2015 decreased during Ramadan.

In contrast, between 2013 and 2015, the average number of attacks carried out by ISIL "core" did increase each year during Ramadan; and, the average number of attacks per day by ISIL affiliates increased during Ramadan in 2013 and 2015, but decreased during Ramadan in 2014. The fact that the attacks that were not linked to ISIL also increased during Ramadan in both 2013 and 2014 is noteworthy. The class of perpetrators not linked to ISIL certainly include other Islamists who may have similar perspective on jihad during Ramadan, indicating that the strategy is not unique to ISIL. Or, perhaps the fact that consistent increases in terrorism during Ramadan are a recent development, coinciding with Ramadan taking place during the summer, suggests that there is a seasonality to patterns of terrorism that transcends ideology.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

For each attack included in the GTD, researchers review supporting source materials and record the name of the perpetrator group responsible for the attack. In doing so, GTD staff retain as much specificity as possible, while adopting a canonical naming convention for each group. If sources identify one or more individual perpetrators not formally affiliated with a group or organization, GTD staff classify the perpetrator(s) as "unaffiliated individual(s)." As an event-level database, the GTD does not systematically record information about the relationships or allegiances between groups. In order to produce this report, we conducted supplemental analysis to comprehensively classify perpetrator groups as affiliates of ISIL, and to identify unaffiliated individual perpetrators who were reportedly inspired by ISIL. The resulting auxiliary dataset is available on [START's Dataverse page](#), and can be merged into the June 2016 release of the GTD using the *eventid* variable.

Several noteworthy challenges arose during the process of classifying perpetrator groups as ISIL affiliates. Perhaps the most significant challenge is the fact that links between these groups exist on a continuum ranging from formally established, operational coordination and cooperation to more abstract, ideological support. Further complicating matters is the fact that often little detail about the exact nature of these relationships is available in open source materials, and the terminology used by both the media and the group leaders is extremely imprecise. Terms such as "link," "allegiance," "alliance," "support," "loyalty," and "endorse" are used interchangeably. Among the more poetically phrased announcements is that of the Pakistani group Tehrik-e-Khilafat, whose statement read, "From today, Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi shall consider [Tehrik-e-Khilafat] and Jihad mujahideen fighters of Pakistan as one of the arrows among his arrows which he has kept for his bow."¹⁴ Furthermore, in some cases ISIL leadership have acknowledged declarations of allegiance, and in other cases they have not. Finally, these relationships can be fluid, strengthening and weakening over time. For example, given the complex progression of the relationship between al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State, we classified al-Nusra Front as an ISIL predecessor group *prior* to its split from the newly branded ISIL. We classified attacks carried out by al-Nusra Front after this point as not ISIL-related.

We began by including all organizations identified as an Islamic State *wilayat* or "province" and that include this identity in their names. We identified 19 such organizations named as perpetrators in the GTD, including Boko Haram, which ostensibly adopted the name "Islamic State West Africa Province" upon declaring allegiance to ISIL. However, this name has not been widely adopted in favor of "Boko Haram."

We then conducted an exhaustive search of open source materials to identify other organizations that made specific statements indicating that they act in support of the Islamic State and al-Baghdadi. Through this process we identified 11 additional ISIL-affiliated perpetrator organizations. In certain cases, source materials indicated that elements of a group had declared allegiance to ISIL, but that this sentiment was not widely shared among all members. For example, we did not include the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines among ISIL affiliates, despite the fact that ASG leaders announced allegiance to ISIL around the same time BIFM leaders did. Subsequent reports indicated that certain ASG battalions may have actually defected

¹³ Hubbard, B. (2016, July 3). ISIS uses Ramadan as calling for new terrorist attacks. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/middleeast/ramadan-isis-baghdad-attacks.html

¹⁴ Crilly, R. and Mehsud, S. (2014, July 9). Pakistani terror group swears allegiance to Islamic State. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/10955563/Pakistani-terror-group-swears-allegiance-to-Islamic-State.html>

from ASG to join ISIL.¹⁵ Likewise, although reports indicate that some al-Shabaab members have pledged allegiance to ISIL, this is certainly a source of division within al-Shabaab and is characterized as defection rather than shifting allegiance of the group itself.¹⁶ The table below lists all organizations we classified as ISIL affiliates.

Adan-Abyan Province of the Islamic State	Jund al-Khilafah (Tunisia)
Algeria Province of the Islamic State	Jundallah
Ansar Al-Khilafa (Philippines)	Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State
Bahrain Province of the Islamic State	Lahij Province of the Islamic State
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM)	Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT)
Barqa Province of the Islamic State	Najd Province of the Islamic State
Boko Haram	Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade
Caucasus Province of the Islamic State	Sanaa Province of the Islamic State
Fezzan Province of the Islamic State	Shabwah Province of the Islamic State
Hadramawt Province of the Islamic State	Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade
Hijaz Province of the Islamic State	Sinai Province of the Islamic State
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)	Supporters of the Islamic State in Jerusalem
Islamic State in Bangladesh	Supporters of the Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques
Jamaah Ansharut Daulah	Tehrik-e-Khilafat
Jund al-Khilafa (Algeria)	Tripoli Province of the Islamic State

In 11 cases source materials attributed responsibility for an attack to ISIL generically in locations and time periods where there was more than one ISIL affiliate known to be active (specifically, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the Gaza Strip). Due to lack of information about which specific organization was implicated in the attack, the perpetrator of record in the GTD was ISIL “core.” However, unless sources specifically indicated that these attacks were carried out by “core” ISIL operatives, we classified them as attacks by ISIL-affiliated perpetrators for the purpose of this analysis.

The GTD includes information about the motive of each attack, as reported in source materials. To identify the attacks that were carried out by perpetrators inspired by, but not directly linked to ISIL, we reviewed the event summaries and motives fields for references to ISIL. We then sought out additional information about attack motives for those events attributed to unaffiliated individuals or Muslim extremists. In order to classify an attack as ISIL-inspired, we relied on statements made by the perpetrator(s) or other direct evidence (e.g., journals, social media messaging). In two cases, ISIL-inspired attacks were claimed by organizations (Jund Ansar Allah and Kilafah Islamic Movement) rather than unaffiliated individuals. Although these organizations had not explicitly declared allegiance to ISIL, sources indicated that the attacks were inspired by ISIL.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

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The data presented here are drawn from START’s Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and reports from news media. The GTD contains information on more than 150,000 terrorist incidents that have occurred around the world since 1970. For more information about the GTD, visit www.start.umd.edu/gtd. The auxiliary data on ISIL-related perpetrators can be found on START’s Dataverse page: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/start>.



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¹⁵ Weiss, C. (2016, March 22). Abu Sayyaf Group battalion defects to Islamic State. Retrieved from <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/03/abu-sayyaf-group-battalion-defects-to-islamic-state.php>

¹⁶ Shabelle News. (2016, April 9). A new Al Shabaab group pledges allegiance to ISIL. Retrieved from <http://www.shabellenews.com/2016/04/a-new-al-shabaab-group-pledges-allegiance-to-isil>