



# OIET

OBSERVATORIO INTERNACIONAL  
DE ESTUDIOS SOBRE TERRORISMO

# Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook 2022



## COVITE

Colectivo de Víctimas  
del Terrorismo



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# **Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook 2022**

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# PROLOGUE

**Fernando Grande-Marlaska Gómez**  
**Minister of the Interior**  
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The important and necessary work of research and dissemination carried out by the team and collaborators of the Observatorio Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo (OIET), led by its director Carlos Igualada, is today more necessary than ever, and it is a pleasure to see that institutions born from the associations of the victims themselves work with rigor in the study and analysis of a phenomenon, that of terrorism, which constitutes a serious threat to the security and peace of humanity. Contributing to its dissemination is an obligatory exercise and one for which I feel deeply honored.

More than 20 years after the attacks of 11 September 2001, which changed the reality of international security forever, and in the run-up to the twentieth anniversary of the attacks of 11 March 2004, in which Madrid suffered the largest jihadist-inspired terrorist attack on European soil, killing 193 people and injuring more than 1,800, jihadist terrorism continues to be one of the main threats to the security of all of us.



## **The Spanish Model of Reparation for Victims of Terrorism**

Terrorism in Spain has a long history of more than 60 years. This tragic circumstance has led to a system of protection for victims in our country that is at the forefront of the systems of protection and recognition of the victims of terrorism among the countries of our environment.

Law 29/2011, of September 22, 2011, on the Recognition and Comprehensive Protection of Victims of Terrorism, is a pioneering law, of consensus, a benchmark at the international level, inspired by the principles of memory, dignity, justice, and truth, whose legal framework has promoted the reparation of victims and their accompaniment both at the time of the attack and over time, as long as necessary.

To materialize this assistance, the General Directorate for Support to Victims of Terrorism of the Ministry of the Interior has a team of social workers and coordinates the National Network of Psychologists specialized in the care of victims of terrorism.

Thus, the protection provided in the Spanish system is comprehensive and covers all areas: economic reparation, health and psychosocial care, labor, moral, and memory that dignifies the victims and society and is our best guarantee to counteract the terrorist narrative and prevent the scourge of terrorism from recurring.

Memory is a fundamental pillar of our victim protection model. In 2021, the Victims of Terrorism Memorial Center in Vitoria-Gasteiz was opened to the public. A museum, educational, research and dissemination project and, in short, a recognition of all the victims of all forms of terrorism, which has already been visited by more than 50,000 people who have had a unique experience of learning about the history of terrorism and which will have a delegation in Madrid, where work is already underway.

The preservation of memory necessarily requires reaching out to the younger generations, as they are the key to preventing it from happening again.

For this reason, the Ministry of the Interior has launched an educational and remembrance project that provides the educational community with rigorous teaching material that facilitates knowledge of the terrorist phenomenon in the classroom and is complemented by the testimony of victims as an effective tool for the prevention of violent radicalization.



## **International Cooperation**

The efforts of the institutions and society as a whole, with our State Security Forces and Corps as the spearhead to curb jihadist activity, have enabled the strategy to fight terrorism, both within and outside our borders, to be a useful and effective tool to combat a threat that continues to be a reality in Spain and in the countries around us.

International cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the protection of its victims is one of the fundamental pillars of our country's security policy, making Spain a model to follow.

The Ministry of the Interior keeps updated the Plan for Prevention, Protection, and Response to Terrorism, a key element of security policies, which prioritizes comprehensive assistance to victims and incorporates the guidelines of the European Union's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the National Security Strategy and the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The main advances of the current Plan are in the field of the response to an attack, determining the necessary coordination mechanisms to mitigate its consequences, restore normality and facilitate the participation of the people who work in the General Directorate of Support to Victims of Terrorism, a unit under the Undersecretariat of the Interior, in terms of psychosocial assistance, emotional support and information and advice to victims and their families, in accordance with the provisions of Article 8 of Law 29/2011, of September 22, on the Recognition and Comprehensive Protection of Victims of Terrorism.

This participation will be made through their integration in the Territorial Crisis Management Centers, which guarantee the joint, cohesive, and coordinated action of the response of the Security Forces and Corps, the civil protection services, and the assistance entities, always in collaboration with the corresponding autonomous and local administration.

In addition, within the scope of the Specialized Committee against Terrorism chaired by the Secretary of State for Security, the Interinstitutional Protocol for Response to Terrorist Attacks was drawn up, one of whose main objectives is to harmonize the organizational structures and their coordination systems whose mission is to respond, with all the capabilities of the State, to a terrorist action against the citizens and against Spanish interests. This protocol is the ideal instrument to identify the different organizations and actors, including their



functions and capabilities, that intervene and respond in a coordinated manner to a terrorist attack.

Spain's experience in the knowledge, study, and fight against terrorism, as well as in the reparation of victims, has been reinforced by its participation in different international conferences and congresses.

Thus, Spain led, from the co-presidency of the Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism, the First Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism organized by the United Nations in September 2022 at its headquarters in New York. In my speech at the United Nations headquarters, I highlighted the prominent place that victims of terrorism should occupy in the policies of memory and prevention of violent radicalization as symbols of the values of democratic societies, and the need to promote the creation of a statute and an international fund for victims of terrorism, as well as support for the International Network of Associations and Foundations of Victims of Terrorism.

During the Congress, we agreed with Mr. Voronkov, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations Office to Combat Terrorism (UNOCT), to hold the Second United Nations Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism in Spain next year 2024, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the attacks of March 11, 2004.

Furthermore, also in the field of international cooperation, Spain was host and co-organizer of the High-Level Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society and the Fight against Terrorism, which took place on May 10 and 11 last year in Malaga. The choice of Spain as the host country was a recognition by the United Nations of the work and commitment of Spain in the fight against terrorism and the visibility and protection of its victims, whose voices and testimonies were one of the most outstanding and relevant elements of the Conference.

On the occasion of the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the EU, different events, meetings, and seminars are being organized that will allow, under Spain's leadership, to advance in the prevention, protection, and reparation in case of terrorist attacks. Among these activities, I would like to highlight the fundamental role of victims in the prevention of violent radicalization and the policies of reparation and memory of victims, a priority that will be reflected in the holding of a Seminar on Victims of Terrorism on September 25, with the participation of representatives of EU Member States, experts, civil society and victims of terrorism and their representatives.



## **New International Context for the Fight Against Terrorism**

For decades, Spain has suffered the scourge of terrorism, the main threat that our system of rights and freedoms has faced, a barbarity that has left us with a terrible toll of more than 1,400 dead and more than 5,000 wounded. I would like to honor once again the memory of all of them.

It has been more than 10 years since the rule of law defeated ETA terrorism, and today jihadist terrorism is the main terrorist threat facing Spain.

Publications such as this Yearbook, which this year for the first time is available in English, help us to understand and analyze the factors that have altered the terrorist morphology in recent years: the end of the self-proclaimed caliphate of Daesh and the fall of Afghanistan. In memory of this, I would like to highlight the actions of our Security Forces and Corps and the staff of our Embassy in Kabul in the evacuation of Afghan citizens in August 2021.

The loss of the territory occupied by Daesh in Syria and Iraq has caused its terrorist activity to expand to other territories in Africa, South Asia, and the Far East, with special concern for its consolidation in the Sahel.

Our intelligence services, analysts, and specialists are constantly focused on these movements. The security of the Sahel region is a priority for Spain in the fight against terrorism at the international level.

Our State Security Forces and Corps work tirelessly and with the highest levels of professionalism to protect us from barbarism, inside and outside our borders, and also carry out important training work to improve the capabilities to combat terrorism in third countries.

Within this security equation, the Sahel is one of the scenarios in which we are devoting the most effort, both through cooperation and information exchange and by improving local capabilities to fight terrorism.

But it is not only by advancing the line of defense that we can prevent the spread of terrorism. Preventing the violent radicalization of the most exposed population is one of the objectives to which we must pay attention. And in this important task, the commitment of the victims of terrorism is crucial, as I have previously pointed out, with the implementation of the Didactic Units for the study of terrorism in the classroom reinforced with the testimony of the victims.



We can conclude after this brief analysis of the current framework of jihadist terrorism that only by advancing the line of defense and having useful instruments for the prevention of terrorism, among which the voices of the victims play an essential role, can we be effective in guaranteeing the security of the Spanish people.

And in this task, the Security Forces and the Ministry of the Interior will continue to work with perseverance and the utmost determination.

## **Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook 2022**

Jihadist terrorism has historically been marked by a strong dynamism that has allowed it to adapt with agility to each situation. Therefore, the best approach to deal with this global threat requires multidisciplinary analyses that allow us to understand this phenomenon from all possible points of view in order to respond effectively and offer a quality security policy adapted to each of the regional and local scenarios in which jihadism is currently present.

In 2022, jihadist terrorism manifested itself in the world through 2,270 attacks in which more than 8,000 people were killed. However, even if the number of fatalities is unbearable, their number has decreased by 17% compared to the previous year on an overall basis, although this decrease has not been equal in all regions, with the growth that terrorism has in West Africa, a region where there is currently one out of every three victims caused by jihadist terrorism, being particularly worrying.

### **Scenarios, Actors, and Trends**

As Marta Summers points out, the Sahel is becoming the global epicenter of jihadist terrorism. For the third consecutive year, the Sahel is the region of the world with the highest rates of jihadist activity and the highest number of victims. Mali and Burkina Faso were the countries most affected by terrorism due to the activity developed by the territorial branches of Daesh and Al Qaeda, together with the Lake Chad Basin area, in this case also due to the presence of Boko Haram, together with organizations linked to Daesh.

With regard to the jihadist activity exercised during 2022 in Southeast Asia, the trend has been the opposite, and attacks were occasional and when circumstances permitted, as indicated by Iñaki Méndez in chapter three.



Although in previous years it might have been thought that the decline was temporary and due to the measures adopted to halt the advance of Covid-19, once pre-pandemic normality had returned, the different jihadist groups, instead of gaining new members among those economically affected by the health measures, have found a way to reintegrate into society through social reintegration programs.

## **Operations against Jihadism in Spain**

The threat that jihadism represents for society should not only be evaluated in terms of the levels of terrorist activity materialized in the form of lethal attacks. This approach must be qualified by two other relevant facts since most Western countries maintain a high level of anti-terrorist alert, and the volume of anti-terrorist operations carried out throughout the year continues to be substantial. Both circumstances are indicative of the fact that jihadism continues to represent a major security challenge.

From the study of the director of this Yearbook, Carlos Igualada, several ideas can be extracted:

The first is that we continue under the same paradigm initiated in 2015, the date on which the serious threat that Daesh represents for the West began to manifest itself. Since then, the number of operations ranges between 20 and 60, while the number of detainees ranges between 80 and 20.

The second idea is the realization that there are multiple jihadist profiles that make it difficult to establish common elements to identify all of them under the same pattern. The fact that in 2022 both a 15-year-old minor and a 72-year-old woman were arrested highlights this reality. Something similar occurs with the analysis of the rest of the variables that have been studied, which only confirm the existence of multiple profiles and roles within the jihadist circles in Spain.

The third idea is that the passing of the years has ended up demonstrating how the reform of the Penal Code carried out in 2015 provided those responsible for the fight against terrorism with the necessary tools to enable them to act in advance in the face of possible threats of a jihadist nature, as was the criminalization of indoctrination and self-training through the Internet, and of travel to a foreign territory to integrate or collaborate with a terrorist group.



A fourth conclusion is the evidence pointing to the fact that people involved in jihadist activities in Spain show intense activity in social networks with certain circles among which there are both family connections and links with individuals also arrested for terrorist offenses or with a record for common crimes.

Finally, the relevant connections and the degree of relationship that some of those arrested last year had with foreign terrorist fighters should not go unnoticed. The threat they pose to security should not only be measured by their presence on the territory but also by their ability to indoctrinate and instruct, even from a distance, other individuals who may have the intention of committing terrorist attacks.

### **Women and Minors Returned from Detention Camps**

The phenomenon of the situation of women of foreign terrorist fighters and their children is a recent challenge that stands out for its complexity and diversity and, as Daniel Perez points out, has important humanitarian implications and security and reintegration risks. Within the framework of the European Union Member States, there are different approaches depending on the action taken by each State to repatriate their nationals and the legal framework under which this is done in each country.

We find countries that base prosecution more on the transfer to conflict zones and terrorist crimes, such as France and Spain, others on the prosecution of international criminal offenses, such as Germany and the Netherlands; and others that do not have the legal framework to criminally prosecute their nationals returned from Iraq and Syria, such as Sweden.

In the case of social intervention, the greatest differences are found in the priority referral of repatriated minors, given the serious humanitarian conditions and the delicate security situation in the refugee camps, to close relatives (Germany), to host families (France) or to social services (Netherlands, Sweden, and Spain).

Likewise, in any of the cases, it is pertinent to reflect on the participation of nationals or residents in the commission of crimes of genocide, war or crimes against humanity and the constitution of specialized investigation teams that give judicial support to the prosecution of these nationals who fought with jihadist organizations in the years of expansion of Daesh and other jihadist organizations in Iraq and Syria.



## **Terrorism and Smuggling in West Africa**

The illicit economies of West Africa and the Sahel are interconnected and have fostered the trafficking and smuggling of various goods, including firearms, which have become a major source of economic power. However, this lucrative trade has played a crucial role in exacerbating violence and social unrest in the region, fueling local conflicts, inter-communal disputes and the rise of violent extremism. The proliferation of weaponry has led to the emergence and strengthening of various armed actors at the regional level, posing major challenges to national and international security. The collapse of the Libyan regime in 2011 marked a paradigm shift in the impact of terrorism on the regional landscape, providing terrorist groups with rapid access to weapons and the ability to move them across borders into the Sahel and other conflict zones.

The complicity between organized crime and violent jihadist groups has further complicated this issue, especially in the post-revolutionary scenario in Libya. Ana Aguilera puts the spotlight on the far-reaching effects of firearms trafficking and terrorism around the world, causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing social, economic and political problems.

## **Analyzing Terrorism from the Victims' Perspective**

For most of ETA's terrorist trajectory, the reality of the victims of terrorism remained hidden. The perspective from which the terrorist phenomenon was approached, in the political, historical, social, and cultural spheres, focused on the perpetrators and not on the situation of the passive and involuntary protagonists of the terrorist phenomenon. The victims were left out of the analysis or played a marginal role.

Inés Gaviria has observed that this same trend is occurring with jihadist terrorism. The victims continue to be the hidden face of the phenomenon, despite the fact that they are the ones who suffer it firsthand and who could contribute most to its delegitimization. Victims form a structural part of a country's fight against terrorism since they are the main victims of barbarism, and the State is indebted to them insofar as it has not been able to protect their lives and physical integrity or that of their families.



The public expression of their testimony, and the fact that it is treated with the respect it deserves, is part of their reparation. Various studies show that a large part of the population is unaware of the history of terrorism and the identity of its victims. One of the causes of this lack of knowledge is the fact that analyses of the terrorist phenomenon are not made from the perspective of the victims.

## **Conclusion**

In short, the commitment of Spanish society, the rule of law, and the tireless dedication of our State Security Forces and Corps, together with the work of so many other actors such as universities, research centers, the Memorial Center, and the associations that represent the victims of terrorism and the foundations that honor them and collaborate for their reparation and memory within the Fundación de Víctimas del Terrorismo, will allow us to advance in the knowledge of the terrorist phenomenon, of its prevention.

This new edition of the Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook 2022 is one more instrument of the collective effort in the fight against terrorism and reinforces the State policy of reparation for the victims. The Yearbook is a benchmark in the field and constitutes an obligatory working tool for scholars in this field and for the institutions that fight against terrorism.

I would like to highlight my gratitude to the research and dissemination work carried out by the people who work and collaborate with the OIET and its director, Carlos Igualada, whom I encourage from this rostrum to continue along this path of excellence that will undoubtedly result in a better understanding of security needs and policies, and in the permanent tribute to all victims of terrorism.



# GLOBAL JIHADIST TERRORISM. TRENDS, ACTORS AND SCENARIOS IN 2022

Carlos Igualada

## 1. Introduction

Jihadist terrorism has historically been a highly dynamic phenomenon with a high capacity for mutability and adaptation. As a result, tackling this threat in global terms increasingly requires more multidisciplinary approaches that provide a multifaceted and comprehensive vision as a whole and, in turn, allow an optimal response to be offered, adapting it to each of the regional and local scenarios in which jihadism is currently present. All of this also considers another essential element, which is the role played by the different actors and the relationship they establish with each other in a context in which alliances between both state and non-state actors are more volatile and liquid than ever. The terrorist organizations themselves, as reflected in the development of their activity over the last year, are a perfect example of this reality.

Although jihadist terrorist activity has not grabbed the headlines or been one of the main stories in the media throughout the year 2022, there have been many events that require our attention due to the impact or significance they have had and may have on the future of the present and future Jihadist movement. Year one of the return to Taliban power in Afghanistan, the death of the main leaders of both Al Qaeda and Daesh, the so-called total war proclaimed by the Somali government in its fight against Al Shabaab, Daesh's call for *hijra* in



Africa, the expansion of jihadism in the Gulf of Guinea and the numerous and constant attacks on Christian villages in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique are just some of the most important milestones that have taken place in the last twelve months. All of these events will be discussed in more detail in this chapter as we analyze the different dynamics and trends studied, which are the result of monitoring and tracking global jihadist activity during 2022<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> All the data presented in this chapter are part of the database of the Observatorio Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo (OIET), which covers the evolution and development of Sunni jihadism and the terrorist organizations that make up the movement through their terrorist actions. In order for these actions to be treated as case studies, they must meet a series of conditions and requirements: 1) they must be attacks perpetrated by organizations or individuals inspired by jihadist ideology, 2) in which at least one person has been killed, which may be the terrorist himself, and 3) they must have been documented using OSINT tools. However, as an exception to point 2, Jihadist-inspired attacks that have not resulted in fatalities in Western countries are also recorded as case studies, as well as in other scenarios in which their commission is exceptional and their recording is necessary in order to analyze certain trends, as occurred in 2022 with the cases of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.



# STHGH

1.

## **More terrorist activity, fewer deaths**

There were at least a total of 2,250 terrorist attacks in which 8,305 people lost their lives in 2022. This represents a slight increase in terrorist actions, which contrasts with a considerable 17% reduction in the number of fatalities.

2.

## **Burkina Faso and Mali as the gravitational center of global jihadist activity**

As the trends of recent years had already indicated, these two West African countries have ended up being the hardest hit by terrorism. Both account for almost 40 percent of attacks and fatalities worldwide in 2022.

3.

## **The new frontier of the Gulf of Guinea**

The instability of the Western Sahel and the contagion effect on countries such as Benin and Togo is no longer a future threat but a present reality. While in 2021 there were only a few isolated attacks in these countries, there have been more than twenty in the last year.

4.

## **The evolution of Daesh Central**

Over the last year, the trend that began in 2020, which points to a progressive increase in Daesh terrorist attacks on part of the territory covered by its now deceased jihadist caliphate, has been accentuated. However, the number of fighters killed or arrested in counterterrorism operations, especially in Iraq, is also very high.

5.

## **The institutionalization of terror**

The return of the Taliban to power has resulted in a drastic reduction in terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, given that until 2021 they were responsible for the vast majority of terrorist actions. However, the fact that the country continues to be one of the most affected by terrorism raises questions about its effectiveness in counter-terrorism policies.



# S T H G L H G H

6.

## **The indiscriminate targeting of Christian populations**

The growth phases of jihadist activity in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique have many parallels, the latest of which are the dozens of attacks on Christian villages that have taken place in both countries over the course of the year. Dozens of inhabitants have been killed and Christian villages razed to the ground.

7.

## **The dismantling of the jihadist leadership is forcing a generational renewal**

For the first time since Al Qaeda and Daesh have coexisted, the top leaders of both organizations have been killed in the same year. Moreover, in the case of Daesh, it has been a double death. This will force both organizations to accelerate a process of generational renewal in the top leadership that already begun some time ago.

8.

## **The decentralization of the global jihadist movement**

The growing prominence of the local and regional branches of Al Qaeda and Daesh in recent years, as well as the empowerment of independent groups, has resulted in a multipolar scenario with numerous and increasingly extensive centers of activity.

9.

## **Continuation of the terrorist act model in Europe**

Since the end of 2017, the vast majority of terrorist actions committed over Europe have obeyed the same paradigm whereby individuals inspired by the ideology of Al Qaeda or Daesh, but who do not present any formal link of membership towards these organizations, decide on their own to commit an attack with few resources after undergoing a rapid process of radicalization.

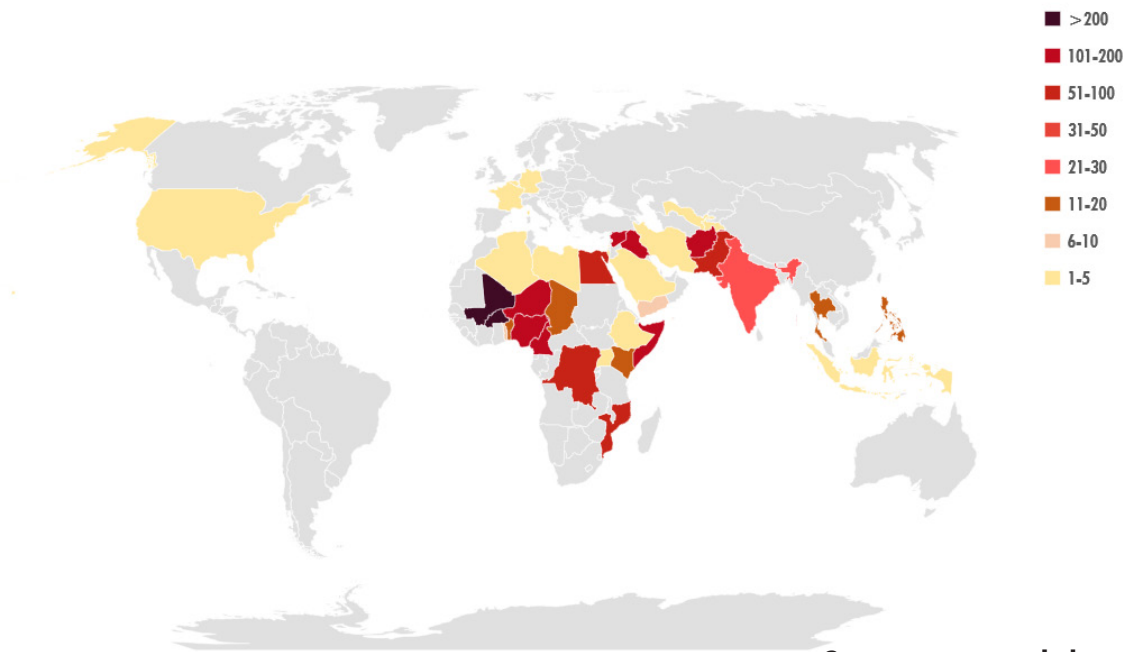
10.

## **The international agenda on standby**

Neither of the two transnational brands of jihadist terrorism has claimed responsibility for any of the few terrorist attacks committed on European soil in the last year. Although the global agenda is not a priority at the moment and there is greater interest in exploiting local and regional rivalries and conflicts, it is only a matter of time before Al Qaeda and Daesh try to refocus their attention on the West in the long-term.



**FIGURA 1. World map of jihadist attacks**



Source: own elaboration

## 2. The development of terrorist activity

Jihadist activity is currently so variable and heterogeneous in its global dimension that it is complex and risky to establish patterns or trends applicable to its development in all the scenarios in which it is present, given that in each geographical region its evolution is more a function of local and regional factors than of global dynamics. Failure to consider this context can lead to errors of analysis when interpreting, for example, that Jihadist terrorism has ceased to be an international threat due to the decrease in highly lethal attacks in the West or the fact that the central structures of Al Qaeda and Daesh are not at their best due to the continuous blows received by the fight against terrorism. Therefore, and beyond these perceptions, the reality is that the global Jihadist movement is currently at its most significant territorial peak. Never before has the influence exerted by this extremist ideology and the groups that represent it managed to cover such a wide area. This is especially true on the African continent, where the arrival and rapid expansion of jihadism in recent years in both the westernmost region and the southern half has become a differentiating element to be considered that has already threatened the stability of different regional governments and the survival of a large part of the population there. The growth of Jihadist terrorism in a large part of Africa in recent years can be seen from the quantitative and qualitative evidence that has been presented in previous publications of the Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook, which in this edition



marks its highest point so far. As Figure 1 shows, for the first time, we find two countries in the West African region as the hardest hit by terrorist violence, a milestone that has never happened before and which in itself manifests how the major epicenters of global jihadist activity have shifted from traditional regions such as the Middle East and South Asia to much of sub-Saharan Africa. While it is true that this is merely the confirmation of a trend that could be glimpsed in recent years, the difference in the volume of attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali compared to the rest of the countries is nonetheless worrying. So much so that these two territories account for 36% of the terrorist actions registered globally, which means that one out of every three jihadist attacks registered worldwide has been committed in one of them.

**FIGURE 2. Number of jihadist attacks by country**

	COUNTRY	ATTACKS			
			= 18	Chad	14
↑ 1	Burkina Faso	459	↓ 19	Kenya	12
↑ 2	Mali	369	↑ 20	Togo	7
↑ 3	Syria	195	↓ 21	Yemen	6
↓ 4	Afghanistan	161	↓ 22	Libya	3
= 5	Iraq	151	↑ 23	Israel	3
↓ 6	Nigeria	146	↑ 24	Algeria	2
= 7	Niger	127	↑ 25	Saudi Arabia	2
↑ 8	Somalia	118	↑ 26	Ethiopia	2
↓ 9	Cameroon	116	↑ 27	Germany	2
↑ 10	Egypt	86	↓ 28	Indonesia	1
= 11	Mozambique	78	↓ 29	France	1
↓ 12	DR Congo	75	↑ 30	Uzbekistan	1
↓ 13	Pakistan	55	↑ 31	Tajikistan	1
↑ 14	India	22	↓ 32	Uganda	1
↑ 15	Philippines	19	↑ 33	Iran	1
↑ 16	Benin	16	↑ 34	Belgium	1
↓ 17	Thailand	16	↑ 35	United States	1
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>2.270</b>

Source: own elaboration



As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, multiple factors have converged in the West African region that together explain the deterioration of the security situation. Fragile governance, power vacuums, difficulties in controlling porous borders, multiple inter-community conflicts, institutional corruption, the incapacity of the security forces, and the socio-economic problems faced by the local population, to name but a few, provide the ideal breeding ground for the proliferation of violent extremism. If we add to all this the special interest shown in recent years by both Al Qaeda and Daesh in making the growth of jihadism in a large part of Africa the central focus of their agenda, the result could not be other than what we are currently witnessing.

Nor should we forget that against this backdrop, France announced in February 2022 that it would end its Barkhane mission in Mali after almost ten years since the start of this military intervention, with the withdrawal taking effect in the summer. This decision was largely motivated by disagreements and worsening relations with the Malian military junta that governs the country, the high point of this misunderstanding being the expulsion of the French ambassador from Mali at the end of January. Now, with French forces and other European partners moving to Niger, where efforts to combat jihadism in the region will focus and continue, Malian territory will be left at the mercy of the Wagner group, the private mercenary militia that acts in Russia's geopolitical and economic interests. That this paramilitary group will play a decisive role in terms of security in such a volatile scenario as West Africa, without having to answer or respect the framework of international law and with total impunity, does not seem to be the most hopeful option for achieving much-needed regional stability. In this sense, one need only think of how the abuses already being committed by the Wagner company on the local population could end up generating greater social support for the jihadist cause (Clarke, 2023)<sup>2</sup>.

It is also true that the intervention of France and its allies has not achieved the desired objectives in a whole decade, and that the excessively military and unwieldy approach adopted during this time is open to criticism, in addition to a poor understanding of the dynamics of local conflicts, serious political mistakes and operational errors (Powell, 2022). Even so, without the French intervention that began in January 2013, the current instability in the region would in all likelihood be even greater, given that jihadism would have been able to expand much more rapidly, and terrorist groups would have large domains over which to directly exert their control.

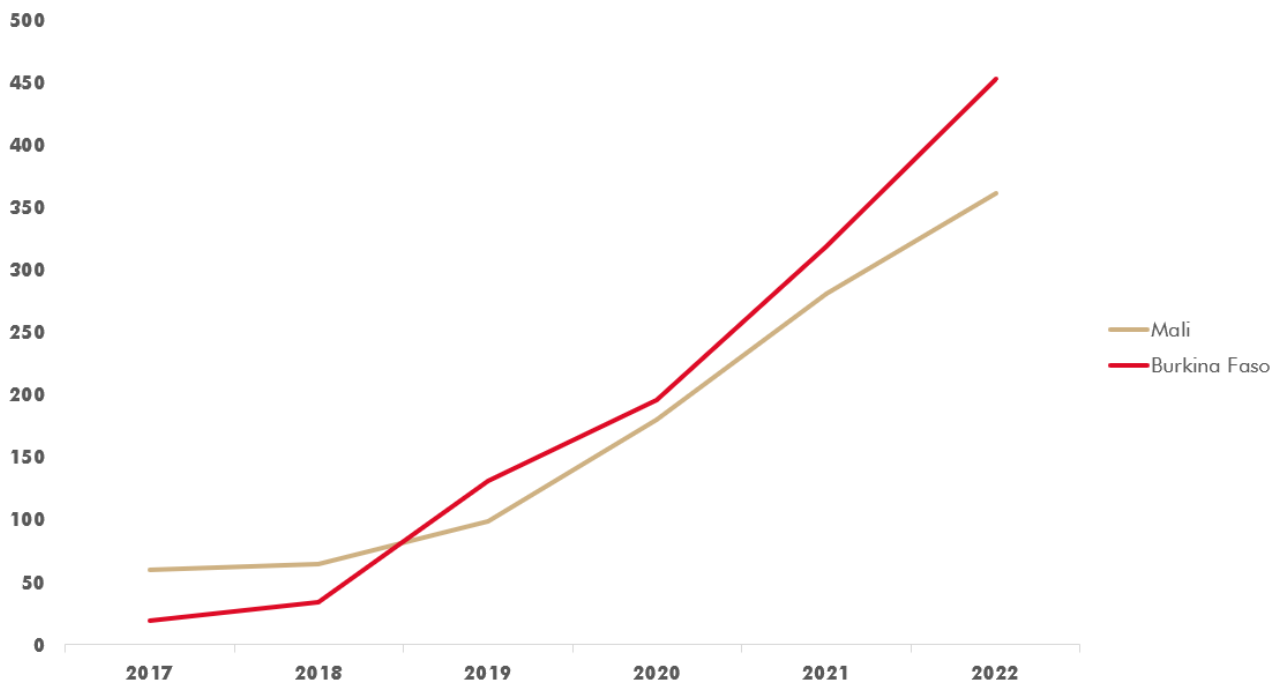
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2 Independent UN experts have already established that since 2021, various cases of executions, torture, arbitrary detention and sexual violence have been committed by Wagner mercenaries.



Monitoring jihadist activity in West Africa in the short term is particularly important because of the impact that developments may have on it. Beyond the implications of Wagner taking over the role in counter-terrorism work that until now has been carried out in a coordinated manner by different African and Western states, we must also consider, for example, the impact that the call for hijra towards Africa made in June by Daesh in the editorial of its weekly propaganda bulletin *Al Naba* may have. It remains to be seen whether this call, which in itself shows the degree of interest that Daesh Central has in events in Africa<sup>3</sup>, is heeded by those of the organization's foreign terrorist fighters or sympathizers who wish to join its cause in a scenario that is unprecedented for them. There is no shortage of reasons and attractions for them to do so: assured possibilities for growth and success, spoils of war in the form of money and enslaved women, freedom of movement due to porous borders, numerous sanctuaries in which to protect themselves, etc. However, as an element that works against Daesh, the ideological component must also be considered. From the point of view of Jihadist narrative, discourse, and tradition, it will not be easy for the terrorist organization to justify the need for its fighters to move to this region of Africa based on a historical claim, unlike what happened in Syria and Iraq in the past.

**FIGURE 3. Evolution of the number of attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali**



**Source: own elaboration**

<sup>3</sup> There are many other recent examples that show the growing interest of Daesh propaganda in the development of jihadism in West Africa and especially in the successes achieved by its territorial branch. As recently as June, two videos were published in official media of fighters from Syria and Iraq congratulating their African comrades on the progress made in recent months. For more on this issue, see: Garofalo, D. Islamic State Propaganda Renews Focus on Africa, but a "Jihadist Monopoly" Remains Elusive, *Terrorism Monitor* vol. 20, issue 14.



If we broaden the focus beyond West Africa and look at the continent as a whole, the picture is not much more encouraging, as thirteen of the twenty countries with the highest number of attacks are in Africa. This means that, although the westernmost region is the one that has suffered most rapidly from the growth of jihadism, other more traditional hotspots of terrorist activity such as Nigeria, Somalia, and Egypt continue to show high levels of extreme violence. Moreover, to all these scenarios we must add other centers of activity that until a few years ago were incipient in terms of terrorism, but which have now also become areas of intense activity. Such is the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique. Both countries show similar trajectories in terms of the development and expansion of the current terrorist phenomenon, the main element for understanding the impact that jihadism has had in both being the link established between Daesh and local insurgent groups. Thus, from the synergy between local and global agendas, territorial branches have been formed that follow the Daesh brand and, although initially integrated in 2018 under the name of the Islamic State in Central Africa (ISCAP), since mid-2022 they have been operating independently in both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. This restructuring was proven last May, when Daesh claimed for the first time an attack in the province of Cabo Delgado under the nomenclature of the Islamic State in Mozambique, and not under the acronym ISCAP, as it had done until then<sup>4</sup>.

**Although West Africa is the region that has suffered most rapidly from the growth of jihadism, other more traditional hotspots of terrorist activity such as Nigeria, Somalia, and Egypt continue to show high levels of extreme violence**

On the other hand, it is also worth noting the existence of a new incipient focus of Jihadist activity in Africa: the Gulf of Guinea. This region should be considered today as one of the main fronts of interest when it comes to containing the advance of jihadism on the African continent. This is clear from a multitude of evidence that points to the displacement of terrorist activity from Mali and Burkina Faso towards the interior of the borders of countries such as Togo,

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<sup>4</sup> Following the emergence of the Islamic State of Mozambique, there has been an attempt by the group to carry out its terrorist actions beyond its main area of influence in Cabo Delgado. This is evidenced, for example, by a number of attacks since June in neighbouring provinces such as Nampula.



Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire. The advance of both the territorial branches of Daesh<sup>5</sup> and al Qaeda has forced some of the countries in the region to adopt urgent counterterrorism measures, but so far they have not made sufficient progress to contain this threat.

As for the other global scenarios, the case of several countries also needs to be analyzed. Firstly, and as an important point to highlight, the evident decline in terrorist violence in Afghanistan. The fact that this country has suffered a decline in attacks of more than 75% (we have gone from 599 terrorist actions in 2021 to 161 recorded in 2022) can be interpreted in several ways. One of them, following the discourse and narrative of the Taliban leaders as they take stock of their first year in power, is that since their return to the government, they have managed to put an end to a large extent to the violence that existed until then. While this is an unquestionable fact based on quantitative evidence, we should not forget that until they managed to take Kabul in mid-August 2021, it was mainly the Taliban themselves who were responsible for the vast majority of terrorist actions on Afghan soil. Therefore, and turning around their discourse that tries to demonstrate their good governance, we should ask the question in reverse: How is it possible that Afghanistan is currently the third country worst hit by jihadist terrorism worldwide? The answer to this, although it involves a series of nuances that need to be analyzed, is clear and is due to the alarming growth of the Islamic State in Khorasan, also known as ISKP, in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

This Daesh affiliate, which is spread across Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of India, has become the main challenge to the security of the Taliban regime<sup>7</sup>. Although the evolution and development of its terrorist activity were to be expected, given the deep degree of enmity and rivalry with the Taliban, its capacity to carry out a campaign of highly lethal attacks over a long period across a large part of Afghanistan has not ceased to be somewhat striking. And in this regard, we should especially bear in mind that ethnoreligious minorities,

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5 Until March 2022, the territorial branch of Daesh operating in West Africa operated under the name Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and was integrated into the province of Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP). However, as of that date, and as a result of a provincial restructuring, ISGS was renamed ISWAP and became the Islamic State in the Sahel (IS-S).

6 For a detailed account of how this group has evolved since its emergence in 2015, see: Qazizai, F., Sands, C. (1 August 2022), *Faith and Vengeance: the Islamic State's War in Afghanistan*, New Lines.

7 Beyond these countries, the ISKP's expansion trend also points towards Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This is attested to by the two terrorist actions recorded in these countries in April and May respectively, and the fact that more and more individuals from these former Soviet republics are joining its ranks. For more information, see: Webber, L., *Islamic State in Khorasan Province Exploits Tajik Martyrs for Online Recruitment in Central Asia*, *Terrorism Monitor* Vol. 20, issue 14.



such as Sufis and Shiites, as well as the Hazara community in particular, have been the priority targets of their most lethal attacks. This is evident in numerous attacks over the past year, including the one in August at a Hazara mosque in Kabul in which some 20 people were killed, and the one in late September when a suicide bomber, also in the Afghan capital, blew himself up next to a Hazara school while hundreds of girls and teenagers were inside. A total of 52 people were killed in this indiscriminate attack on the most vulnerable population.

The terrorist strategy implemented by ISKP in Afghanistan over the last year has a clear meaning. On the one hand, these attacks on the local population seek to show Afghan society that the Taliban regime is incapable of guaranteeing the security of its citizens, thus generating a distrust of the authorities that could lead to a loss of credibility and social support that could be key to destabilizing the government. On the other hand, through these actions, ISKP tries to show the Taliban's weaknesses and incapacity in anti-terrorist matters through the use of an insurgent strategy that can hardly be efficiently confronted with the current anti-terrorist policy employed by the Taliban. Finally, and possibly the most important factor, the attacks on minorities are aimed at promoting sectarianism, as was the case almost two decades ago in Iraq, to dynamite social relations and generate a social divide that allows them to profit from the instability that may arise.

To make sense of this reality, it is necessary to consider the Afghan context, since the Taliban regime pledged from the moment it came to power to protect Afghan society as a whole, including especially minorities such as the Hazara, who had suffered numerous attacks perpetrated by themselves in the past. This supposed protection of minorities has been used as a propaganda weapon by both sides, since while the Taliban try to make society see their commitment to defend all minorities, ISKP uses every attack against these minorities to delegitimize the Taliban discourse and, incidentally, criticize the regime for trying to protect community groups that, according to Sunni extremism, should be eradicated. Finally, we should also not forget the terrorist actions that ISKP has carried out especially on Chinese targets and interests over the last year to undermine political rapprochements and try to boycott the Asian giant's investment possibilities in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan<sup>8</sup>. Similar is true of attacks on Russian and Pakistani targets in an attempt to erode the Taliban's attempt to seek recognition and legitimacy for their rule.

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<sup>8</sup> The attack in Kabul last December on a hotel frequently visited by Chinese workers and staff is the most recent example of this.

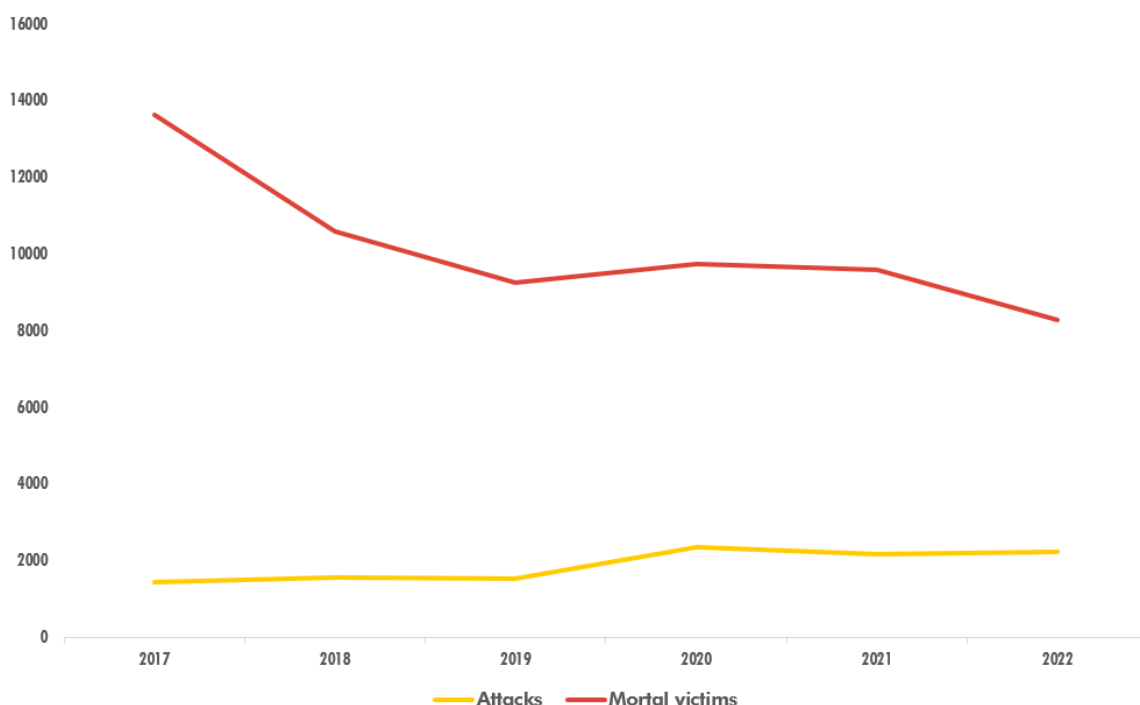


### 3. Victims

Taking stock of jihadist terrorist activity in 2022, one of the positive aspects compared to previous years is the significant reduction in the number of fatalities overall. Although the number of people killed by jihadism in the last year is significant, amounting to a total of 8,305, it is necessary to put it in context to see the improvement, as this figure is the lowest of all those recorded by this research, representing a 17% decrease compared to the year immediately before. Moreover, if we go back to 2017, a year in which the jihadist situation was still marked by the Daesh jihadist caliphate responsible for thousands of deaths annually in Syria and Iraq, the comparison is even more demonstrative, given that the reduction in deaths between the two periods is almost 40%.

This significant decline in the number of casualties is also accompanied by a decrease in the lethality of attacks, something that does not necessarily go hand in hand. Once again, 2017 serves as an example to contrast how a lower number of attacks does not necessarily mean a lower death toll. Back then, as we have just mentioned, terrorist activity resulted in 40% more fatalities compared to 2022, but the number of terrorist attacks that year was 35% lower than in 2022. Therefore, lethality indicators are another element to be considered when analyzing the dynamics in terms of the form and intensity with which terrorist activity is carried out.

**FIGURE 4. Evolution of the number of attacks and casualties at the global level (2017-2022)**





This year it is particularly difficult to assess the evolution of the number of victims in global terms, as situations and trends differ in each of the scenarios we wish to analyze. In this sense, and as was the case when commenting on the development of terrorist actions, we find countries with a significant worsening, while others show a substantial improvement. Among the former, we again find a good part of the African territories, while in the case of the latter, Afghanistan stands out above the rest.

**FIGURE 5. Number of fatalities by country**

	COUNTRY	DEATHS			
↑ 1	Burkina Faso	1.604	↑ 19	Benin	35
↑ 2	Mali	1.578	↑ 20	Ethiopia	31
↑ 3	DR Congo	727	↓ 21	Philippines	22
↑ 4	Syria	679	↓ 22	Thailand	16
↓ 5	Afghanistan	668	↑ 23	Iran	15
↑ 6	Somalia	604	↑ 24	Israel	6
↓ 7	Nigeria	600	↓ 25	Algeria	6
= 8	Iraq	391	↓ 26	Libya	4
↓ 9	Niger	326	↓ 27	Indonesia	2
↑ 10	Mozambique	213	↑ 28	Belgium	1
↑ 11	Egypt	188	= 29	France	1
↓ 12	Cameroon	187	= 30	Uganda	1
↓ 13	Pakistan	170	= 31	Saudi Arabia	0
↓ 14	Chad	61	↓ 32	Germany	0
↑ 15	Yemen	46	↑ 33	Uzbekistan	0
↓ 16	Kenya	45	↑ 34	Tajikistan	0
↑ 17	Togo	42	↑ 35	United States	0
↓ 18	India	36		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8.305</b>

Source: own elaboration



In the case of those that have suffered a significant increase in the number of victims, we must once again speak of the two countries that are currently the hardest hit by terrorism: Burkina Faso and Mali. Both in themselves reflect the unstoppable growth of jihadism in West Africa in recent years and its rapid expansion towards southern territories, essentially through the regional affiliates of Al Qaeda and Daesh. The fact that these two countries account for 38 percent of the total number of casualties worldwide is a good indicator of the worrying deterioration of security.

If these dynamics continue, it is only a matter of time before the countries of the Gulf of Guinea are also infected by terrorist violence with the same intensity and suffer within their borders the high degree of extremism with which jihadism operates in the region. Although it is true that this reality is already evident from the evidence, as evidenced by the twenty or so attacks that Benin and Togo have suffered in the last year, which have left a death toll of close to a hundred people, while in 2021 only two people lost their lives as a result of jihadist activity.

Without leaving Africa, we must also turn our attention to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The link formed by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Daesh led in 2018 to the establishment of a new space for the growth of terrorism through the Islamic State in Central Africa province, also known as ISCAP. Since then, Islamist extremism has continued to grow and gain adherents to its cause, especially in the northeastern provinces of Kivu and Ituri. It is on these territories that most terrorist actions are carried out, including attacks on Christian-majority villages. These ISCAP raids on small towns and villages have become the group's main modus operandi, as they reveal through their propaganda media in which they visualize the high degree of violence they use against the locals. This ruthlessness has an added component in the case of Christian settlements, which are completely razed to the ground and end with the execution of a good part of the people living there. For example, in the month of June alone, at least 104 people were killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo in a dozen attacks on different Christian settlements.

Figures 2 and 5 also serve as a measure of the degree of lethality of this type of action, since although the Democratic Republic of Congo ranks twelfth in terms of the countries most affected by Jihadist activity, if we look at the number of fatalities, this same country ranks third, given that in 2022 there were at least 727 deaths at the hands of Jihadist organizations. In this way, and as can



be seen in the figure below, it continues the trend of recent years in which the increase in terrorist activity and the trail of violence and deaths that ISCAP leaves in its wake in the territories in which it acts can be seen.

The same reality can also be seen in the Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado. There, Christian towns and villages have been, since October 2017 and increasingly so, a clear target of attacks by members of the Islamic State in Mozambique (IS-M). This is the name given to the Daesh delegation in this country after its formal separation from the ISCAP franchise mentioned above, which until last year comprised both the faction in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the one in Mozambique. Possibly, this territorial restructuring obeys strategic motivations and grants a greater degree of independence to the territorial branch in Mozambique concerning the decisions taken from ISCAP.

At the opposite end of the spectrum to these sub-Saharan African countries, which have generally seen a significant increase in the number of victims, is the north of the continent. Although countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco have traditionally been the cradle of extremist movements and activity in the form of attacks either within their borders or through other international connections, the truth is that in recent years there has been a notable improvement<sup>9</sup>. This opposed evolution to practically all of the rest of Africa is largely explained by the fact that Daesh never found the same acceptance during its attempt to expand in North Africa as in other regions where its influence was quickly absorbed by Jihadist circles. While this is due to several motivations and factors, the fact that al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb has a long-standing ideological rootedness in the roots of the jihadist movement in the region has played a major role in slowing the growth of its enemy. It is also true that in other geographical areas, such as Southeast Asia, al Qaeda's influence was hegemonic and seemed solid enough to prevent Daesh's influence from further penetrating the local and regional Jihadist atmosphere. However, there has been a replacement in the region, and Daesh's prominence and impact are now considerably greater than Al Qaeda has been able to exert in recent decades. All this despite the considerable weakening suffered in recent years by Philippine groups such as the Abu Sayyaf or the Maute Group after the defeat suffered in Marawi in 2017, where the main leaders of the regional jihadist movement such as Isnilon Hapilon and the Maute brothers were killed<sup>10</sup>.

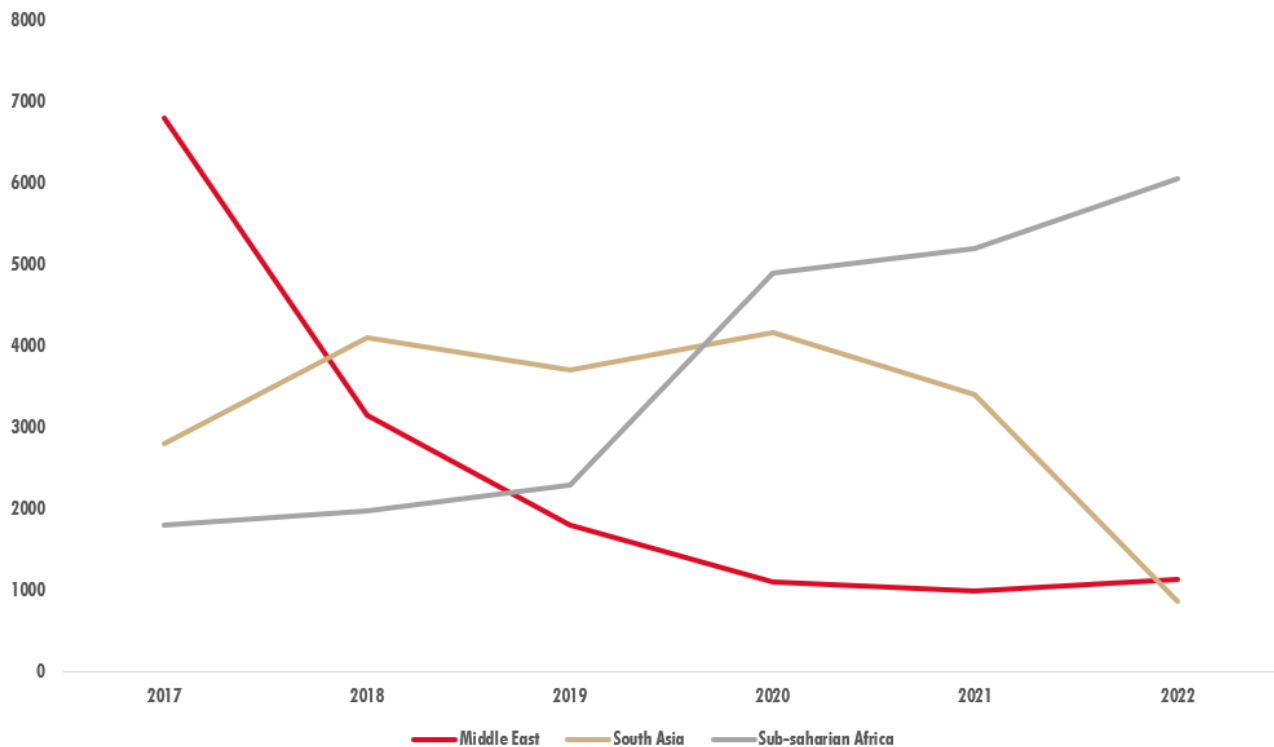
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9        So much so that in 2022 neither Morocco nor Tunisia suffered any terrorist action. In Algeria, by contrast, there were only two attacks in which six people were killed.

10       For a more detailed account of the evolution of jihadist terrorism in the Southeast Asian region, see chapter 3.



**FIGURE 6. Evolution in the number of victims by region (2017-2022)**



**Source: own elaboration**

Returning to the Maghreb, the fact that Daesh has not managed to make the most of this region during a favorable time, such as in 2014 and 2015 with its expansion in global terms, does not mean in any way that its experience has been negative since it managed to get various jihadist groups to pledge allegiance to it and carry out operations in its name<sup>11</sup>. They even managed to exert some territorial control over the mountainous region of Kasserine in Tunisia, making it for a time one of their main centers of activity in the Maghreb. And beyond the development of terrorist activity in these territories, it is necessary to consider another more important element: the large number of foreign fighters who joined the ranks of Daesh in Syria and Iraq from these countries. This is undoubtedly one of the most characteristic features of the impact that the rise of this terrorist organization has had on the Maghreb. Tunisia is considered to be the country that has contributed the most fighters to Daesh in the territories of its defunct jihadist caliphate (Zelin and Walles, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> One exception that is important to note within the Maghreb is the case of Libya. During Daesh's expansion, the terrorist organization managed to take over a significant part of Libyan territory, even establishing the city of Sirte as the third capital of its Jihadist caliphate, behind only Raqqa and Mosul.

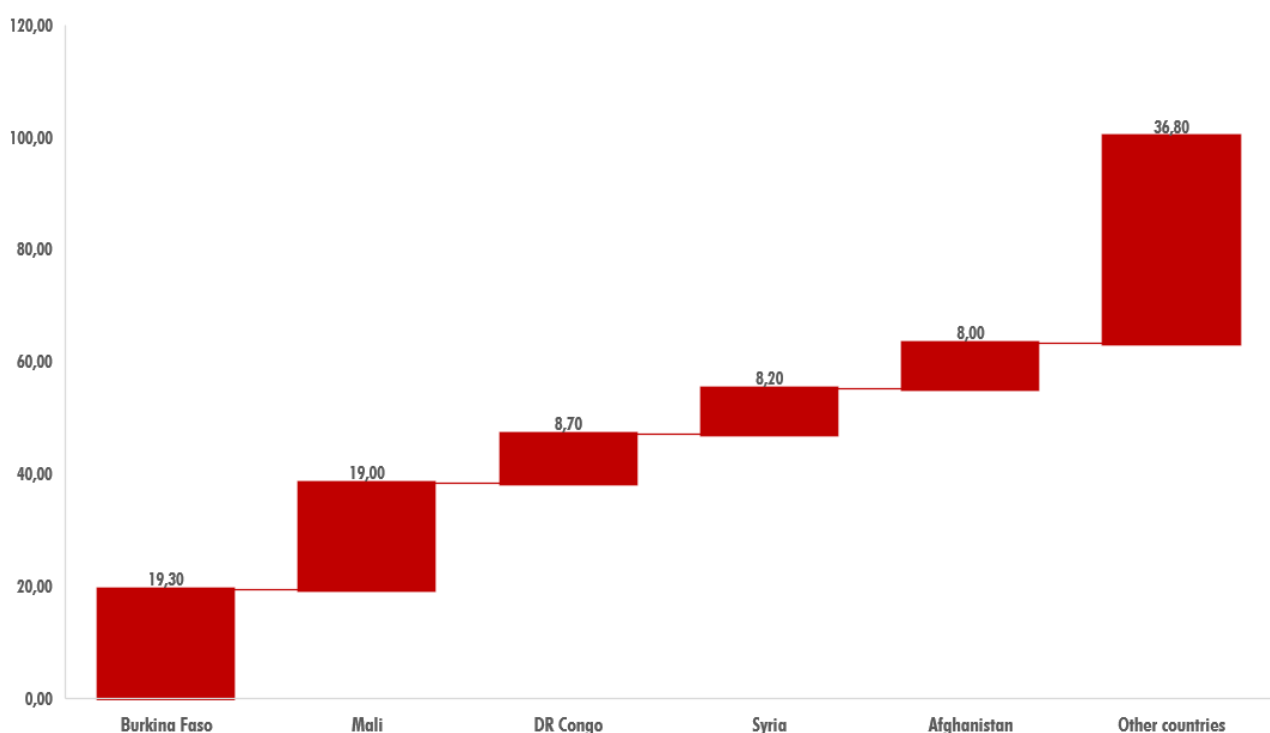


On the other hand, even though violence has decreased considerably in Afghanistan since the Taliban came to power, we should not overlook the institutionalization of terror that is currently being exercised towards all those groups that oppose the Taliban government's ideology or that are contrary to its ideological principles. In one way or another, society as a whole has been affected by this, with the loss of rights suffered by Afghan girls and women being particularly significant. Despite the initial efforts of the new Taliban regime to carry out a propaganda campaign to whiten its image, to disassociate the new reality from the one that took place two decades ago, the passage of time has shown that the two are a little different. During the last months of 2021 and especially throughout 2022, and in the face of the passivity and disinterest of the international community, we have seen how the main rights of women have been progressively taken away under the desire of the Taliban rulers to eliminate any role they might have as social agents. Thus, their contribution to society is once again restricted to the domestic sphere and subjugation to the male figure. In the last fifteen months, the new Taliban government has established numerous prohibitions that demonstrate the regression of women, including the prohibition to work outside the family home (with very few exceptions), their exclusion from education, the obligation to be accompanied by a male relative in the street at all times, and the prohibition to have access to their mobile phones. These are just four examples that reflect the progressive loss of rights suffered by girls and women in a country where Islamic law is being reintroduced in all its rigor.

Even though, as we have already mentioned, jihadism is currently in a growing phase of decentralization and diversification of activity that has allowed the movement to expand into new regions where until recently the influence of its ideology was very limited or non-existent, the truth is that a large part of its victims continues to be concentrated in very localized territories. This is clear from the fact that 63% of those killed by jihadist activity are in one of the five countries hardest hit by terrorism.



**FIGURE 7. Cumulative percentage concentration of victims by country**



Source: own elaboration

## 4. Most lethal terrorist attacks

We have already mentioned that one of the keys to understanding the decrease in the number of fatalities in 2022 compared to previous years is essentially due to the reduction in the lethality of these actions, given that the number of attacks has increased. In this sense, the best empirical evidence we can offer in quantitative terms is the analysis of the ten terrorist attacks that occurred during the year with the highest number of fatalities<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, it is important to do all this in a comparative exercise concerning the evolution of previous years and without forgetting that we are coming from a context in which the number of people killed in some of the largest terrorist actions was several hundred. This was evident in the attack attributed to Al Shabaab in October 2017 in which 512 people lost their lives or the chain of attacks in Sri Lanka in April 2019 in which another 259 people were killed.

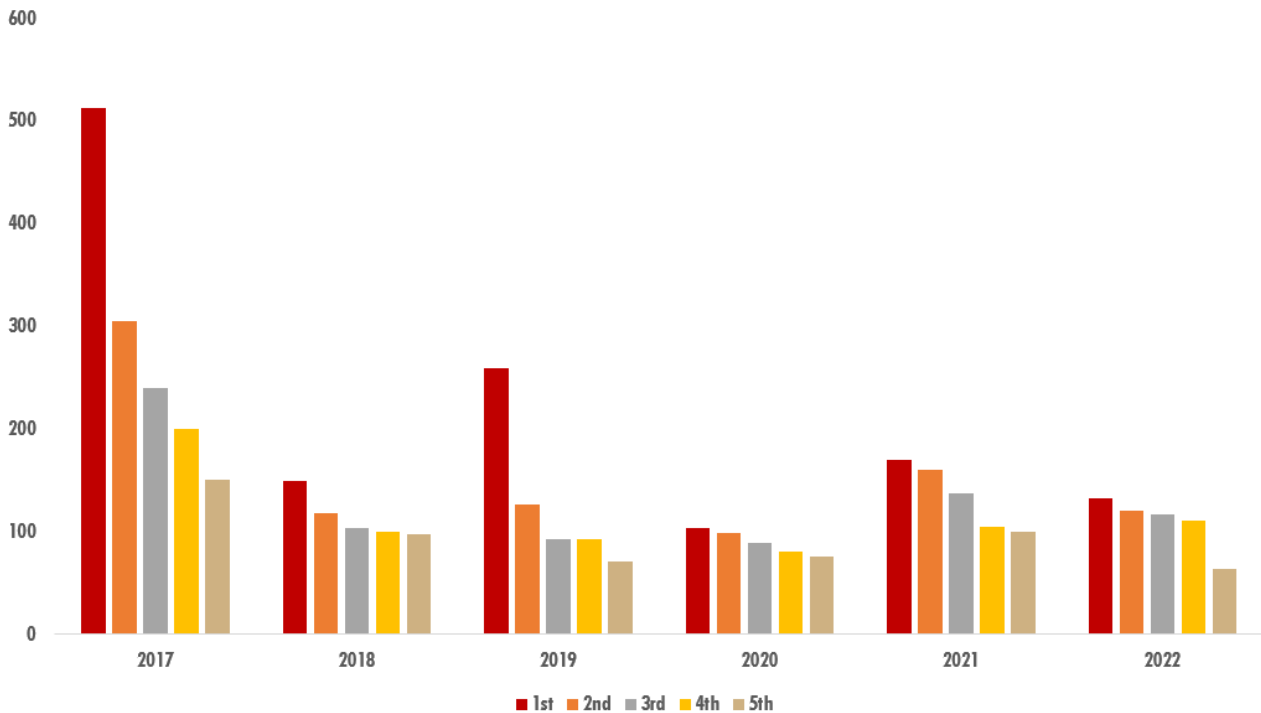
Fortunately, the casualty figures recorded in 2022 in these high death toll attacks are considerably lower than the two mentioned above and generally lower than those recorded in previous years. Nevertheless, it is still traumatic that up to 132 people could be killed in a single terrorist action, as happened in the Malian town of Bankass after a raid presumably carried out by members of the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, better known simply by its acronym JNIM.

<sup>12</sup> All of this must always consider the special sensitivity with which data must be treated when working with victim figures and being aware that behind each number there are many lives broken by terrorism.



It was members of this terrorist organization who killed a significant number of the inhabitants of this municipality, including its leaders, as an exemplary punishment for the refusal of many of them to join the group's ranks and in retaliation for the casualties that the region's defensive militias had inflicted on terrorist fighters.

**FIGURE 8. Annual evolution of the five most lethal attacks (2017-2022)**



**Source: own elaboration**

The detailed analysis of the lethality of the actions shown in Figures 7 and 8 also provides other interesting readings that reaffirm some of the key points made in this research. First, these ten terrorist attacks have taken place in some of the ten countries that have suffered the highest number of attacks and casualties, except the attack in Pakistan in early March on a Shia mosque in Peshawar where two terrorists acted in coordination during Friday prayers to carry out an attack that left 63 dead. Therefore, if we leave aside this attack, the other nine attacks reflect in themselves the greatest hotspots of Jihadist activity at the global level.

Another relevant aspect that can be concluded from the study of these attacks is how the modus operandi employed by the different terrorist organizations in their attacks is revealed. In this sense, it is increasingly common to see how the various territorial branches of Al Qaeda and Daesh operating in West Africa carry out some of their major terrorist actions on soft targets through large-scale raids on towns, villages, and localities, such as the one in Bankass mentioned above. It is therefore no coincidence that all of the terrorist actions in this



region that are included in the top ten most lethal attacks of 2022 follow this pattern. The explanation for this phenomenon is that, although these terrorist organizations have sufficient capacity to directly confront security forces, it is safer for them to attack populations that are more unprotected and have few defensive resources, beyond the self-defense militias that are formed in some tribal and community areas. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that terrorist groups of these characteristics carry out raids on different villages for several important reasons, such as supplying resources by looting the places they attack, increasing their ranks by recruiting new fighters, or frightening and educating the population to ensure that they do not become an enemy.

On the other hand, leaving the African continent, the only three attacks of greater lethality that have been committed outside these borders have been carried out by Daesh and its territorial branch in Khorasan. On the one hand, the two attacks perpetrated by ISKP in the Peshawar mosque mentioned above, and in Kabul at the end of September, demonstrate the high degree of sectarianism that is intrinsic to this terrorist organization at the core of its ideological extremism. Both attacks are aimed at targeting Shia minorities, and in the case of the attack in the Afghan capital, it is even more despicable given that the target of the suicide bombing was a Hazara school on an ordinary school day, with the result that the vast majority of the more than 50 fatalities in the attack were teenage girls.

For its part, it is also important to consider the other highly lethal terrorist acts committed by Daesh and carried out in this case by its central branch in Syria in January, as it is a good reflection of a trend that is becoming increasingly common globally: the assault by Jihadists on prisons and jails to free detained fighters. These types of attacks should not be understood as one-off terrorist actions, but rather as part of a well-defined strategy on the part of Daesh, which has been given a voice through official propaganda media and sympathizers. It is from these media that in recent years several calls have been made to incite attacks on prisons and to emulate those others who have already done so under an orchestrated propaganda campaign under the illustrative name of “Breaking the walls”<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth look at prison attacks by the global jihadi movement, see: Clifford, B., Weiss, C., “Breaking the Walls” Goes Global: The Evolving Threat of Jihadi Prison Assaults and Riots, CTC Sentinel, February 2020, vol. 13, no. 2.



**FIGURE 9. The ten deadliest jihadist attacks in 2022**

	DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER OF DEATHS	MODUS OPERANDI	AUTHOR
1	18 June	Bankass (Mali)	132	Raid	JNIM
2	29 October	Mogadishu (Somalia)	120	Double attack	Al Shabaab
3	20 January	Hasakah (Syria)	117	Prison assault	Daesh
4	12 June	Seytenga (Burkina Faso)	111	Raid	IS-Sahel
5	4 March	Peshawar (Pakistan)	63	Coordinated attack on mosque	IS-K
6	22 May	Gorgadji (Burkina Faso)	63	Raid	IS-Sahel
7	2 February	Kivu (DR Congo)	60	Refugee camp attack	ISCAP
8	15 March	Beni (DR Congo)	60	Raid	ISCAP
9	23 May	Rann (Nigeria)	60	Raid	ISWAP
10	30 September	Kabul (Afghanistan)	52	Suicide bombing at school	IS-K

**Source: own elaboration**

While it is true that attacks on prisons have already occurred on previous occasions by the Jihadist movement, these actions have become increasingly frequent since the existence of Daesh, as demonstrated by its significant growth in various geographical areas such as the Middle East, the Sahel, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. In this regard, in the last year, there have been several illustrative examples of this reality, one of the most relevant being the one that took place in Hasakah prison in January, which lasted for several days. Although it was finally put down, this attack led to the death of more than a hundred members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the escape of several hundred prisoners, including many Daesh fighters who had been arrested in recent years in the context of the consecutive defeats that led to the collapse of the Syrian-Iraqi



jihadist caliphate<sup>14</sup>. This attack on Hasakah was preceded in August by another carried out by ISCAP and claimed by Daesh that took place in Butembo prison in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This action is also particularly indicative because it reveals ISCAP's ability to attack another maximum-security prison, where nearly 800 prisoners managed to escape. It should also be borne in mind that quite a few of the prisoners in this Butembo prison were members of a terrorist organization or sympathetic to the ideological extremism promoted by Daesh, so this massive escape of prisoners will undoubtedly increase the human resources available to groups such as ISCAP or the ADF.

## **5. Terrorist organizations**

The plurality and diversity of jihadist terrorist organizations that coexist today are greater than ever. While most groups are marked only by the fulfillment of a local or regional agenda, others have been able to maintain and merge this dimension on a smaller scale with a global vision that allows them to aspire to have a presence in a large part of the world. Such is the case of Al Qaeda and Daesh, which today have numerous regional franchises in the form of subsidiaries that in turn seek to strike a balance between maintaining their autonomy and subordinating themselves to orders from the parent organization.

The greater or lesser degree of independence that these territorial branches may have depends to a large extent on various factors. Among these, one factor to be considered is the economic situation itself, which may be more or less favorable for central structures to exercise greater control over their subsidiaries. The more stable and solid the central structure is, the easier it is to ensure that its franchises remain faithful to the directives issued, even concerning decisions that may represent a turning point in the future of the subordinate organization. This was the case with the order from Daesh Central to replace Abubakar Shekau as head of ISWAP once Boko Haram swore allegiance to the Daesh leader. Under a different context in which Daesh was not an ever-expanding authority figure, likely, these directives would not have been assimilated in the same way.

There are, however, differences in the way in which the core structures of Da'esh and al-Qa'ida manage the relationship with their territorial branches. Traditionally, Al Qaeda has opted for a closer relationship with its territorial

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<sup>14</sup> This attack on Hasakah prison had other attempted aftershocks in the following months, especially in March, although all of them were put down more quickly and with lesser consequences by the SDF.



branches, ensuring that they are responsive to its interests at all times and trying to maintain a common strategy that is in line with its interests. While this positioning helps to better control and monitor all affiliated groups, Al Qaeda's inflexibility in these relationships can also cause tensions and ruptures. Indeed, over the past two decades, Al Qaeda has lost much of its influence in Iraq and Syria as a result of the severing of relations with its territorial branches in these countries<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, the greater degree of compromise and independence that Daesh has usually granted its affiliated groups allows for a more flexible relationship, although this could mean that the sense of belonging and attachment to the matrix is not as strong<sup>16</sup>. In any case, Daesh's greater flexibility in managing the relationship and links established with its affiliated groups is also reflected in its greater laxity about accepting the bay'ah or oath of allegiance. While al Qaeda has been very careful in accepting such tokens of allegiance, Daesh has not, and in a much shorter time of existence has accepted a greater volume of tokens of allegiance.

Both the structures of Al Qaeda and Daesh are currently in a situation that we could classify as one of the contradictory paradoxes and which, to a certain extent, demonstrates the uncertainty we are facing. So much so that, depending on the elements of analysis chosen, the result or the conclusions we can reach is that we are facing a favorable and prosperous situation for one or both organizations, or the opposite. It is therefore essential to take as broad and global a view as possible. On the one hand, one of the most important aspects to highlight in recent years is undoubtedly the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism in terms of dismantling the leadership of both groups. Never before have we been faced with such a favorable situation in this respect that has made it possible to put an end to the lives of the leaders of both Al Qaeda and Daesh in the same year. While Al Qaeda managed to kill Ayman Al Zawahiri on the last day of July during an operation carried out by a US drone in Kabul<sup>17</sup>, Daesh has

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15 One of the most criticized aspects of Ayman Al Zawahiri's legacy has been precisely his lack of ability to manage tensions generated by strategic differences, something that was key to both Al Qaeda in Iraq and Jabhat Al Nusra's decision to break all ties with Al Qaeda in the context of the war in Syria. For more information, see: Drevon J, Haenni, P., *Redefining Global Jihad and Its Termination: The Subjugation of Al Qaeda by Its Former Franchise in Syria*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 2022.

16 This approach is so far not being seen at practical levels, as virtually all of its regional franchises and affiliated groups have renewed their oath of allegiance following the appointment of a new leader.

17 Much has been written about the implications for Al Qaeda of Al Zawahiri's death. To address this question, the following readings are recommended: Bunzel, C. (August 3, 2022), *Al Qaeda's Next Move. What Zawahiri's Death Means for Global Jihadism*, Foreign Affairs; Mir, A. (August 2, 2022), *The Al Qaeda That Ayman al-Zawahiri Leaves Behind*, The New York Times; Igualada, C., Yagüe, J. (August 9, 2022), *The Death of al-Zawahiri. Implications for Al Qaeda and the future of global jihadism*, Observatorio Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo.



lost in the last year no less than the two successors of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. The first of these, Abu Ibrahim Al Hashimi, reportedly committed suicide in February after being cornered in the Syrian province of Idlib during another US counter-terrorism operation. Al Hashimi also allegedly killed a dozen people who were in the same house as him at the time he decided to blow himself up, killing at least six children. His successor as head of Daesh, Abu al Hassan al Hashimi, was barely able to exercise leadership for a few months, as he was reportedly killed in another Syrian city, in this case, Daraa, during a clash with members of the Free Syrian Army. The news of his death was unexpectedly reported by Daesh's official media outlet, Al Furqan, in November without much more detail about his death or his successor, which was still unknown at the beginning of 2023<sup>18</sup>.

On the other hand, it is common to make the mistake of trying to assess the strength of Al Qaeda and Daesh in terms of the degree of threat they pose to the West and how they do or do not succeed in carrying it out in the form of terrorist attacks. This is the case across the board for Western policy-makers, public opinion, and media. In this sense, the fact that both organizations have decided to put their focus on Europe and the United States on hold may be due more to strategic than operational reasons, although it is undeniable that the capacity to carry out terrorist actions on European soil is not the same as in previous years, especially in the case of Daesh. This wait-and-see approach can be seen most clearly in the agenda of Al Qaeda, an organization that has historically adopted a long-term strategy and has shown a great capacity for adaptability in the face of adversity. In the case of the organization that until this year was led by Al Zawahiri, we can observe the adoption of a smaller-scale agenda in which the priority has been to exploit local and regional conflicts for more than a decade (Hoffman and Ware, 2022). Al-Qaeda is particularly aware that it is in these contexts that it can gain the most from reaching out to social bases in which to root its ideological influence. This has been the case in recent decades in Mali, Yemen, and Somalia, to give just a few examples. Moreover, the Taliban's return to power once again guarantees it a haven in Afghanistan from which to restructure and reorganize its future with the arrival in positions of responsibility of a generation of jihadists to replace all the veterans who more than forty years ago sowed the seeds of jihad. However, it is worth remembering that the Taliban regime will not allow al Qaeda to create problems

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<sup>18</sup> The fight against terrorism has not only focused on the central apparatus of Al Qaeda and Daesh in recent years, but its various regional franchises have also been targeted. This is attested by the death of major leaders such as Abdelmalek Droukdel of AQIM or Qassim Al Rimi of AQPA, both in 2020.



by planning or orchestrating attacks on the West from Afghan soil (Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, 2022) because this could destabilize its government and lead to the same mistakes it made more than two decades ago. It is therefore difficult to believe that in the short term, Al Qaeda Central could change its strategy and return its full attention to the West, regardless of whether it can carry out one-off terrorist actions.

**It is common to make the mistake of trying to assess the strength of Al Qaeda and Daesh in terms of the degree of threat they pose to the West and the way in which they do or do not succeed in carrying it out in the form of terrorist attacks**

When analyzing the terrorist activity carried out by both organizations from their central core over the last year, we must pay special attention to the worrying development that Daesh is showing at the regional level, since the fact that Iraq and Syria have increased both the volume of attacks and the number of victims over the last two years is closely related to the reappearance of this terrorist group in these countries. All this after remaining in a low-profile dynamic since the total collapse of the jihadist caliphate at the beginning of 2019. Over the last two years, the coordinated terrorist actions carried out especially in the Syrian provinces of Deir-ez-Zor and Idlib as well as in the Iraqi governorates of Anbar, Nineveh, and Saladin have become increasingly complex in terms of planning and materialization by the organization. This is evidenced by the various ambushes carried out on positions of the Syrian Democratic Forces or the Syrian army, resulting in dozens of enemy deaths, as well as attacks using increasingly less rudimentary and more lethal explosives, which point to a recovery of technology and resources that may have been lacking in the past. Taking all this into account, the trend suggests that Daesh will continue to progressively regain some of the power and capacity lost with the collapse of its caliphate, which will allow the number of terrorist actions and the degree of lethality to increase, not only on military targets and positions but also against civilian targets in both Syria and Iraq. However, this trend may also be affected by the numerous counter-terrorism operations, especially in Iraq over the past year, which have directly undermined Daesh's capacity by eliminating many middle-level positions that connect the top echelons of the organization to the grassroots.



In turn, Daesh terrorist actions are complemented by assaults on a wide range of targets, including military bases, institutional buildings, prisons and refugee camps. We have already seen that attacks on prisons such as Hasakah are a show of muscle on the part of Daesh that also allows it to expand the number of active members, as a good part of the released prisoners rejoins the group, and thus increasing its capacity to prepare its resurgence (Carter, 2022). The likelihood of further large-scale assaults on Iraqi or Syrian prisons currently holding hundreds of jihadist prisoners must therefore be considered. While Iraqi prisons are generally well protected by the authorities, this is not the case, for example, for those under the control of Hayat Tahrir al Sham in Syria's Idlib province.

Likewise, the occasional incursions into refugee camps such as Al Hol and Al Roj show the influence that Daesh continues to exert on some of the tens of thousands of people there, including women and children of detained or dead jihadists. It is also important to emphasize that these types of attacks on refugee camps and detention centers could be increased in the short term if Turkey continues its offensive on Kurdish positions in northeastern Syria, as Daesh will take advantage of the reduced protection and surveillance that can occur in these spaces with the transfer of Kurdish fighters to other positions on the front. Therefore, Turkish operations in northern Syria may provide a very good opportunity for Daesh to take advantage of the instability and take a new step to the front (Winter, 2022).

Evidence that clearly shows what we commented on the influence and the direct connection that exists concerning Daesh between what happens inside and outside the refugee camps occurred last September when more than 200 people residing in Al Hol were arrested by the Kurdish forces. They are accused of activities such as financing the terrorist group, exchanging information with the outside world, and even belonging directly to Daesh, as evidenced by the vast amount of material found during the operation. Daesh propaganda manuals, various Daesh flags, as well as equipment and cell phones to contact members of the group abroad were found during the anti-terrorist operation carried out by the Kurdish forces.

This intervention in Al Hol reflects the strong social support base that Daesh still possesses and the risk that at some point in time, a major orchestrated attack may occur, allowing all those sympathetic to its cause to flee. Nor should



we forget that certain sectors of these refugee camps are controlled by female jihadists who impose Sharia as a way of life and punish all those who do not follow extremist rigorism. Such is the situation that, in November, the bodies of two teenage girls were found, apparently murdered for not complying with the orders issued by these deeply radicalized women who act as leaders in the areas of Al Hol under their control.

Based on this reality and the degree of radicalism and extremism prevailing in various areas of these displaced person camps, it is difficult to believe that the situation will improve over time, but rather the opposite. At present, thousands of unprotected children are still in the care of the wives of Daesh jihadists, whose only ideological influence is the one they can receive from these women<sup>19</sup>. With this in mind, we should not rule out the possibility that the experiences lived by these children in places such as Al Hol or Al Roj may be energizing elements for the next generation of jihadists. Hence, the adoption of prevention policies for vulnerable people is more essential than ever.

If we extend the focus beyond the development of the central structures of Al Qaeda and Daesh, we cannot deny that the situation of both organizations is one of growth and expansion, albeit at different rates for each of them. As we are seeing in this chapter, the African continent is the best example of this. And beyond what is happening in West Africa, it is also important to focus our interest on other areas such as the Horn of Africa, and specifically Somalia. While it is true that over the last few years, we have seen a recovery of Al Shabaab, an Al Qaeda affiliate that is the main terrorist actor in the country, the events of 2022 represent a new scenario of violence.

In the first place, and since the beginning of the year, a substantial change in the typology of the attacks could be observed, with Al Shabaab opting for actions in which the use of suicide bombers occupied a central place both on targets of the security forces and civilian targets. The increase in attacks of this type, which directly caused a higher number of victims, could be associated with the organization's desire to prevent the normal development of the electoral and legislative processes that were to take place in 2022, after more than a year of delays and postponements of the presidential elections. Finally, in May, the elections could be held, resulting in the appointment of a government in which

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<sup>19</sup> It is estimated that a total of 30,000 children under 12 years of age are currently distributed in several displacement camps in northeastern Syria.



again Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was placed as the head, after having already held the same position between 2012 and 2017. However, the spiral of terrorist violence did not end after the elections but rather became more pronounced. This is evidenced by the attack on the Hayat Hotel in August. This centrally located hotel, which is frequently visited by military authorities and government officials, was the target of a coordinated terrorist action by members of Al Shabaab who, in a show of muscle, seized it for more than 30 hours until Somali forces managed to recapture it with a toll of at least 21 people killed.

This terrorist attack was the trigger for the beginning of what has been called by the Somali government itself the “total war” to eliminate the presence of Al Shabaab in the country. To achieve this, one of the political priorities adopted by the government in terms of counter-terrorism strategy is to join forces. Hence, in recent months, a joint appeal has been launched to bring together the different clans and ethnic groups, to whom arms are delivered and military training is provided to confront a common enemy such as Al Shabaab<sup>20</sup>. Since then, the intensity of the anti-terrorist actions carried out by the Somali authorities has been responded to in the same way by Al Shabaab in the form of attacks, with almost daily counter-terrorist offensives that force the jihadists to withdraw momentarily to regain the same territory or others nearby once the military and police forces have redeployed their forces. In this context we must understand the forceful response of Al Shabaab to attacks such as the one that occurred in October and was carried out in a coordinated manner at two points in the city; a first epicenter near the Ministry of Education, where a suicide bomber blew himself up, and the subsequent explosion of a car bomb placed next to a well-known restaurant that at the time was crowded with diners. A total of 120 people were killed, making it one of the most lethal terrorist actions worldwide in the last year.

Likewise, the force deployed by Al Shabaab is not only limited to those areas in which it has traditionally exercised its area of influence on Somali territory. This is evidenced by the more or less continuous attacks across the border with Kenya. However, particularly significant may be the case of Ethiopia, where some twenty people were killed in two Al Shabaab attacks in July. While it is true that this is not the first time that this group has tried to enter Ethiopia<sup>21</sup>, it could be the

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20 It is also important to note President Biden’s approval to send half a thousand U.S. troops back to Somalia after the end of the troop withdrawal ordered by Trump in early 2021.

21 Al Shabaab already tried to establish itself on Ethiopian territory in 2007 shortly after the formation of the terrorist group and there were subsequent attempts to commit attacks in 2013 and 2014.



case that the raids that have occurred are part of a strategy aimed at getting members of the terrorist group to enter Ethiopian territory to plan attacks from inside the country.

Nothing seems to presage that the situation in Somalia is going to improve in the short term, despite the effort that the Somali forces and authorities are showing to face the advance of Al Shabaab. The capacity that this group has regained in recent years and the social support base it has gained in areas where a power vacuum has been created in the face of institutional helplessness may be an important element in the face of this spiral of violence continuing over time without substantial progress in the fight against terrorism or the weakening of Al Shabaab.

Another organization that also requires our attention is the territorial branch of Daesh in the Sinai Peninsula operating under the Wilaya Sina brand. Bridging the gap, one could say that the trajectory over the last few years between this group and Al Shabaab bears different parallels. Broadly speaking, this trajectory would consist of an initial phase of significant growth that is countered by the anti-terrorist policies implemented and that later must be reshaped to face a new resurgence of terrorist activity. Such is the case of this regional Daesh franchise, which was one of the first to be formed after the proclamation of the 2014 jihadist caliphate. This group had a first stage of development in which its growth in the Sinai Peninsula was related to the absence of anti-terrorism measures in Egypt that tried to curb the jihadist threat. Abdelfatah Al Sisi's government prioritized fighting the Muslim Brotherhood, which it considered the most dangerous actor in the face of challenging its stay in power, which allowed Wilaya Sina some freedom of movement. However, in November 2017, a turning point occurred after the attack committed by Daesh on a Sufi mosque in Bir Al Abed, in the Sinai Peninsula, where 305 people were killed. That terrorist action brought to light the real extent of the threat posed by jihadism to Egypt and, consequently, the authorities took a turn in their anti-terrorist policy, opting to allocate a large part of the available resources to combat Daesh. Thus, the capacity of Wilaya Sina was progressively reduced to very limited levels of activity by the end of 2020. However, the following year saw the beginning of a new phase of growth that has seen a sharp upturn in 2022, to the point of placing Egypt once again as one of the countries hardest hit in the world by terrorist activity. The concern is such that it has forced Egyptian and U.S. authorities to agree once again to intensify their cooperation in the fight against extremism in the country (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2022).



The recovery of much of the prominence lost in recent years must be especially worrying in the case of Wilaya Sina, not only because of the increase in its terrorist actions but also because of the form and geographical areas in which some of these attacks are taking place. The best example of this can be found in the last few months of last year. Contrary to the majority of terrorist actions perpetrated by this group occurring in the northeastern area of the Sinai Peninsula, and more specifically around the city of El Arish, since November there have been terrorist attacks carried out in Al Qantara and Ismailia, on the banks of the Suez Canal, i.e. at the other end of the Sinai Peninsula. And beyond considering the different geographical locations in which these attacks are materializing, we must also consider their *modus operandi*. While in some of these attacks there has been a recurrence of acts of suicide terrorism, in others terrorist actions have been planned and coordinated to storm different institutional buildings that they have managed to keep under their control for a few hours. Both modalities differ from how the Wilaya Sina attacks have been carried out in recent years in the Sinai Peninsula, so this latest evidence points to a diversification both in the scenarios where they commit their terrorist actions and also in the typology of their attacks. While it is true that everything points to the fact that this reality is the result of a new expansion and growth phase of the territorial branch of Daesh in Egypt, the government authorities point out that, if part of the most recent terrorist activity has shifted to another geographical point, this is motivated by a forced displacement of the members of the organization to new territories as a result of the pressure of the anti-terrorist struggle that is forcing the group to abandon its more traditional areas of influence<sup>22</sup>.

## **6. Jihadist–inspired terrorism in Europe**

Terrorist activity materialized in the form of attacks in Europe throughout 2022 continues to find itself under the same paradigm initiated at the end of 2017. This stage in which we find ourselves is characterized by attacks that are committed by individuals (self-)radicalized through online media and who at an advanced stage of their indoctrination process decide to carry out a terrorist act that is generally committed through the use of bladed weapons. To a lesser extent, terrorists also make use of a vehicle with which they try to run over pedestrians, as happened with the 2021 attack in the Murcian town of Torre Pacheco or Berlin in August of the previous year. In any case, the vast majority of these

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<sup>22</sup> Something similar is currently happening with the Nigerian group Boko Haram, which has been forced to look for new spaces in which to establish itself after losing some of its most important centers of activity in the region of Borno, in northeastern Nigeria.



attacks are carried out on their own and do not have the logistical or financial backing of any terrorist organization, beyond the ideological influence they may exert on terrorists during their radicalization process through the consumption of jihadist propaganda. It also follows that this type of attack is considered low cost, given the low budget that the perpetrators of the attacks generally have at their disposal<sup>23</sup>.

However, the fact that these terrorists act individually at the time of the attack and that there is no direct or indirect support from terrorist organizations does not necessarily mean that there were no links with third parties who could act as collaborators or facilitators. This was recently demonstrated by the Vienna bombing in November 2020, when four individuals were convicted after the trial and found guilty as accomplices of the terrorist who killed four people and wounded twenty others (Bell and Kirby, 2023). Precisely, the Vienna bombing can be considered an exception within the current paradigm, given that a firearm was used in that terrorist action. Since then, of the dozen or so jihadist-inspired attacks that have taken place on European soil, none of them have been perpetrated using this type of weaponry.

**FIGURE 10. Jihadist-inspired attacks in Europe, 2022**

DATE	LOCATION	DEATHS	TYOLOGY
2 March	Arles (France)	1	Asphyxia
13 May	Aachen (Germany)	0	Stabbing
8 September	Ansbach (Germany)	0	Stabbing
10 November	Brussels (Belgium)	1	Stabbing

Source: own elaboration

If we look at jihadist activity in Western Europe over the past year, we see that there have only been four attacks in which the existence of a terrorist motivation seems to be clear<sup>24</sup>. The first of these was committed in a prison in the French city of Arles in March. It was there that a French prisoner of Cameroonian origin, who was serving a sentence after having been arrested in Afghanistan for joining jihadist groups, suffocated the well-known Corsican separatist Yvan Colonna, who was serving a life sentence for terrorist crimes. According to the

<sup>23</sup> At the time, Abu Mohammad Al Adnani, spokesman for Daesh, called for attacks on the West using the low-cost methodology: "If you are not able to find an improvised explosive device or a bullet, then target the American or French infidel or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock, kill him with a knife, run him over with your car, throw him from above, drown him, or poison him."

<sup>24</sup> Throughout 2022 there have been other attacks in Europe that, contrary to what might initially appear, have not been investigated as acts of terrorism after it was considered that there was no terrorist motivation that was the trigger for these actions. Such is the case of the stabbing attack inside a church in Nice in April or the stabbing in the German city of Ludwigshafen in October, where two people were killed.



investigation carried out by the French National Anti-Terrorist Prosecutor's Office, the murdered person had committed hours before blasphemy about Islam and the Prophet, which would have motivated the subsequent attack by the Islamist terrorist.

Two months later, the second attack took place in the German city of Aachen. A 31-year-old man of Iraqi nationality wounded five people with a knife inside a train, and four of the victims had to be taken to hospital due to the seriousness of their injuries. According to the investigation, the attack was carried out randomly and indiscriminately on the passengers. The perpetrator, who was arrested, had already been investigated in the past for his Islamist radicalization.

The third terrorist action took place in September at the train station of another German city, in this case, Ansbach. There, an individual in his thirties stabbed two people with a knife before being shot by police officers. The two victims were injured with varying degrees of severity, but fortunately, neither of them was in any danger of life. Although the investigation into the attack is still open, the authorities still maintain as a first hypothesis an Islamist terrorist motivation.

The last Jihadist-inspired terrorist action in Europe took place in November and unfortunately left one victim dead. This attack occurred at another train station, this time in the Belgian capital. An individual armed with a knife assaulted two officers, resulting in the death of one of them before he was taken down by police officers who arrived on the scene. Investigations carried out after the attack established that the perpetrator was on the list of individuals considered potential violent extremists. It was also confirmed that the terrorist had been under psychiatric treatment.

About the latter case, it is not uncommon to find that terrorists acting on their own in the West in recent years have suffered from psychological disorders and mental illness<sup>25</sup>. This is giving rise to new research aimed at clarifying the link between radicalism and mental health, opening an intense debate on whether a person with a mental illness can be considered a terrorist or whether an attack perpetrated by a person acting under mental problems should be treated as a

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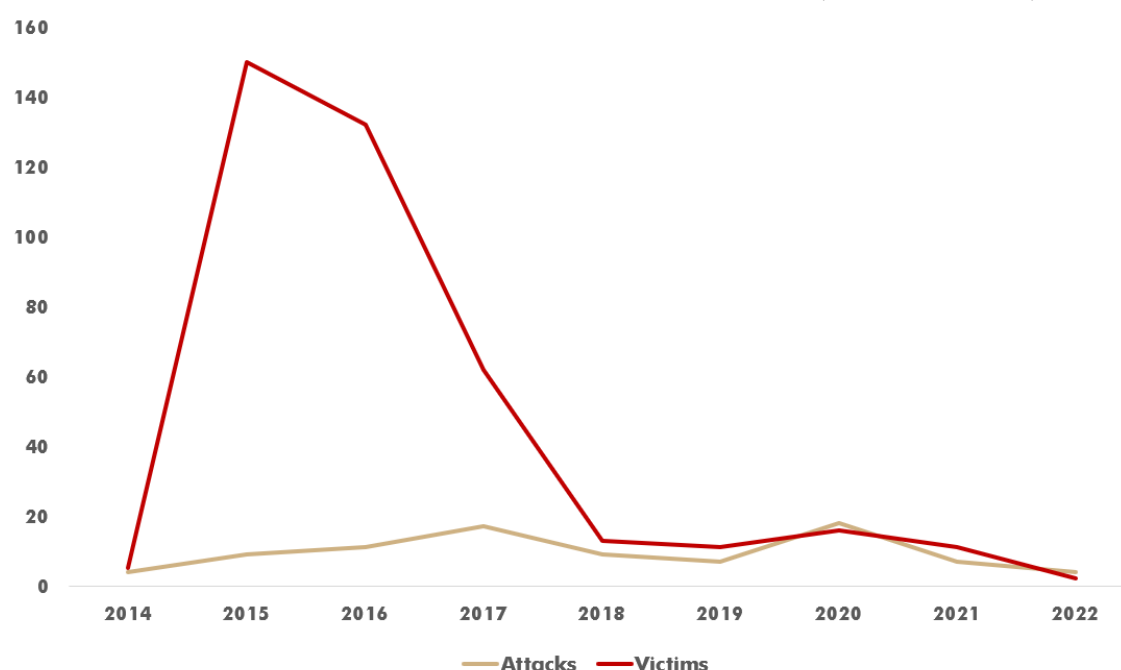
<sup>25</sup> The Spanish case serves as an example. The perpetrators of the terrorist actions on a police station in Cornellá in 2018, in Torre Pacheco in 2021, and in Algeciras at the beginning of 2023, suffered from mental health problems according to sources of the investigations. Another example of this relationship was the attack that occurred in Utrecht, Netherlands, in March 2019, which was investigated as terrorism. However, the perpetrator of the attack was not convicted as such since the judge considered that his mental illness was the trigger for carrying out the stabbing in which three people were killed.



terrorist act, among other things. Be that as it may, what seems to be clear is that in these cases the influence that extremist ideology exerts on people with mental illness can be a trigger when initiating or accelerating an indoctrination process, although the degree of radicalization and the adoption of extremist postulates that they reach before committing the attack is usually precarious. Hence, it can also be understood that these radicalization processes are more a consequence of mental health problems than of a solid ideological conviction (Europol, 2020).

As a general assessment of the four terrorist actions committed in Europe during the last year, it can be said that based on qualitative and quantitative evidence we are facing figures that fortunately are far away, despite the death of two people in 2022, from the scenario that developed between 2014 and 2017 with attacks of enormous lethality such as those in Paris in 2015, Brussels and Nice in 2016 or those in Manchester and Barcelona in 2017. Likewise, and based on the detailed analysis of these four attacks, we once again empirically verify that bladed weapons continue to have a central place in the commission of attacks, something that logically translates into a lower number of victims. Nor should we forget that this kind of democratization of terrorism, in which any individual can enter into a rapid process of radicalization leading to the commission of an attack, makes the terrorist phenomenon a volatile, unpredictable, and complex threat to deal with in terms of the fight against terrorism.

**FIGURE 11. Jihadist attacks committed in Europe (2017-2022).**



Source: own elaboration



Another relevant aspect to consider is that neither Daesh nor Al Qaeda have claimed any of these terrorist actions committed in Europe, being the second consecutive year in which this occurs. As we have already mentioned above, the fact that there is no terrorist organization offering support to the planning of these attacks, together with the participation of a single terrorist at the time of the attack, prevents the orchestration of attacks that generally require great complexity. However, we must also be aware that after periods of relative calm in the West in terms of the development of the jihadist activity, terrorism has once again expressed itself at its most lethal level. Nor should we forget the importance acquired in the fight against terrorism at the European level and the cooperation between interstate agencies, which has been key to thwarting numerous plans to commit attacks in European cities in recent years.

As for the multiple challenges posed by the Jihadist threat that the European continent must face in the immediate future, the most important are the processes of radicalization that are difficult to detect, especially those that can occur in the prison environment where all the elements necessary to initiate and energize cases of proselytization and indoctrination converge. This is a risk that is already being assumed and is materializing in the form of terrorist actions both inside and outside prisons. In this regard, we must also take into consideration mainly the new role that may be played in prisons by the numerous European women who are being repatriated from refugee camps and detention centers in Syria, as many of them are being sent to pre-trial detention pending trial. In these cases, special attention must be shown to those who present a high degree of extremism, given that their high capacities can turn them into indoctrinating agents initiating radicalization processes on other female inmates. A similar role can be played by the various returned terrorist fighters who are being detained after trying to reach Europe. Their learning and experience in conflict zones, as well as the instruction they have received in the handling of weapons and the deep degree of radicalization and extremism they have acquired, make them potential threats both inside and outside prisons. From all of this, we can see the urgent need to implement effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs within prisons.

Finally, although it is a risk that is being assumed at the moment in the face of a greater need, shortly it will be crucial to monitor and control as exhaustively as possible the outflow of weapons from Ukraine, given the high probability that they could end up being acquired by terrorists on the black market. Unquestionably,



the war in Ukraine has opened a window of opportunity for both organized crime groups and terrorist organizations. All of them can take advantage of the war conflict and the instability generated in multiple aspects that also go beyond the simple acquisition of all kinds of weaponry and the possible arrival of fighters who want to carry out jihad alongside Chechen groups (Kepel, 2023). In this sense, the learning in strategic terms for terrorists can be enormous, given the opportunities to implement new tactics that could be used in the same way both in the context of a war against a traditional army and through attacks in which the civilian population is the target. As a button, the numerous uses and different capabilities of drones to carry out attack actions, as well as the numerous propaganda videos that have been uploaded during the last year to platforms and social networks by both Ukrainian and pro-Russian supporters in which manuals on how to manufacture certain explosives are offered and are accessible to the entire public. About the latter, and just as happened in the past when time and resources were invested in blocking jihadist propaganda content in online media, the same efforts must be devoted to removing this type of content, which after all is similar in instructional and practical terms.



**FIGURE 12. Jihadist-inspired attacks in Europe (2018-2022).**

Year	Date	Location	Number of death	Attack typology
2018	11 January	Pas-de-Calais (France)	0	stabbing
2018	23 March	Carcassonne and Trèbes (France)	4	firearm and attempted hit-and-run
2018	5 May	The Hague (The Netherlands)	0	stabbing
2018	12 May	Paris (France)	1	stabbing
2018	29 May	Liège (Belgium)	3	stabbing and firearm
2018	20 August	Cornellà (Spain)	0	stabbing
2018	31 August	Amsterdam (The Netherlands)	0	stabbing
2018	11 December	Strasbourg (France)	5	stabbing and firearm
2018	31 December	Manchester (United Kingdom)	0	stabbing
2019	17 January	Oslo (Norway)	0	stabbing
2019	5 March	Condé sur Sarthe (France)	1	stabbing
2019	18 March	Utretch (The Netherlands)	4	firearm
2019	24 May	Lyon (France)	0	IED
2019	17 September	Milan (Italy)	0	stabbing
2019	3 October	Paris (France)	4	stabbing
2019	29 November	London (United Kingdom)	2	stabbing
2020	3 January	Villejuif (France)	1	stabbing
2020	9 January	Cambridgeshire (United Kingdom)	0	stabbing
2020	2 February	London (United Kingdom)	0	stabbing
2020	3 February	Dieuze (France)	0	stabbing
2020	14 February	Winchester (United Kingdom)	0	stabbing
2020	4 April	Romans-sur-Isère (France)	2	stabbing
2020	27 April	Bavaria (Germany)	0	arson attack
2020	27 April	Colombes (France)	0	hit-and-run
2020	21 June	Reading (United Kingdom)	3	stabbing
2020	18 August	Berlin (Germany)	0	hit-and-run
2020	12 September	Canton Vaud (Switzerland)	1	stabbing
2020	25 September	Paris (France)	0	stabbing
2020	4 October	Dresden (Germany)	1	stabbing
2020	16 October	Paris (France)	1	stabbing
2020	29 October	Niza (France)	3	stabbing
2020	2 November	Viena (Austria)	4	firearm
2020	24 November	Lugano (Switzerland)	0	stabbing
2020	9 December	Bollène (France)	0	stabbing



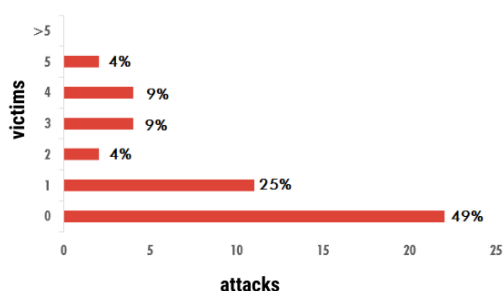
Year	Date	Location	Number of death	Attack typology
2021	23 April	Paris (France)	1	stabbing
2021	28 May	Nantes (France)	0	stabbing
2021	25 June	Würzburg (Germany)	3	stabbing
2021	17 September	Murcia (Spain)	1	hit-and-run
2021	13 October	Kongsberg (Norway)	5	arch
2021	15 October	Essex (United Kingdom)	1	stabbing
2021	6 November	Bavaria (Germany)	0	stabbing
2022	2 March	Arles (France)	1	asphyxia
2022	13 May	Aachen (Germany)	0	stabbing
2022	8 September	Ansbach (Germany)	0	stabbing
2022	10 November	Brussels (Belgium)	1	stabbing

**With regard to the multiple challenges posed by the jihadist threat that the European continent must face in the near future, the processes of radicalization that are difficult to detect stand out, especially those that may occur in the prison environment where all the elements necessary to initiate and energize cases of proselytization and indoctrination converge**



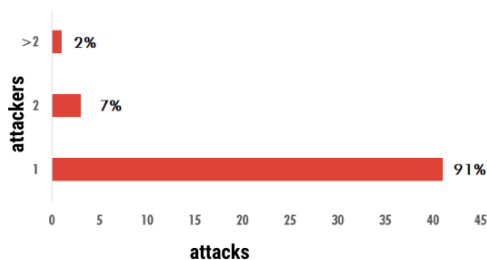
# JIHADIST TERRORISM IN EUROPE (2018-2022)

## Number of victims per attack

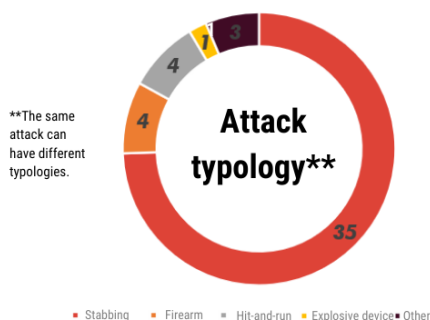


**74%** of attacks resulted in **one or no** fatalities.

## Number of attackers per attack



**France** as the hardest hit country.  
**18 attacks** (40% total)  
**23 fatalities** (43%)



**45 attacks**

**53 casualties**



## **7. Conclusions**

Once again this year it has become clear that the challenge to international security posed by jihadist terrorism is still very latent. The adaptability of this global phenomenon in times of greatest adversity, together with the enormous dynamism with which it manages to expand ever more rapidly, are key to understanding the challenge of dealing with it in all its dimensions, as well as how unpredictable, diverse and diffuse the threat it represents can be.

Despite the slight increase in the number of terrorist actions, the 17% reduction in the number of victims in 2022 compared to the previous year is a positive aspect to be considered. However, and despite the notable improvement in regions such as South Asia, not to mention the ISKP growth in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, many other scenarios such as West Africa, the Horn of Africa, or the Middle East have seen a significant increase in the development of the terrorist activity, with all that this implies. How the inconsistency of the state in these territories has an impact on a large part of the population ends up being a facilitating element for the continuous growth of an increasingly ideologically rooted extremism in an important social base.

In this sense, the evolution of the situation in a large part of the African continent is particularly worrying. The rapid progression of jihadism remains closely linked to a series of socio-economic and political factors that are being exploited by terrorist organizations to gain adherents to their cause and continue to expand into new territories and resources. The expansion of the West African territorial branches of Daesh and Al Qaeda towards the Gulf of Guinea is yet another example of how instability and insecurity, which is often the result of institutional fragility and the adaptive virtues of terrorism, is crossing borders and eventually spreading to other countries as terrorist groups build bridges to connect their main centers of activity. For this reason, combating terrorism requires a plural, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive approach that covers all the causes of its existence. Knowing the motivations that lead people to join extremist movements and investing in prevention is as necessary as the coercive measures of the use of force on the territory to curb the advance of jihadist organizations.

Another important aspect to consider is the possibility that, in the short-term future, various jihadist groupings that are currently under the umbrella of one of the two major brands of international terrorism may decide to break their ties



with them and renounce the global jihad. All this to reorient a strategic direction towards purely local agendas and under their leadership, as Hayat Tahrir Al Sham did in 2017 or more recently the Turkestan Islamic Party, which has adopted a nationalist agenda after setting aside its role as part of the global jihadist movement under the influence of Al Qaeda. The current context is conducive to this, as neither the core structures of Al Qaeda nor Daesh can prioritize the agenda vis-à-vis the West. Moreover, at present most of their franchises and affiliated groups already have a strategy that is only local or regional in nature, so that in the event of a break in relations, they would not require great efforts to reshape their agendas.

As for terrorist activity in Europe, although the current context allows us to glimpse an improvement concerning previous years, something that is supported by the evidence itself in quantitative and qualitative terms, it can also generate a false perception of complete security by believing that this situation will continue indefinitely in time. There is nothing to suggest that this will be the case. We are currently in a phase in which there are various more or less incipient phenomena that, if they come together, could represent a serious threat to the West. One need only think of the extremist breeding ground that can be generated inside prisons with the arrival of returned fighters or women repatriated from Syria. In both cases, the ideological influence received from the experiences acquired under the jihadist atmosphere of the caliphate can be decisive in turning these figures into real references for other prisoners susceptible or willing to start a radicalization process, with the added risk involved in the reincorporation into the society of all of them once they have served their sentences. Likewise, we must not forget the window of opportunity that the war in Ukraine represents for numerous terrorist groups. The easy acquisition of all types of weaponry, as well as the lessons learned in terms of military strategies and tactics that can also be applied to non-war scenarios and on civilian targets, will surely be exploited by jihadist organizations. Once all these elements come together, we should not rule out the possibility that transnational groups such as Al Qaeda, Daesh, or any others that may emerge under the inspiration of jihadism, may decide to resume their agenda against Europe and the rest of the West.



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# JIHADIST ACTIVITY IN THE MAGHREB AND WESTERN SAHEL IN 2022

Marta Summers

## 1. Introduction

This chapter is based on the data recorded in the Observatorio del Magreb y África Occidental<sup>1</sup>, published monthly by the International Observatory for the Study of Terrorism (OIET). The following pages are structured as follows: first, in the regional context section, the situation of the region under study will be described in general terms, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Subsequently, the evolution of jihadist terrorism in each of the regions will be analyzed, starting with the Maghreb and distinguishing, within West Africa, the two major hotspots of this type of violence: on the one hand, the Western Sahel - where the area of the Triple Border between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger stands out - and, on the other, the Lake Chad basin. Within each of the sections, each of the countries that comprise them will be studied in depth.

Finally, in the conclusions section, we will proceed to list the most relevant findings about the jihadist terrorist phenomenon, interpreting the information analyzed in the previous sections and trying to relate it to the socio-political trends of each of the regions, thus generating a complete contextualization of the quantitative data on which the work is based.

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<sup>1</sup> Only attacks resulting in at least one death, whether of civilians, security forces or terrorist militants, are counted.



## **2. Regional context**

2022 ends with Africa as the main global scenario of jihadist violence. For the third consecutive year, the continent is the region of the world with the highest rates of jihadist activity, surpassing other latitudes where this type of terrorism was traditionally predominant, such as the Middle East. This chapter will describe and analyze the situation in two regions of the African continent: the Maghreb and West Africa<sup>2</sup>. In the latter, the study will place greater emphasis on the two major hotspots of terrorist activity: the Liptako-Gourma area-also known as the “Triple Frontier”-which covers territories in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger belonging to the Western Sahel subregion, and the Lake Chad basin.

The overall figures show, once again, a clear increase in the number of attacks, which have reached a total of 1,259 in the last twelve months. This represents an increase of 23% compared to the 1027 in 2021. Moreover, considering the temporal evolution, another negative feature stands out: 2021 represented a period of slowdown after the alarming figures of 2019 and 2020, the growth of violence was 12% compared to the previous year, and this figure doubled in 2022, so there has been a remarkable acceleration of terrorist activity.

Analyzing at a lower level, jihadist activity in West Africa accounts for almost all of that recorded, where the predominance corresponds to the Western Sahel, specifically, to the Tri-Border area, which concentrates 73% of attacks and where, on average, 2.53 attacks have been perpetrated daily. In fact, violence in Burkina Faso and Mali alone accounts for 66% of the total number of attacks in the 16 countries studied. In contrast, violence in the Lake Chad Basin is less than 25%; and in the Maghreb, only five attacks are known to have occurred - which would account for less than 1% of the total.

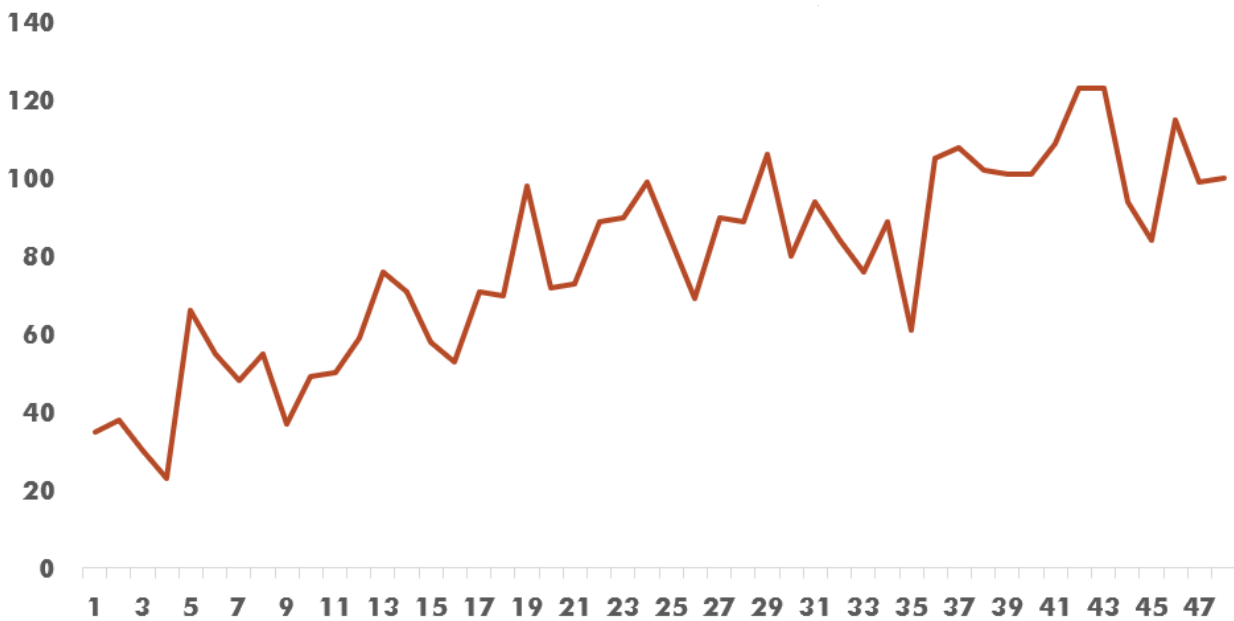
**The Western Sahel is positioned as the main epicentre of jihadist terrorism, both on the African continent and globally**

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<sup>2</sup> The countries comprising the Maghreb are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, while the so-called West African region includes Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin.



**FIGURE 1. Monthly evolution of the number of terrorist attacks in the Maghreb and Sahel (2019-2022)**



**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

If we look at the evolution over time, the Tri-Border area also stands out, where jihadist terrorism has increased by 38% compared to 2021. In contrast, the other two regions analyzed show a positive evolution, with a decrease in this type of violence of 37% and 13%, respectively.

On the other hand, with regard to fatalities, the total number has increased compared to 2021, but to a lesser extent than jihadist attacks (6%). The two countries in which more deaths have been recorded are Burkina Faso (1,604) and Mali (1,578): in this case, between the two countries they accumulate more than 70% of the total number of deaths counted in all the countries analyzed. Mali is the worst performer, with a 60% increase in the number of deaths in the last year, in contrast to Niger, where the reduction was similar, at 64%.

In general terms, Al Qaeda-related groups would be behind a large part of the attacks registered throughout 2022 - 58% of them, to be precise -, continuing with the rise shown over the last few years. If Daesh affiliates operating in the study area<sup>3</sup> are counted together, they would reach 32% of the total jihadist activity in the region, although, as will be analyzed later, there is a big difference between the Sahel and West African franchises.

<sup>3</sup> These include the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP) and the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISIS), referred to as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara until March 2022, at which point Daesh decided to establish it as an independent regional affiliate of ISWAP.



On the other hand, Boko Haram, which in 2020 was the group that perpetrated the most attacks, would be in third place, with less than 10% of the total. If a distinction were made between the two major groups in the Lake Chad Basin - Boko Haram and ISWAP - the latter would be in fourth place, below even the former, representing a significant drop in its level of activity compared to previous years.

If we analyze the number of fatalities resulting from the actions of each group, the figures show a similar evolution: those in the orbit of Al Qaeda are close to 2,000 deaths caused, accounting for 53% of the total, while those related to Daesh would absorb 40%. However, when comparing between sub-regions, the Western Sahel zone (81%) far exceeds the Lake Chad basin.

In terms of victimology, the values of civilian deaths continue to show an increasing trend: the 3,533 casualties recorded in 2022 represent an increase of 25% over the previous year, which was precisely the growth rate between 2020 and 2021. On the other hand, the figures for law enforcement personnel continue to fall, being, for the first time in four years, less than 1,000 (898 in 2022). This extreme is striking in cases such as those of the JNIM coalition<sup>4</sup>, which positions itself as a defender of the civilian population-even claiming to be an alternative to the Malian state-but which, at the same time, is behind serious massacres against citizens.

In fact, this propensity is clearly seen when analyzing the ten<sup>5</sup> most serious attacks of the year<sup>6</sup> - in which a total of 910 people were killed - nine of which targeted civilians. This already happened in 2021, but previously the prevalence was attacks against military installations. Moreover, of these, only two were reportedly carried out in the Lake Chad basin, which again consolidates the Western Sahel sub-region as the main focus of this type of violence. Another indicator supporting this assertion is the capacity of terrorist groups in both regions to carry out attacks: of these eleven attacks, eight were committed in the western subregion, the majority (six) by the EIS and three by the JNIM coalition. In the Lake Chad basin, where only two attacks have been perpetrated, they are said to have been shared equally between ISWAP and Ansaru, a group linked to Al Qaeda.

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4 It corresponds to the name Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen which, translated into English, would be "Support Front for Islam and Muslims".

5 According to the numbers of civilian and military casualties, which vary, according to their severity, between 180 and 42, there are eleven attacks and not ten, since there would be two with 42 casualties recorded.

6 The seriousness of a terrorist attack is measured in terms of fatalities, without distinguishing between civilians and military, but excluding from the calculation those terrorists neutralized or killed in clashes.



On the political front, the Western Sahel sub-region continues to be highly unstable. Coup's d'état, which have been taking place since 2020, have continued to plague the area: a perfect example would be Burkina Faso, which changed government twice in 2022. The last one occurred on September 30, when Lieutenant Colonel Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba was dismissed eight months into his mandate by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who represents a part of the army demanding greater results in terms of counter-terrorism (The Soufan Center, 2022). These new executives, far from alleviating the already existing political tensions with their Western partners, have increased them to the point of breaking ties with some of them. The case of Operation Barkhane in Mali stands out, which, close to a decade of deployment, was finally canceled<sup>7</sup>.

The new strategy of the Malian executive has included the arrival of new actors. In this case, the growing presence of Wagner troops, a Russian corporation close to the Kremlin, which began to act in the center of the country, but later expanded towards Gao, Ménaka, and the northern zone, although the Malian government junta has not officially recognized their presence. The political, military, and diplomatic cost of this type of allies is lower than that of the Europeans: far from demanding political reforms or the fulfillment of the fundamental rights of local citizens, they agree, in return for their collaboration, to mining concessions and rights to exploit natural resources, as well as a position close to the ruling government of the country in which they are located (Nasr, 2022). They tend to show no interest in Africans developing effective long-term capabilities and, moreover, have been involved in violent episodes involving abuses against civilians -in the development of joint operations with the Mali Armed Forces-, disinformation, and illegal contracts (Faulkner, 2022).

But the alleged arrival of Russian troops in Mali not only provoked a backlash from France but also from other international partners, which added to existing complaints about the military character of the government or the lack of democratic elections as part of the transition process. The two EU missions in Mali, EUTM (European Union Training Mission) and EUCAP (European Union Capacity Building Mission) tried to continue operating unchanged but finally suspended their activities in April due to a lack of guarantees about Wagner's interference in their own functions. For their part, some countries that were members of the Takuba Force-which was finally canceled in July-were withdrawing from

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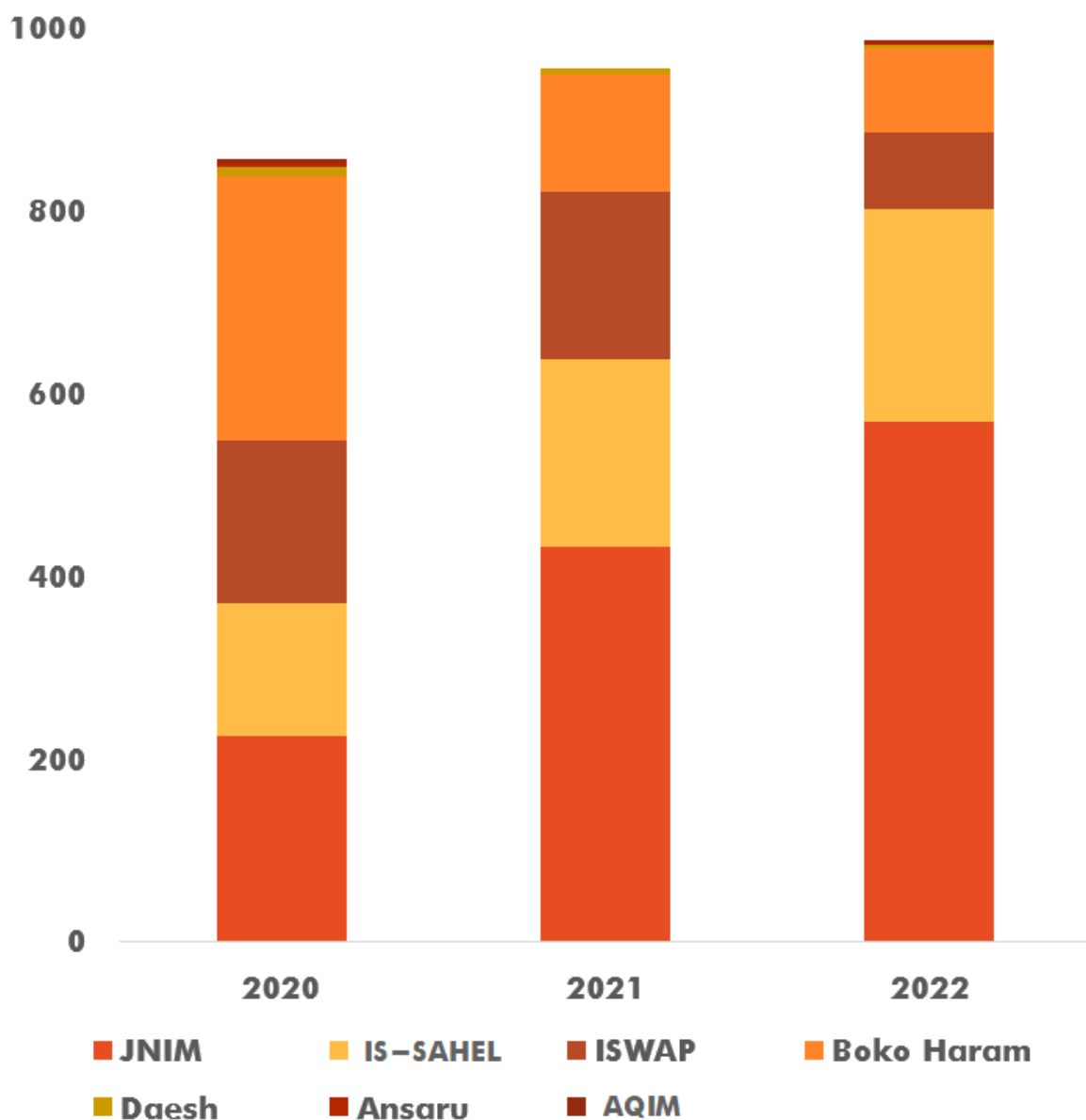
<sup>7</sup> Although it is true that the French president announced the end of the mission in February, the increase in diplomatic tensions between the two countries caused the acceleration of the departure of their troops, which was finalized in August.



the mission. Moreover, in this regard, France is in the midst of reconfiguring its missions and operations in the Sahel, foreseeably from Niger. The United Nations Stabilization Mission, MINUSMA, extended its mandate until June 30, 2023, although it currently lacks French air support, and has also suffered the withdrawal of important partners, such as the United Kingdom and Germany. At the institutional level, the country was subjected to sanctions by the African Union, whose relations with Mali were suspended, and by ECOWAS, which imposed strong economic measures, subsequently withdrawn in July during the ordinary session held in Accra.

International reactions also followed in the case of Burkina Faso: the African Union and ECOWAS paralyzed activities with the country within hours of the January coup d'état, to which was added the condemnation of the European Union.

**FIGURE 2. Evolution of terrorist activity (number of attacks) according to authorship (2020-2022).**



SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION



### **3. Evolution of the jihadist threat during 2022**

The following is a detailed analysis of the situation in each of the regions under study. To this end, each of the countries that make up the regions will be detailed, ordered from west to east, according to their geographic location.

#### **3.1. The Maghreb**

The Maghreb region continues to show positive developments, as has been the case in recent years. Only five attacks of a jihadist nature are known to have occurred, which is almost 50% of the eight in 2021, and just over 30% of the 14 in 2020. Neither Morocco nor Tunisia have recorded attacks on their territory, unlike Libya and Algeria, where three and two incidents have been recorded, respectively. In the first of these, it would be individuals linked to Daesh. However, in the Algerian case, the available information points to groups close to Al Qaeda's regional franchise, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

##### *3.1.1. Morocco*

For the second year in a row, Morocco has not suffered any jihadist attacks in 2022. In January, a French citizen residing in the country died after being stabbed in the market in the town of Tiznit, although the Moroccan authorities finally ruled out a terrorist motive.

However, the lack of consummated attacks does not imply the absence of jihadist-related networks. The Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) has reportedly carried out at least four anti-terrorist operations, in which 18 suspected jihadists were arrested in cities such as Tetouan, Larache, Nador, or Salé.

In addition to new measures, such as the creation of a national center for the processing of passenger and commercial flight information, the country has had the largest military budget in its history, as part of new alliances between the Alaouite kingdom and countries such as the United States, Israel, and Germany.



### 3.1.2. *Algeria*

As was the case last year, only two terrorist attacks are known to have occurred on Algerian soil in 2022. In the first of these, in the town of Timiaouine, bordering Mali, three soldiers were killed in a confrontation with terrorist elements supposedly coming from Malian territory. Although it was not confirmed, they would belong to groups of the Al Qaeda orbit, which in Mali operate within the JNIM coalition.

On July 5, another Algerian soldier was killed during a search operation in the commune of El Maine, in the extreme north of the country. In this case, the individuals who attacked him also belonged to Al Qaeda, but this time to its Maghreb affiliate (AQIM).

In addition, the country, which is going through a good economic moment, derived from the increase in hydrocarbon prices, has notably increased its investment in military technology. Although this type of investment has a direct impact on the fight against terrorism, as in the case of Morocco, such improvements are not exclusively oriented to this end, but are also a consequence of other factors, including the numerous tensions between the members of the region (Summers, 2022).

### 3.1.3. *Tunisia*

Tunisia shows a positive evolution compared to previous years, since, for the first time, no jihadist attacks have been recorded. However, the security forces and the army continue to deploy numerous operations: ten operations are known to have taken place, in which at least 15 individuals suspected of being linked to this type of terrorism have been arrested.

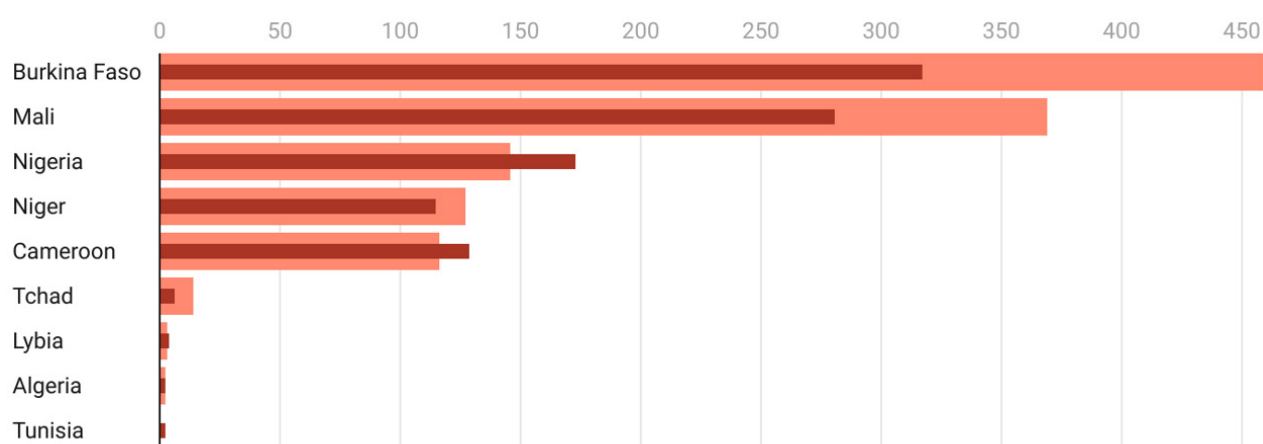
In addition, in March, the attacks perpetrated in 2016 in the town of Ben Guerdane, close to the Libyan border, once again came to the fore in the public sphere. The attacks, committed by individuals aligned with Daesh, targeted an army barracks, a police station, and a National Guard post, killing dozens of people. Sixteen of the 96 individuals accused of involvement in the attacks were sentenced to death.



### 3.1.4. Libya

As indicated in the introductory section, Libya is the Maghreb country that has registered the most jihadist attacks in 2022. The three recorded incidents were allegedly perpetrated by Daesh members, all of them against Libyan army personnel. Four military personnel were reportedly killed as a result. All of them took place during the month of January, in the western part of the country: in the first one, the terrorists attacked a group of military personnel close to Marshal Hafter using an IED -one of them died-; in the second one, a patrol of local security personnel of Tubu ethnicity, killing three of them; and in the third one, there was a clash between the terrorists and members of the Libyan National Army in Mount Asida, in which two Daesh militants died as a result of the response of the former.

**FIGURE 3. Evolution of jihadist activity by country 2021-2022.**



**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**



### **3.2. Western Sahel**

The Western Sahel region has been by far the most affected by jihadist violence: 962 attacks, out of a total of 1,259, have taken place in these countries. This represents an increase of 43% compared to the 671 recorded in 2021, so that, for yet another year, the area marks record highs for this type of criminality. The two terrorist groups operating in the region-the JNIM coalition and Daesh's regional franchise, the EIS-are the two most active groupings in the 16 countries under study, and both have increased their activity throughout 2022, although there are considerable differences in this regard: the JNIM coalition would be behind at least 569 attacks, while the EIS is credited with 233. If we compare these figures with previous years, a greater increase can be seen in the case of the Al Qaeda-related group, in whose case its actions would have grown by 32% over the last twelve months.

There are also clear differences in the areas of action of the two groups. The coalition linked to Al Qaeda dominates practically the whole of Malian territory, as well as a large part of Burkina Faso and the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. Its territorial stronghold would be in the northeast and center of Mali, and its expansion would be facilitated by the social support of the population of these regions (Nasr, 2022). On the other hand, EIS actions predominate in western Niger, eastern Burkina Faso, and, to a lesser extent, in the riparian countries. However, two of the attacks committed in June on Nigerian soil were allegedly perpetrated by members of JNIM, in what would be the first incursions of the group in this country.

In fact, clashes between the two groups have intensified over the past year, especially in the Liptako Gourma region of Mali. These clashes, which began at the end of 2019 and were sustained until the beginning of 2021, were motivated, among others, by the expansionary strategy of the Daesh affiliate, which sought to dominate territories where JNIM traditionally operates (Summers, 2020). After declining throughout 2021, in 2022 the EIS has gained further momentum, moved by the change of status of the affiliate within the terrorist organization, and as part of the group's strategy following the assassination of its leader, Abu Al Hasan Al Hashemi Al Quraishi-whose successor was also killed in late November-in Syria. The truth is that, as part of this attempt at territorial domination, ISIS troops have even changed their *modus operandi*, bringing it closer to that usually deployed by Al Qaeda and positioning themselves as alternative actors to the state, thus trying to win the support of the local population.



For their part, the countries of the Gulf of Guinea-Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin-are increasingly affected by the activity of jihadist groups, which led to their inclusion in the monthly Observatories as of January 2022. However, while the evolution is unfavorable in general terms, it is uneven geographically: in 2021 the country most affected was Côte d'Ivoire, whose security forces have managed to avoid committing attacks in 2022. On this occasion, Benin would lead the comparison with 16 attacks recorded on national soil, followed by Togo, with seven. As will be analyzed in the corresponding section, the case of Togo is particularly worrying, since its territory serves as a bridge between the two main centers of jihadist terrorism in the region: the Western Sahel and the Lake Chad basin.

In terms of victimology, the trend already analyzed in previous Yearbooks continues to be reflected: the number of civilian victims is steadily increasing, distancing itself from the casualties recorded among the ranks of the armed and security forces. This is clearly reflected when analyzing the ten deadliest attacks of the year, of which only one - committed by members of the EIS in the Malian town of Tessit - was directed against military personnel.

On the other hand, with regard to the fight against terrorism, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) announced its intention to create a regional force for this purpose, which would also include the prevention of coups d'état, although, as has already happened with initiatives such as the G5 Sahel, the subsequent development of these projects entails many difficulties (Éboulé, 2022). Mali's exit from the latter has hindered certain regional initiatives, such as the articulation of a possible deployment of troops -in principle, around 3,000- by the African Union, which they intended to carry out through the G5 Sahel and which would now have to be rearticulated (Institute for Security Studies, 2022)

### *3.2.1. Mauritania*

In the case of Mauritania, the country maintains the trends it has shown in recent years. No jihadist activity has been recorded for eleven years, and there is no record of any police or military operation related to this type of violence.

However, the threat and proximity of terrorist violence are persistent, given the proximity of some attacks that, despite being officially perpetrated in Mali, take place at a short distance from Mauritanian soil. In this case, it would be members of the Katiba Macina, which is one of the most active members of the



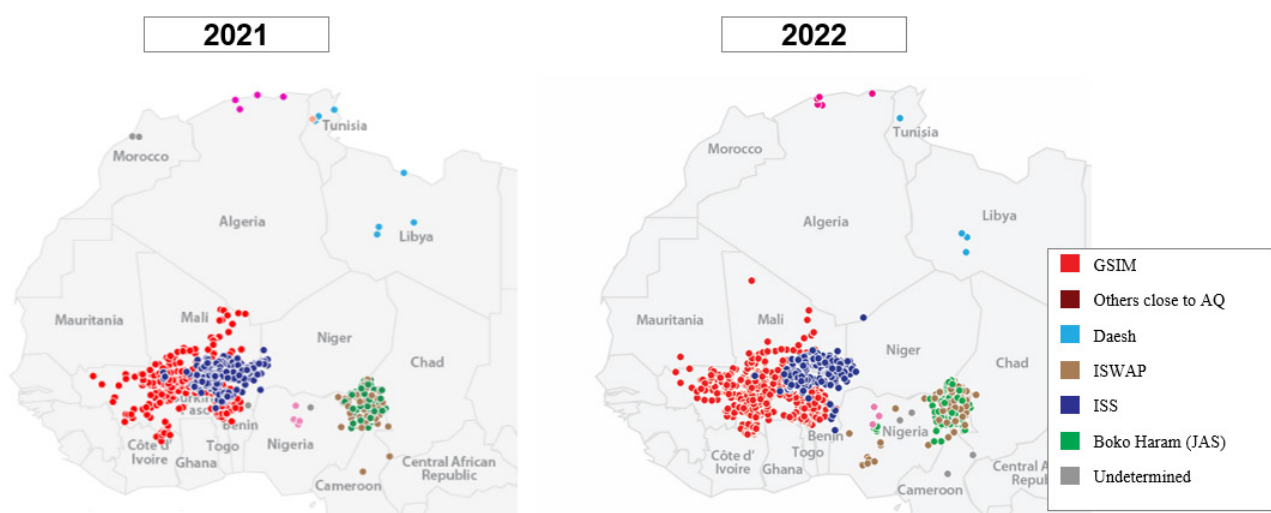
JNIM coalition and which, in response to the territorial expansion of the EIS to the west, has consolidated its own in regions such as Niono, Segou or, more residually, Kayes.

### 3.2.2. Senegal

Senegal shows an even more positive situation than its northern neighbor: in this case, the country has never suffered a jihadist attack. Moreover, in 2022, there is no record of anti-terrorist operations or arrests either. However, this expansion of the Katiba Macina towards the west of Mali, analyzed in the case of Mauritania, also affects the country, where, according to the United Nations, some groups related to JNIM have even established themselves on Senegalese territory.

Proof of the authorities' concern is the constant reinforcement of the border between the two countries: in the last two years, they have built several military bases along the eastern border and have increased the number and frequency of patrols protecting the area, which would cover the two regions considered most vulnerable: Kédougou and Tambacounda, both bordering Kayes. These two demarcations could arouse the interest of terrorist groups because of the importance of illegal gold mining in the local economy of both, revenues that could contribute to the financing of these groups, as is already the case in neighboring countries (Toupane, 2021).

**FIGURE 4. Graphical evolution of terrorist activity of a jihadist nature**



**SOURCE: AFRICA CENTER OF STRATEGIC STUDIES**



### 3.2.3. Mali

As has been the case in recent years, Mali shows lower values, in terms of number of attacks, than those recorded in Burkina Faso (369 and 459, respectively). However, despite occupying this second place in the regional comparison, the level of violence recorded in 2022 exceeds the peak of 2021, which also corresponded to its southern neighbor (317), showing the generalized and remarkable increase of jihadist terrorism in this last year.

The country absorbs 30% of the total number of jihadist attacks on record, so the activity of these groups has increased by almost 50% compared to 2021. If we compare the 369 attacks with the 196 in 2020 or the 99 in 2019, we can see an exponential increase in violence.

In the case of fatalities, the percentage evolution compared to the previous year is even more unfavorable (60%), and the difference with the first place in the comparison, which would also correspond to Burkina Faso, is very narrow, more so than in the case of the number of attacks. Compared to 2021, whose annual figure was close to 1,000 deaths, in 2022 it has risen to 1,578 fatalities, of which 1,318 would correspond to civilians and 259 to military personnel. Furthermore, considering the mortality ratio (4.3 deaths on average per registered attack), this would be higher than the average for the countries studied (3.5), as well as the highest at the national level.

Reflecting the regional trend, the predominant activity is that of the JNIM coalition, which accounts for 73% of the total number of attacks that can be attributed to it<sup>8</sup>. Within it, the activity of Katiba Macina, led by Amadou Kouffa and consolidated in the center and west of the country, continues to stand out. The group has advanced considerably throughout the Malian territory, as shown in Figure 4, reaching territories very close to the capital, Bamako. In fact, Malian Army operations -probably deployed alongside Wagner troops- have focused on combating Wagner troops, which has given the EIS the opportunity to try to expand westward again (Nasr, 2022).

However, although its overall activity has decreased, the Daesh affiliate has increased the frequency of attacks in the Gao and Menaka regions. The group's modus operandi has changed in recent years: at its emergence in the middle

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<sup>8</sup> Differences can be seen between the overall figures and those broken down by type of perpetrator, as certain attacks could not be reliably linked to the perpetrator terrorist group.



of the last decade, its actions were complex and targeted military bases, while today they are focused on the civilian population. The group, which until 2022 was called the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and depended on the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), was declared an independent affiliate in March, acquiring the name Islamic State in the Sahel. It was precisely from this moment onwards that its terrorist activity accelerated, as analyzed in the introductory section (ACLED, 2022).

### 3.2.4. *Burkina Faso*

For the second year in a row, Burkina Faso is the West African country that has suffered the most jihadist attacks -until 2020 it was second only to Nigeria-. In fact, the 459 attacks account for 37% of the total in the study area. If we look at the evolution over time, in the last three years the violence has more than doubled and, if we only compare it with respect to 2021, the increase has been 45%.

In terms of fatalities, it is also the country where the most deaths have been recorded (1,604, compared to 1,199 in 2021). The year-on-year growth is 34%. Of this total, 1,268 are civilians, while 326 correspond to military personnel and security forces.

However, despite being the country most affected by this type of terrorism, only three of the attacks recorded in Burkina Faso would enter the ranking of the ten most serious in the region, ranking third and fourth in the comparison, respectively. Both were allegedly committed by EIS. In the first, in the town of Seytenga, 100 civilians and 11 military personnel were killed, while in the second, in Gorgadji, 63 civilians - 9 of them civilian volunteers - were killed. On the other hand, in the ninth ranking, which took place in the locality of Madjoari, 50 civilians were killed while trying to flee from the attackers.

Political problems are also evident here, with the two coups d'état detailed in the introduction. The new Executive has also shown itself to be close to the orbit of the Russian government, something that would not be approved by Western partners, but also by some countries in the region - in fact, the Ghanaian government has already shown itself to be totally opposed to this possible decision. For their part, the Burkinabe transitional authorities have not confirmed this, but there have been several statements announcing their interest in diversifying the nature



of international partners in the fight against jihadism. French troops have also left their territory, and the arrival of members of Wagner to combat jihadism is suspected. Proof of, at least, their interest would be the celebration of the change of government by the company's owner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who welcomed the arrival of a new leader in the African country (Mednick, 2022).

So far, the measures taken by the transitional president have failed to alleviate the pressure of jihadist terrorism in the country: one of the main decisions has been the recruitment of 50,000 civilians, called Volunteers for the Defense of the Fatherland (VDP), whose role would be to assist the security forces throughout the national territory, as well as the call for new vacancies for military and gendarmes.

### 3.2.5. *Niger*

As has been observed in previous analyses, Niger has two main terrorist hotspots, each belonging to a different study region. On the one hand, the western end of the country is affected by jihadist activity in the Tri-Border area, while the Diffa region and its surroundings would be in the Lake Chad Basin. Consequently, this will be the structure of the section: after a global presentation of the nation, the evolution and situation of the western zone will be analyzed, followed by a description of the eastern end which, after a brief section dedicated to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea, will give way to the rest of the countries bordering Lake Chad and, therefore, to the other scenario of vital importance for the study of jihadist terrorism in West Africa.

At the national level, the country maintains a similar evolution to that recorded in the previous period, with an increase of 10% compared to 2021. Of the total 127 attacks, 97 would have been committed in the aforementioned Triple Border, while the remaining 30 would have taken place in the Lake Chad Basin. However, if there is one positive fact, it is the drastic reduction in the number of fatalities, which is one-third of those recorded the previous year, which could also be interpreted as lower operational capabilities of terrorist groups that, as analyzed above, have focused their efforts on confrontations among themselves. Analyzing the two national hotspots of violence separately, of the almost 60% of the total participation of the groups operating in the western part of the country - the JNIM coalition and the EIS - the activity of the Daesh affiliate would predominate, which would be behind about three-quarters of the terrorist



actions in the area. Precisely of these characteristics would have been the two most deadly attacks<sup>9</sup> recorded in 2022, both committed against civilian public transport vehicles by groups related to Daesh. As for the territorial domain of these groups, the EIS would dominate the northern zone, mostly bordering Mali, and JNIM would act more in the south, already close to Benin.

The victims of this group would be mostly civilians. This contrasts with the victimology that the group showed in its beginnings, at the end of the last decade, when they perpetrated complex attacks against military installations.

On the other hand, already in the Lake Chad basin, the Diffa region would show, according to data collected throughout the year, a higher number of attacks committed by Boko Haram. However, most of them would be of low impact and committed against civilians. In addition, the distinction between members of this group and the regional Daesh affiliate (ISWAP) is sometimes not definitive, since the areas of operation of one and the other have not yet been defined after the death of Abubakar Shekau in May 2021.

### 3.2.6. *Gulf of Guinea*

As indicated in the introduction, at the beginning of 2022 the Gulf of Guinea countries bordering those of the Western Sahel most affected by jihadist violence were included in the daily monitoring: Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. In these countries, there has been a growing presence of terrorist cells, mostly from the north, which, prior to the commission of attacks -something that did not happen until 2021- developed a long process of rapprochement and local implantation. They try to gain a foothold in societies and, to this end, increase their influence in areas such as education or religion, imposing their own rules and interfering, first and foremost, in the development of the life of the civilian population. The arrival of this type of violence in these countries is a source of particular concern since they are economically stronger than their northern neighbors but, at the same time, have significant structural weaknesses: factors such as the youth of the population, the lack of economic and educational opportunities, ethnic disputes, the difference between the living conditions of the populations in the north and the south or the continuous conflicts over land ownership only facilitate the possible establishment of jihadist groups.

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting the notable difference between the number of victims analyzed in 2021 - the two most serious attacks accumulated almost 250 fatalities - and that of 2022, where this figure does not reach forty people.



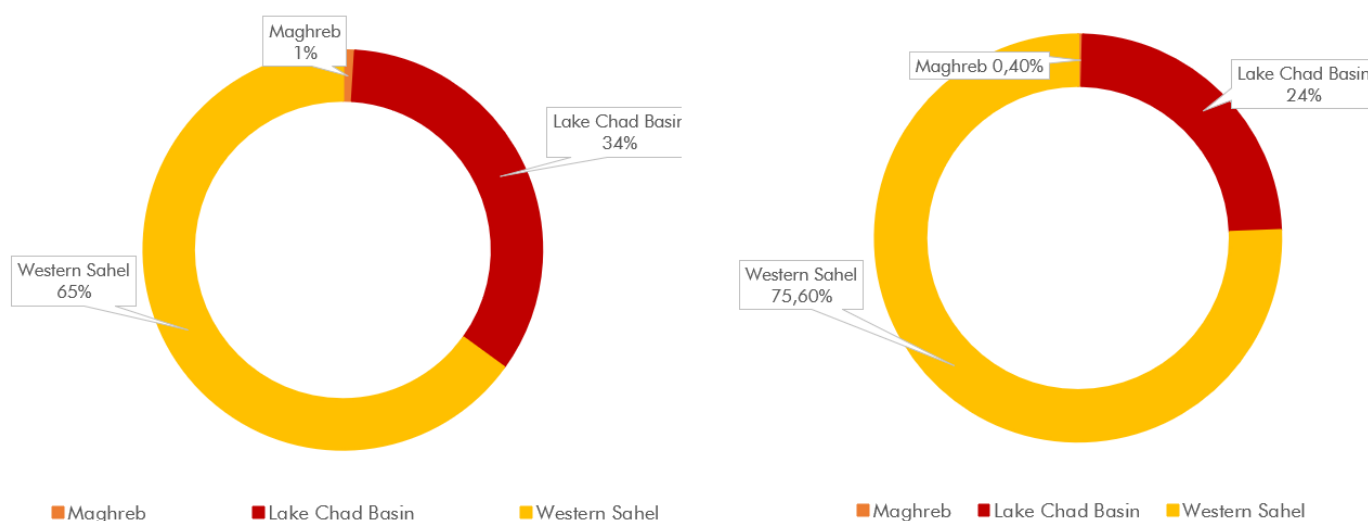
Moreover, with the exception of Ghana, which remains the only country where no incidents are reported, 2022 ends with very different trends from the previous year. First of all, Côte d'Ivoire, which was then the country hardest hit by terrorism with six attacks, has not suffered any attacks over the course of this past year. This is largely due to the Ivorian government's cross-cutting strategy: it reinforced its actions in the border area, invested in new technological and aerial resources for the fight against terrorism, increased the training of the actors involved -through the creation of institutions such as the International Academy against Terrorism, established together with France- and initiated programs for the integration of young people in the northern region of the country.

On the other hand, in Benin, the presence and influence of these groups are evident: throughout the year, there has been growing tension between them and the local population, which has been forced, at times, to close schools under the threat of the jihadists. This presence has finally materialized with the commission of 16 attacks, while its eastern neighbor, Togo, has reportedly recorded seven. However, although the latter is quantitatively behind the former, it was on Togolese territory that the two deadliest attacks of the year took place, both near the border with Burkina Faso: first, on July 15, 12 civilians were killed in an attack on two villages in the prefecture of Kpendjal, while in November 12 soldiers were killed in an attack in the town of Tiwoli.

The available information would point to the JNIM coalition as the perpetrator of a large part of these 23 attacks, although many of them have no official claim. As has been analyzed above, the Al Qaeda related grouping would have deployed a notorious territorial expansion in all directions, including the coastal countries, where, for the time being, it has practically monopolized Jihadist activity.



**FIGURE 4. Evolution of terrorist actions by sub-region (2021-2022)**



**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

### 3.3. Chad Lake Region

Despite the decline in jihadist violence, the Lake Chad Basin, which encompasses national territories in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, continues to be the other major focus of this type of violence in the West African region. The region consolidates, after two years with similar figures, with a secondary role, as the figures for the Western Sahel far exceed those of this sub-region. The 473 attacks in 2020 are a far cry from the 306 recorded in 2022. Moreover, with the exception of Chad, this trend has been repeated at the national level.

In terms of the activity of each of the main terrorist groups, and also for the second year in a row, Daesh's regional affiliate, the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP), ranked first in the comparison, with 93 attacks attributable to its members, while Boko Haram, traditionally the most active group in the area, was relegated to second place, with 83 recorded attacks. These differences have been occurring since the death of Abubakar Shekau, leader of Boko Haram, in June 2021, which, together with ISWAP's attempt to absorb its members, as well as the increase in clashes between the two groups, would have considerably reduced both parties' capacity to act, compared to previous years. On the other hand, and with a much more residual role, there would be Ansaru, a group related to Al Qaeda, to which four attacks would be attributed throughout 2022.



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As for the number of fatalities, they have also decreased compared to the previous year. In the regional comparison, the groups maintain the position described above, although the gap between the numbers of ISWAP and Boko Haram has narrowed significantly.

ISWAP currently holds the most territory in the Lake Chad region, but, as explained above, there are jihadist factions that continue to resist ISWAP's hegemony in the area. Therefore, the death of Shekau, far from implying the automatic leadership in the Lake Chad basin, has implied notable changes, which have not yet been consolidated. Among others, the change in the attitude of the Daesh affiliate towards members of the rival group stands out: until 2021, confrontations between the two factions had been scarce, and after Shekau's death and the promulgation of Bakura Doro as the new leader, ISWAP's attitude has been much more aggressive, as their attacks affect civilians in areas under their own control (Amadoy and Foucher, 2022).

The modes of action and organization of the two groups continue to differ: on the one hand, Daesh's parent company provides support to its regional affiliates to achieve a certain level of internal governance, something that is opposed to the actions of Boko Haram, which has traditionally stood out for its violence against the civilian population. Numerous members of Boko Haram reject this type of organization, so resistance zones have been generated on the outskirts of the Sambisa forest -the group's traditional stronghold under Shekau's leadership- the Mandara mountains, and the border between Nigeria

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<sup>10</sup> The sum of the figures attributed to each of the groups differs from the regional total of attacks. This is due to the fact that more than 30% of the terrorist actions recorded in the area could not be directly assigned to one or the other actor.



and Cameroon (International Crisis Group, 2022). However, 2022 has not been free from internal difficulties: negotiations between the two, mediated by members of “central” Daesh, are not prospering, and internal conflicts caused Bakura Doro to execute Bakura Sahalaba, imam of the group, in March.

Finally, although not clearly defined, the two groups have differences in their respective areas of operation. While Boko Haram maintains areas under control on the border with northern Cameroon, and disputes others in the north, in Nigerian and Chadian territory, ISWAP usually operates in the territory southwest of Maiduguri, capital of the Nigerian state of Borno, up to almost the northern border of the country.

### *3.3.1. Nigeria*

The last three years have been a turning point with respect to jihadist terrorism in Nigeria. While new trends began to emerge in 2020 and 2021, several of them have been consolidated in recent months. Firstly, in terms of quantitative analysis, despite continuing to be the most affected country in the Lake Chad sub-region, the drop in the number of attacks recorded is remarkable when comparing 242 in 2020 with 146 in 2022. In this regard, the country, whose levels of violence once accounted for more than 25% of the total in the study area, would now account for less than 12%. Moreover, in the last year, with the exception of Ansaru, both ISWAP and Boko Haram have reportedly decreased their level of activity. This evolution is repeated when analyzing the number of fatalities resulting from this type of violence, which would have decreased by 22% in the last year.

In fact, two of the ten deadliest attacks in the countries studied took place in Nigeria. The first was in the town of Rann (Borno State), where ISWAP members allegedly killed at least 60 of its inhabitants. On the other hand, Ansaru, as part of its strategy to position itself as an alternative security provider to the state, killed around 50 criminals terrorizing the communities of Dansadau and Kwana-Kwasa, in the northwest of the country, in the incident that would rank eighth in the regional comparison.

However, numbers aside, the territorial spread of jihadism is clear. There is evidence of attacks in the northern regions -Kogi and Niger states and northeast-Taraba- targeting both civilians and police officers (Zenn, 2022). ISWAP members



are also suspected of involvement in attacks against Catholic churches, such as the one perpetrated in Owo, in the southwest of the country, in which nearly 40 worshippers were killed (Akinwale, 2022). In addition, the incidence of criminal groups, which sometimes ally themselves with terrorist elements, continues to be notorious; a clear example of this would be the attack on the train traveling from Abuja to Kaduna, where they kidnapped more than 60 people and killed as many others.

On the other hand, as for Ansaru, which resumed its activity after no attacks were recorded in 2021<sup>11</sup>, 2022 ended with four, which would have caused 65 deaths (Weiss, 2022). The group has reconfirmed its allegiance to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which it renewed in 2020 when it announced its return to armed struggle. In fact, the strategy deployed is similar to that of the former: in Birnin Gwari, in the west of the country, they have gained a foothold, gaining local support from the population and managing large tracts of territory (Dahiru, 2022).

### 3.3.2. *Chad*

As indicated in the introductory section, Chad is the only country in the Lake Chad Basin where jihadist violence would have increased in 2022. After the six attacks recorded in 2021, they have more than doubled to 14 in 2022. Except for two of them, all of them would have been perpetrated by ISWAP which, contrary to its traditional *modus operandi*, would have killed more civilians than military over the last year-29 and 18, respectively-.

For its part, the Boko Haram faction, led by Bakura Doro, is said to be behind the other two attacks, both against the Chadian Army. In the first of these, committed in August, two soldiers died and at least ten terrorists were killed by the garrison, which finally managed to repel the attack. On the other hand, on the island of Bouka-Toullorom, also in the lake region, 12 soldiers were killed in November in a new attack by the same group.

### 3.3.3. *Cameroon*

Despite recording fewer terrorist actions than in 2021 (the decrease was 10%), the levels of this type of violence in Cameroon remain practically stable

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11      Causing fatalities.

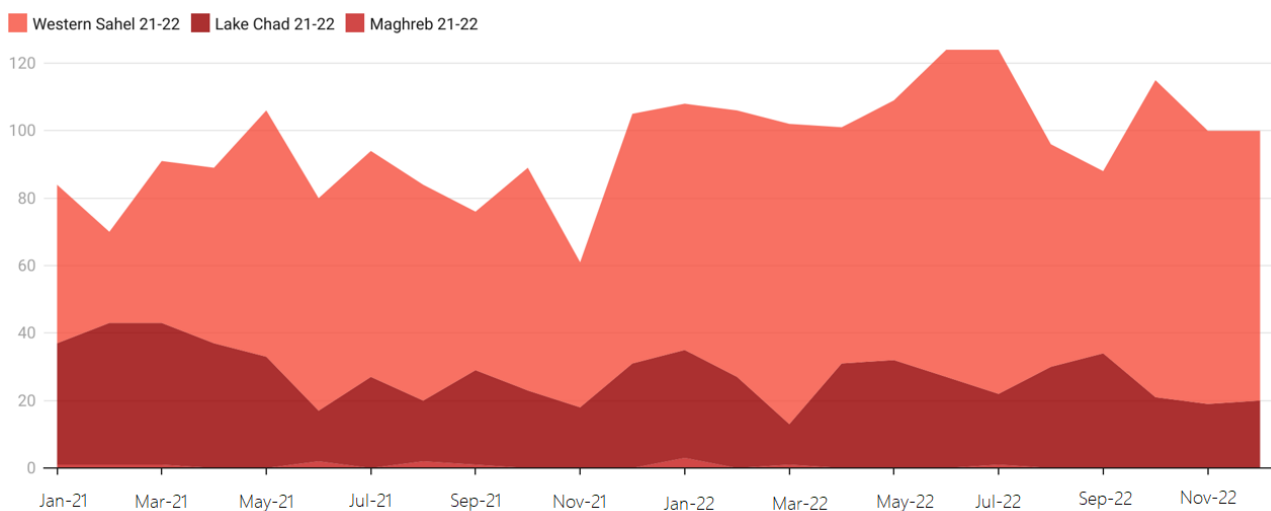


compared to then, halting the downward trend that was shown with respect to 2020. However, the number of fatalities has been reduced by 20%, remaining below the 200 deaths recorded (187).

In this case, it is again difficult to establish the authorship of the attacks, as it is an area mostly controlled by Boko Haram, but where there is evidence of clashes between Boko Haram and ISWAP for the control of certain territorial divisions, all of them within the Northern region. In addition, in this northern area, there has been an increase in kidnappings and violence by criminal networks, in principle unrelated to existing jihadist groups (Hoinathy and Fru, 2022).

The victimology is clearly civilian, despite a residual number of casualties among military ranks. However, the changes in the *modus operandi* of both groups, detailed above, do not allow us to elucidate the authorship of the unattributed attacks.

**FIGURE 6. Proportion of fatalities by country**



**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**



## 4. Conclusions

In light of the data presented throughout the chapter, it is clear that the Western Sahel is positioned as the epicenter of jihadist terrorism, both on the African continent and globally, and ahead of the Lake Chad basin. While in the latter, after the slowdown in 2021, a decrease in terrorist activity is observed, in the case of the Western Sahel no signs of abatement are documented, neither at the quantitative level nor in terms of territorial expansion.

Although a definitive assessment of the scenario would be hasty, the Malian government's change of strategy is already showing incipient consequences. The country's security context, far from improving in 2022, has continued to deteriorate, even with the obvious wear and tear that increased clashes between terrorist groups are inflicting on themselves. The arrival of Wagner's personnel, to the detriment of French troops and other members of the European Union, implies remarkable differences: their equipment is far from that of Western partners, they lack air assets and the direct support of the Russian government, focused on the invasion of Ukraine, to this type of operations is scarce. However, considering the growing international unpopularity of the country, derived precisely from this conflict, Africa becomes essential for its foreign policy, and represents a fundamental scenario where it can deploy its influence.

Moreover, the operations of the Malian Armed Forces have focused in recent months on combating the dominance of the JNIM coalition, the main terrorist threat to the country, thus reducing the pressure on the EIS and leaving it a new space in which to expand westwards. The Gallic strategy, whose troops would have focused on containing Daesh's regional affiliate, would have neglected the pressure on JNIM, something that the terrorist group has taken advantage of to expand southward, including the countries of the Gulf of Guinea.

Although the strategy of Western partners has resulted in continued operational successes, such as the elimination of successive leaders of terrorist groups, the lack of strategic and political successes is glaring: for the time being, the governments of the countries most affected by jihadist violence have not been brought into line with their strategies, which are increasingly focused on capacity building and improving governance, as well as on tackling internal problems that facilitate the recruitment of the population by these groups, such as poverty, unemployment or the gap between authorities and citizens. Evidently, the political



and diplomatic distancing that 2022 has witnessed only makes it more difficult to implement new development and training programs, not exclusively in the military field, but more focused on the reform of the judicial and police systems or the rule of law.

In Burkina Faso, where, for the moment, the problem at the political level is not so complex, the effects of terrorism are devastating, not only because of the immediate consequences of violence on the lives and integrity of people, but also social and economically: essential sectors such as mining are already experiencing losses in the millions: in 2022, more than six tons of gold could not have been extracted. This type of raw material is highly valued both by terrorist groups, which finance themselves through its illegal exploitation, and by actors such as the Wagner corporation, which, in exchange for its support to the army, obtains concessions to exploit the deposits.

The model adopted so far by the Burkinabe transitional executive is not without risks. First, the use of civilian auxiliaries is risky, given their limited or even non-existent military training. Also, arming civilian personnel who are not part of the security forces is not advisable, as it may have negative long-term consequences, such as the creation of civilian militias or the decontrol of firearms. Moreover, recruitment would not have been carried out uniformly throughout the national territory, which could give rise to inter-ethnic and local tensions, which are closely related to the evolution of jihadist terrorism in the area. This being the case, Wagner's arrival is likely to aggravate the security situation in the country, as the main jihadist threat in the country is also the JNIM coalition, which could instrumentalize this to gain a foothold locally.

Likewise, as regards the Gulf of Guinea countries, the strategy adopted by Côte d'Ivoire has proven, at least for the time being, to be effective. The country has managed to prevent the incidence of jihadist violence throughout the year, and the actions carried out are comprehensive in nature, thus making it possible to act on some of the root causes that favor the emergence of terrorism. In this country, one of the main factors driving jihadist expansion is the harsh living conditions endured by communities in the border region with Burkina Faso, where illegal activities -arms and drug trafficking, cattle rustling, and artisanal mining- are essential to their subsistence. However, Benin's evolution is truly worrying, since, as previous reports and Observatories have pointed out, it may act as a bridge between the two main hotspots of jihadist violence in the study area: the Western



Sahel and the Lake Chad basin. In fact, incidents have already been recorded on Beninese territory involving groups from both the west and the east.

In relation to the latter, despite the notable reduction in quantitative values, it still presents great risks for the security context of the area, where ISWAP is emerging as the main terrorist threat. The group is gaining ground, despite the resistance of groups related to Boko Haram, which, for the time being, has a residual influence.

This territorial expansion would predominate in Nigerian territory, where, in addition to gaining space over the group led by Bakura Doro, they have shown the capacity to attack in faraway places from the northeast region - where traditionally jihadist groups operate -, expanding, therefore, throughout Nigeria, although still occasionally, towards the west, in a dangerous approach, as previously warned, towards Benin and, therefore, towards the Western Sahel. However, it would also have been eastward, affecting Cameroonian national territory.

Regarding the remaining actor, Ansaru, the information would point to growing ties with other Al Qaeda affiliates, such as the JNIM coalition, which, being more powerful than him, could provide him with weapons or other resources. Possible corridors between the two regional hotspots of violence could help in this regard. While it is true that they do not yet have the capabilities to pose a major challenge to the Nigerian authorities, the success of their local strategy may further complicate the regional context in the coming years.

Finally, in the case of Cameroon, although the violence committed by criminal groups would not be related to jihadist terrorism, cases such as Nigeria are a perfect example of the changing nature of these relationships, in which synergies can easily be established between these types of actors. This would also be applicable to the case of kidnappings, in which, although the participation of terrorist elements is not clear, they show the weakness of the Cameroonian system, as well as the lack of confidence of the population in the national authorities, making clear the need for a rapprochement between both parties, which would also have the effect of preventing the advance of jihadism in the country.



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# JIHADIST ACTIVITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN 2022

Iñaki Méndez

## 1. Introduction

As in previous years, the International Observatory for the Study of Terrorism (OIET) has made an exhaustive compilation of both jihadist-motivated acts of violence in the countries that make up Southeast Asia and the jihadist-motivated violence in the countries that make up Southeast Asia, as well as the efforts of the region's states to eliminate the organizations that practice it. efforts of the region's states to eliminate the organizations that practice it.

Once again, this monitoring has been reflected in a chapter of this Yearbook of Jihadist Terrorism in Southeast Asia. Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook, which covers both the context before 2022 and the evolution of terrorist activity in the region. the evolution of terrorist activity in the current year and the analysis exposing possible trends for 2023. trends for 2023.

## 2. Previous situation in Southeast Asia

If 2020 was the year in which jihadist activity in Southeast Asia was practically paralyzed due to the outbreak of Covid-19, either because of the devastation caused by the disease or because of the controls introduced by governments to curb its spread, 2021 was the year of the slow return to activity of these terrorist groups once the emergency measures were lifted. This return to activity in most cases did not manage to have the same intensity as in the years before the pandemic due both to the mass surrenders caused by the penalties to which



many militants were subjected as a consequence of the limitations introduced by the governments to curb Covid and to the desire for peace of mind of a civilian population which, after years of suffering the ravages of violence, also had to suffer a state of a health emergency.

As for Thailand, the peace process begun two years earlier became a mere formality for much of 2021 as continued military operations against the insurgency and heavy court convictions<sup>1</sup> prevented détente on the ground. Nor did the increasingly numerous and violent attacks carried out by different armed groups operating in the region help as these caused injury or death to dozens of civilians and military personnel in the Malay-majority provinces in the south of the country. Tensions on the ground reached such a high level at the end of the year that both the Thai government and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) decided to again seek Malaysian mediation given the return to the negotiating table that was scheduled for January 2022.

Singapore, for yet another year, confirmed the influence that global jihadist groups exert on a small part of the country's Muslim population, with several of its citizens being arrested under current legislation and subsequently brought before the courts both for their willingness to travel to the Middle East to fight<sup>2</sup> and for financing Daesh, Al Qaeda or individuals who are enrolled in their ranks<sup>3</sup>.

If in 2021 the greatest security risk for Singapore was found in the sympathies of some of its citizens for organizations operating in a place as distant as the Middle East, in neighboring Malaysia the security forces had to deal with radicalized individuals with objectives as disparate as financing attacks in neighboring Indonesia or attempting to assassinate senior members of the country's army or judiciary in the name of Daesh. In addition, its key geographical location between several states suffering the scourge of violence such as Thailand and the Philippines has made Malaysia the ideal place for armed groups operating in these neighboring countries to seek refuge in the first instance and, if conditions are adverse, to carry out illegal acts to finance themselves. Thus, faced with the

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1 In May, a dozen insurgents were sentenced to death or long prison terms for attacks committed in 2016.

2 A married couple composed of a Malaysian and a Singaporean woman were arrested for wanting to travel to the Middle East, the man being deported to Malaysia and limiting the woman's movements to finally be arrested for violating parole rules.

3 One man was convicted of giving money to an acquaintance so that he would come to the Middle East to join jihadist groups. Another individual was also convicted of financing one of these terrorist organizations.



obstacle posed by the curfew on the coast of Sabah to kidnap fishermen, the Abu Sayyaf opted to install sleeper cells in the interior of the province to kidnap landowners in the region to finance the jihadist group<sup>4</sup>.

**If 2020 was the year in which jihadist activity in Southeast Asia was practically paralyzed due to the outbreak of Covid-19, either because of the devastation caused by the disease or because of the controls introduced by governments to curb its spread, 2021 was the year of the slow return to activity of these terrorist groups once the emergency measures were lifted**

In Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiyah began the year amid a heated internal debate between supporters and opponents of a return to terrorist activity on whether or not to abandon the current strategy of reinforcing the organization's other fronts before returning to a violent confrontation with the state. The anti-terrorist forces took advantage of this moment of internal division and, before one faction prevailed over the other, launched a series of police operations that resulted in the arrest of a large number of militants<sup>5</sup>, including infiltrators in political parties and the Council of Ulemas, as well as the dismantling of the organizations in charge of recruiting new members and the dismantling of the charitable foundations they used to finance themselves.

Meanwhile, Daesh's regional affiliates, such as Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), began the year 2020 with a strong start, carrying out highly symbolic attacks<sup>6</sup> and others aimed at intimidating civilians<sup>7</sup> to prevent them from collaborating with the police or the army. However, as the months went by, court rulings and various anti-terrorist operations wreaked havoc in the ranks of the terrorists as more than a hundred JAD members were arrested and many of the remaining free MIT militants, including their leader Ali Kalora, were killed.

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4 Several police operations in Sabah resulted in the dismantling of two Abu Sayyaf cells that led to the arrest of 19 Abu Sayyaf members and the killing of seven others while resisting capture.

5 Throughout 2021, Indonesian police arrested at least 178 members of Jemaah Islamiyah.

6 Jamaah Ansharut Daulah carried out an attack against the Makassar Cathedral causing 20 injuries (Nara-dichianta, 2021) and another against a police station in Jakarta (Laksmi, 2021).

7 Mujahidin Indonesia Timur killed four farmers in the Poso region as a warning.



Finally, the Philippine security forces, thanks to the collaboration of citizens and various insurgent groups demobilized through various peace processes, continued their success in the fight against various jihadist groups based in the south of the country. Throughout 2021, this assistance enabled the army to seize bases, weapons, and explosive material from the Maute Group, an organization that lost more than two dozen members from its already limited ranks. These operations also decimated both the ranks of the Maguid faction of Ansar Khilafa Philippines and the leadership of the Dawlah Islamiyah-Hassan Group.

As for the larger jihadist groups operating in the southern Philippines, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) suffered an unprecedented debacle over the past year as a result of casualties in anti-terrorist operations and mass defections of its members<sup>8</sup>. This pushed the group to change its strategy from raiding towns to intimidate the civilians living in them to carrying out occasional ambushes on members of the army and placing bombs against civilian targets. In a similar situation, the Abu Sayyaf found itself in a situation where the continuous operations of the army made it lose several bases where they stored weapons and explosives, preventing the terrorist group from carrying out major attacks<sup>9</sup> throughout 2021, as well as making it impossible to keep under its control the Indonesian fishermen they had kidnapped months ago off the coast of Malaysia. This continuous pressure from both the police and the military caused havoc in the jihadist ranks due to different circumstances such as the multiple wounded and dead in armed clashes, the continuous desertions<sup>10</sup>, as well as the arrest of militants with outstanding accounts with the justice system, suicide cells or members of the organization in charge of financing tasks.

### **3. The evolution of the jihadist threat during 2022**

This year can be considered successful for the fight against terrorism in most of the countries of the Southeast Asian region since the security measures introduced in previous years in countries where jihadism was beginning to pose an incipient risk have prevented it from taking root. On the other hand, the exhaustion of both the civilian population and numerous terrorists in regions where violence

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8 Throughout 2021 about 200 BIFF militants surrendered to the authorities and another 900 threatened to return to MILF ranks (Méndez, 2021).

9 In 2021 Abu Sayyaf was only able to attack a military patrol and target a company that refused to be extorted.

10 Throughout 2021, 33 Abu Sayyaf militants were killed in combat, including family members of relevant members of the organization such as Mundi Sawadjaan, while more than 200 militants benefited from reintegration programs (Méndez, 2021).



is endemic has favored the practical dismantling of various jihadist groups and the sharp decline in the activity of other armed groups, except Thailand.

### **3.1 Thailand**

After 18 years since the revival of the conflict in southern Thailand, it seems that 2022 is the first year in which both the Thai government and the insurgent group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) have seriously committed to the negotiating table created in 2019 to achieve lasting peace in the south of the country.

To achieve this, the BRN, coinciding with the sixty-fifth anniversary of its birth, had to make a show of force in the first months of the year consisting of numerous graffiti in favor of the self-determination of the provinces that made up the former Sultanate of Patani and the commission of several chains of attacks<sup>11</sup> that left multiple dead and wounded among the security forces and civilians. Faced with the untenable situation in the southern provinces of the country, the Thai government returned to the negotiating table making a series of concessions<sup>12</sup> that managed to calm most of the BRN militants on the ground and to attract the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) to the peace process. However, the resumption of military operations in early summer against insurgent militants and the subsequent discovery of the body of a member of the negotiating table floating in a Thai river prompted Barisan Revolusi Nasional to launch another bombing campaign<sup>13</sup>, which took a quantum leap toward the end of the year with the explosion of a car bomb against a barracks house and several attacks on railways<sup>14</sup>.

**2022 is the first year in which both the Thai government and the insurgent group Barisan Revolusi Nasional have seriously committed to the negotiating table created in 2019 to achieve lasting peace in the south of the country**

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11 In the month of January BRN committed 18 attacks, 13 of them in a single day.

12 Among other measures, the Thai government allowed insurgent refugees in Malaysia to return home to celebrate Ramadan with their families.

13 Insurgent groups in southern Thailand committed 25 attacks in the month of August, 17 of them on the same day.

14 The placing of a car bomb in front of a barracks house on November 21 caused one death and 30 wounded among civilians and uniformed personnel, while the blowing up of a railway track weeks later caused the derailment of a freight train. A bombing a few days later in the same place killed three workers who were repairing the damage caused by the previous explosion and injured four others.



Once again overwhelmed, the government employed a dual strategy to try to calm the unrest in the south of the country, on the one hand by extending the state of emergency in the region and requesting the help of citizens to detect insurgent activity, and on the other hand by requesting the mediation of the new Malaysian Prime Minister to obtain a truce that would allow the peace process to be resumed.

### **3.2 Singapore**

Singapore seems to have broken the upward trend of radicalization of part of the population of the Muslim country in 2022, as only two individuals have been arrested for their willingness to join jihadist groups; one of them for his intention to go to South Asia to join the Afghan Taliban who had seized power months earlier, and the other for his willingness to create a Daesh province in the country. It can therefore be said that the monitoring of the most extremist elements and the introduction of a range of legal measures made it possible to bring to justice individuals suspected of wanting to carry out violent acts based on ideological motivation or sympathies for jihadist organizations has made it possible to dissuade some of its citizens from choosing violence.

**Enhanced monitoring of extremists and implementation of legal measures to prosecute individuals suspected of planning violent acts due to ideological motives or sympathy for jihadist organizations have deterred some citizens from resorting to violence**

### **3.3 Indonesia**

Over the course of this year, Indonesian counterterrorism forces have seen months of strenuous efforts to disrupt the emergence of cells supporting global terrorist organizations and neutralize jihadist organizations active in the country marred by the reactivation of veteran organizations thought to be extinct decades ago. As for Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), since militants of this group committed their last attack in March 2021<sup>15</sup>, the organization has been subjected to continuous

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15      Jamaah Ansharut Daulah militants attacked the Makassar Cathedral, injuring 20 people.



persecution by anti-terrorist forces such as Densus 88, which has resulted in the arrest of dozens of its militants and has prevented the commission of new attacks until last December, when a member of the organization, dissatisfied with the approval of the new Penal Code, blew himself up in a police station<sup>16</sup>. Meanwhile, the other Indonesian affiliate of Daesh, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), began the year in an extremely weak position with only four militants, which, together with the impossibility of adding new members, as well as of receiving help from the JAD and the action of the anti-terrorist forces, led to its disappearance in September when the last of its members was killed.

The anti-terrorist operations of Densus 88, which began in 2021 to prevent Jemmah Islamiyah from taking up arms again, continued throughout 2022 and resulted in the arrest of dozens of its members during the year and the death of a doctor close to the group's leadership. This police activity also confirmed the suspicions of the security forces about the strategy quietly implemented by the leadership of Jemaah Islamiyah for years, consisting of the training of new militants, the reinforcement of the different fronts of the organization, and the infiltration of some of its members in key positions in civil society.

However, the dismantling of the MIT and the practical paralysis of JAD and Jemaah Islamiyah activity is being overshadowed by the discovery of cells directly linked to global terrorist organizations and the reappearance of a group thought to be extinct years ago, Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). This organization, despite its widespread implantation, could go unnoticed for years until members of its leadership made public its postulates on social networks. Since this event took place in early 2022, the arrest of NII leaders and militants has led to an approximate figure of its membership<sup>17</sup> and a not yet well-defined strategy to overthrow the government before the 2024 elections.

**The dismantling of the MIT and the practical paralysis of JAD and Jemaah Islamiyah activity is being overshadowed by the discovery of cells directly linked to global terrorist organizations and the reappearance of a group thought to be extinct years ago, Negara Islam Indonesia**

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16 A JAD militant managed to break into a police station in Bandung with a motorcycle bomb, killing one officer and injuring 10 others.

17 Although plans to overthrow the government are in their initial stages, in November a woman linked to the NII was arrested at the gates of the Presidential Palace in possession of a gun.



### **3.4 Malaysia**

In Malaysia, the absence of jihadist activity in its territory was total throughout the year due to the anti-terrorist measures introduced in previous years, which prevented the return of fighters from conflictive regions of the world, as well as the settlement or attacks by jihadist cells from neighboring countries.

### **3.5 Philippines**

As for the Philippines, the collaboration of the civilian population and former insurgent groups demobilized in different peace processes with the authorities, police, and Armed Forces throughout 2022 has managed to deeply weaken the different jihadist organizations operating throughout the country. As a consequence of this alliance, jihadist groups such as Hassan Group or the Nilong faction of Ansar Khilafa Philippines saw during this year how their few militants were arrested or killed without them being able to do anything to reverse this situation. One of these anti-terrorist operations carried out in early February to seize one of the bases of the Maute Group also killed the leader of the organization, Abu Zacaria, at a time when he was trying to reorganize all the factions that were integrated under the self-styled Dawlah Islamiyah and thus set himself up as emir of the Southeastern Province of Daesh once this position was vacant after the death of the leader of Hassan Group months ago<sup>18</sup>. Although the information of his death did not come out publicly until December 2021, this fact plunged the jihadist group into confusion for the rest of the year, which was used by the government to redouble military operations throughout 2022<sup>19</sup> and further weaken a group that already in the previous years was struggling not to be disbanded.

As if it were an extension of the previous year, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) kept a low profile to minimize casualties in its ranks, a discretion broke on the day of the Philippine presidential elections in May<sup>20</sup> and a few other occasions during the rest of the year. However, the lack of popular support, the

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18 Despite the fact that he had been dead for weeks, there was still speculation about his appointment as emir of Daesh's Southeastern Province.

19 These operations resulted in 18 deaths in their ranks, including that of the spokesman of Daesh's Southeast Asia province, as well as the arrest of 9 others or the surrender of 93 Daesh militants or sympathizers to the government's amnesty and reintegration programs.

20 On election day of the Philippine presidential election, the BIFF carried out two attacks that killed 3 civilians and wounded 10 others.



harsh living conditions in the underground, and the casualties<sup>21</sup> caused by the army in its countless anti-terrorist operations led to the surrender of more than two hundred of its militants.

If the BIFF avoided confrontation throughout the year 2022 seeking to cause damage as soon as it was feasible to commit attacks, Abu Sayyaf adopted a similar posture to minimize losses in its ranks, limiting its activity to placing small explosives, ambushing groups of soldiers and assaulting localities to retaliate against their inhabitants for collaborating with the forces of law and order. Despite this, and as is the case with the rest of the jihadist organizations active in the country, the active militants were pursued by the Armed Forces to their strongholds in the remotest places in the southern Philippines. In the seizure of what may be their last bases, in addition to suffering heavy casualties, the jihadists also lost numerous weapons and explosives following the seizure of equipment. Moreover, the fact of having abandoned armed activity or not having carried it out directly has not been an obstacle for not answering for their acts before justice, being located several veteran militants even in places as far away from the conflict zone as the Metropolitan Manila Area.

**The collaboration of the civilian population and former insurgent groups demobilized in different peace processes with the authorities, police, and Armed Forces throughout 2022 has managed to deeply weaken the different jihadist organizations operating throughout the country**

#### **4. Conclusions**

About the jihadist organizations operating in the countries of Southeast Asia, we can observe that terrorist activity has been reduced to a minimum, with occasional attacks when circumstances have permitted and to remind both the civilian population and the security forces that the danger still exists.

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<sup>21</sup> During the year 2022, the BIFF suffered the death of 15 of its members, as well as injuries to 17 others, including the leader of one of its factions, Abu Turiafe.



Although in previous years it was thought that the decline was circumstantial due to the extreme measures approved by the different governments to stop the advance of Covid-19, once the pre-pandemic normality returned, the different jihadist groups, instead of gaining new members among those economically affected by the health measures, have seen how the population rejected the presence of the terrorists and these themselves sought a way out to reintegrate into society, beset by hunger and the hardships to which they have been subjected (Yeo, 2021). Thus, looking to the future, the trend in the region suggests that the smaller organizations will end up being disbanded by the anti-terrorist forces in the short or medium term and that the larger ones will become weaker and weaker, with the commission of major attacks being unlikely and territorial control of cities or large tracts of land practically impossible, as occurred in the recent past.

If we go down to detail we can see how in the southern provinces of Thailand the previous dynamic has been maintained for much of this year, in which the military branch of the BRN does not believe in the peace project, but lets the insurgent negotiators do what they want, while the insurgency fails to extract significant concessions from government representatives who stubbornly believe that with gestures of détente but without addressing the causes of the conflict and without seeking solutions to them, they will achieve lasting peace (Bakhshi, 2021). However, looking to the future, there seems to be a glimmer of hope as the election of a new Prime Minister in Malaysia with the will to seek a resolution of the conflict in neighboring Thailand, insurgents who seem to be open to the possibility of accepting an autonomous framework and Thai officials who see that cosmetic measures will never solve a conflict that has been bleeding the southern provinces for decades (Zulkarnain, Yusof, 2022). In this regard, it only remains to be seen how both a Thai military unaccountable to civilian authorities and the military wing of the BRN will respond to progress at the negotiating table, as the BRN is divided into numerous currents, some of them ready to split if the negotiators do not obtain independence (VVAA, 2022).

Singapore is not susceptible to the effects of the establishment of a jihadist group aiming to take control of the territory to establish an Islamic state, except as part of a regional strategy. However, in 2022, the trend of previous years has been reversed, with the number of people brought to justice, either for publicly showing their willingness to join jihadist groups or for financing such organizations, falling sharply.



Malaysia has also experienced a period of calm in terms of jihadist terrorism thanks to the anti-terrorism measures passed in previous years, although it has suffered a long period of political instability since the United Malays National Organization had to relinquish in 2018 the power held since the country's independence in 1957. From there, a succession of government crises has led to recent elections that have left a parliament in which the first political force is a fundamentalist party, and the government is in the hands of a coalition of progressive parties representing the different ethnicities and confessions of the country. (Frangia, 2022). Malaysia is heading towards a polarized society, in which the emergence of explosions of violence by Islamist fundamentalism to prevent a supposed erosion of Malay and Islamic values and eventually the establishment of national and/or transnational jihadist organizations cannot be ruled out.

Indonesia finds itself in a similar situation to neighboring Malaysia in that, while counter-terrorism forces have proven effective in rooting out the MIT and wreaking havoc in the ranks of JAD and Jemaah Islamiyah, fundamentalism is nevertheless managing to shape the political and legislative agenda. The country's history shows that when the state apparatuses manage to avert the danger posed by a jihadist organization, within a short period it is reformulated or another one appears to take its place, as has recently happened with the resurrection of Negara Islam Indonesia. Thus, we can say that the practical inactivity of the jihadist organizations in Indonesia is momentary as a result of internal reorganization processes and that as soon as they manage to find the formula to confront the state with guarantees, terrorism will once again make its appearance (Laksmi, 2021).

Finally, as far as the Philippines are concerned, the frenetic activity of the police and the army in recent years has put the larger jihadist organizations such as Abu Sayyaf and BIFF on the ropes. Moreover, if Abu Zacaria's death is confirmed, the attempt to coordinate the various self-styled Dawlah Islamiyah groups operating in Mindanao would have been aborted. The end of the violence in Mindanao is near but there are still some factors that prevent the dissolution of the jihadist groups such as the disparity in the economic incentives to surrender, the lack of knowledge of the duration of such benefits, the fear of reprisals from society and not knowing if they will be brought to justice for the crimes committed while they were militants in this type of organizations. In this region, it seems evident that disillusionment in the peace process and poverty are key factors in the recruitment



of jihadists, so the successful establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, in addition to fulfilling the political aspirations of a large part of the population of the area, would mean the beginning of economic development in the region, which in the long run would make it difficult for jihadist organizations to recruit new members.

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# ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONS AGAINST JIHADISM IN SPAIN AND PROFILING OF DETAINEES

Carlos Igualada

## 1. Introduction

The threat that jihadism poses to society should not only be assessed in terms of levels of terrorist activity in the form of attacks. If this were the case, jihadism would currently be a one-off phenomenon in Europe that every few months makes an appearance with attacks of very low lethality. However, this approach is far from reality. Beyond the evidence confirming that most Western countries continue to maintain a high level of anti-terrorist alert due to the high probability of attacks, we can also see that jihadism continues to represent a serious security challenge when measuring the volume of anti-terrorist operations carried out throughout the year.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, to analyze quantitatively and qualitatively the number of operations carried out in Spain in 2022. On the other, to conduct a profiling study on the persons arrested for their involvement in the development of Jihadist activity based on the information available on them<sup>1</sup>. To conduct this profiling exercise, more than a dozen socio-demographic, socio-economic, and psychosocial variables have been considered, which addresses both the individual information of the detainees and the relationship that they themselves established with their environment.

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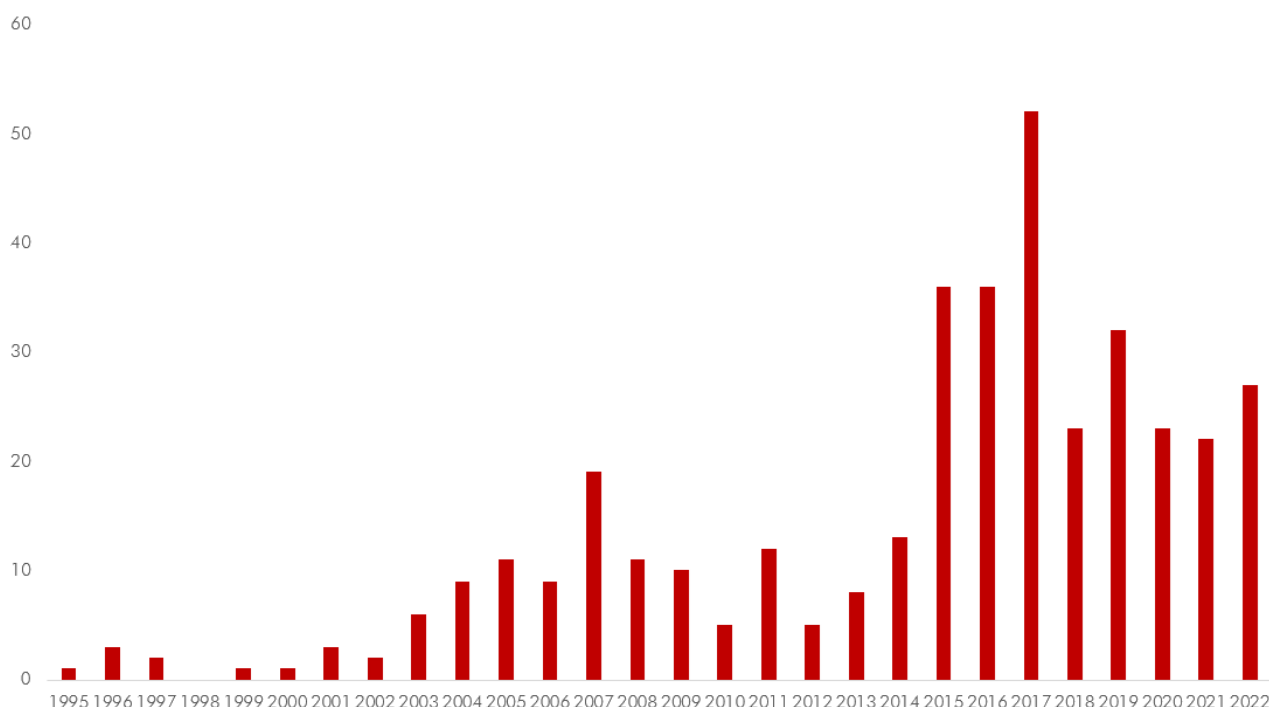
<sup>1</sup> The information presented throughout the chapter has been elaborated from the database of the Observatory of Police Operations against Jihadism in Spain of the OIET. The author is especially grateful for the collaboration of the General Information Commissariat of the National Police Corps for providing complementary information that has been useful in the elaboration of the profiling study of the persons arrested.



## 2. General analysis of operations conducted and detainees

In 2022, a total of 27 operations against jihadism were carried out in Spain, the highest number since 2017, except in 2019, when 32 operations were carried out. Something similar occurs if we look at the number of people arrested in these operations, as 46 people were arrested last year for their alleged links to activities linked to jihadism. In this case, this is also the highest figure since 2017, except for the figure for 2019, when a total of 58 individuals were arrested. The fact that we are facing some of the highest levels of the last five years should also be put in context, since if we continue to focus exclusively on quantitative terms, the increase in 2022 with respect to previous years is not particularly significant, with only small differences with slight variations. Therefore, we are still facing the same paradigm as in recent years, in which the number of operations is between twenty and thirty, while the number of arrests is concentrated between thirty and forty.

**FIGURE 1. Operations carried out in Spain against jihadism since 1995**



**SOURCE: OWN PRODUCTION**



If the current period of operations against jihadism in Spain is analyzed over a longer period of time, it is clear that the volume of operations since 2015 is particularly high due to the police response to the Daesh terrorist organization and to a threat that that same year was already beginning to materialize in the form of highly lethal attacks, as was the case with the terrorist actions in Paris. The increase in operations against jihadism in Spain could not be understood without the reform of the Criminal Code in March 2015, which aimed to provide the necessary tools to deal precisely with the new security challenge that Daesh represented. As a result of the legal hardening carried out with this reform, new crimes could be defined, such as the case of terrorist self-training. Likewise, other types of conduct that could be conducive to the commission of crimes of collaboration with a terrorist organization were also expanded (Ponte, 2015). In this way, the 2015 reform of the Criminal Code allowed those responsible for the fight against terrorism to expand their response mechanisms, something that resulted in part in an increase in operations against jihadism. It is no coincidence that, since then, many of the crimes committed in Spain have been specifically associated with some of the amendments made. As we will see throughout this chapter, the year 2022 is a good example of this.

## **2.1. Temporal distribution of operations and detainees in operations**

The total number of operations against jihadism in the last year has been distributed very heterogeneously over time. While in June there were a total of six operations, none were carried out in December. However, the usual trend continues to be similar to previous years, with between one and two operations being carried out each month. In any case, these data analyzed as single and independent variables do not allow us to extract really useful information, since these operations are carried out at the precise moment when the police investigation considers that it has sufficient evidence to proceed to the arrest of those involved or it is believed that they may represent an imminent threat to the security of the public.



**FIGURE 2. Number of operations and arrests in 2022**

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>OPERATIONS</b>	<b>DETAINEES</b>
<b>January</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>February</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>March</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>April</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>May</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>June</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>July</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>December</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>

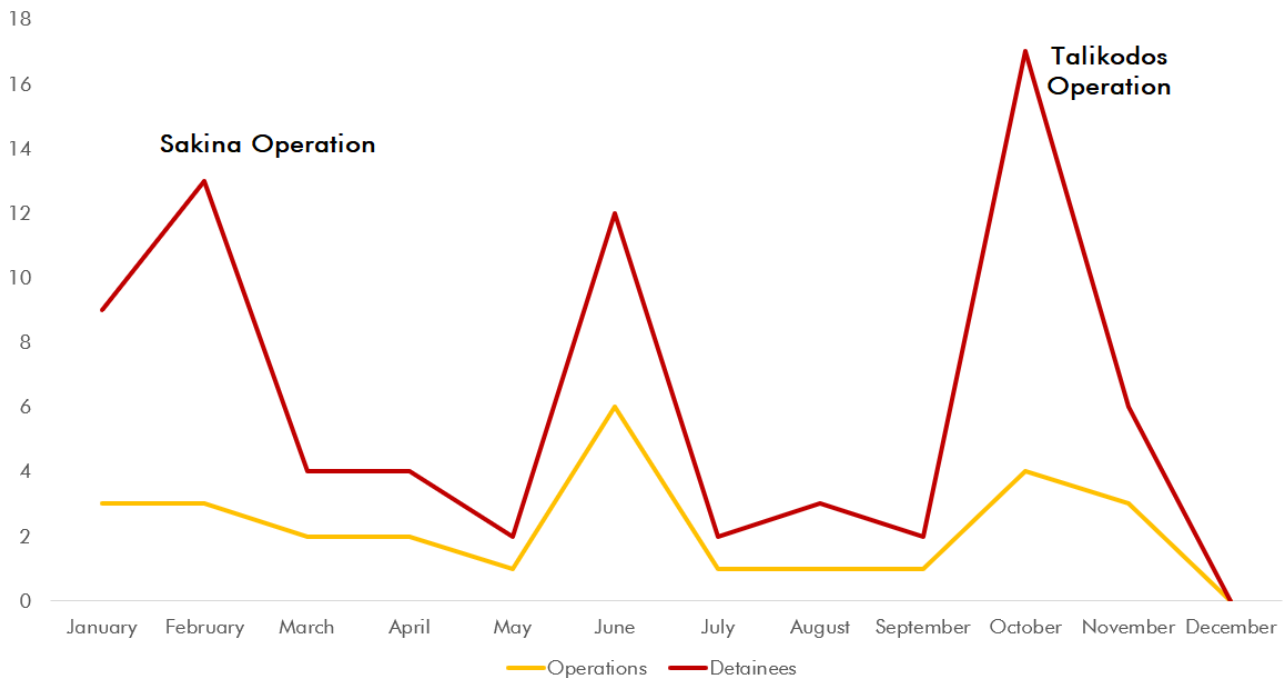
**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

As for the number of arrests, and as with the number of operations, these are also unevenly distributed over time. Although as a general rule no more than two arrests are made in the same operation, this year several terrorist cells have been dismantled with a high number of members in each of them. Only in the so-called Operation Talikodos, carried out at the beginning of October, nine individuals were arrested on national territory, and this figure rises to eleven if we include the other two people arrested in Morocco during the course of this macro operation. In this sense, there is no doubt that Operation Talikodos can be considered the largest operation carried out in Spain in 2022, both in terms of its impact and the volume of resources deployed. The operation involved more than a hundred agents distributed in Melilla, Granada, and part of the Moroccan territory, and the intervention counted with the participation of both the National Police and the National Intelligence Center (CNI), EUROPOL, and the Moroccan intelligence services. Likewise, and in parallel to this police action, Operation Marzu was carried out, in which two women were arrested who were related to some of those arrested in Operation Talikodos and whose activity was



focused on the publication and dissemination of Daesh propagandistic content aimed at recruitment and indoctrination.

**FIGURE 3. Temporal distribution of operations and arrested individuals**



**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

## 2.2. Spatial distribution of operations conducted

The analysis of the information regarding how the 27 operations carried out in 2022 have been distributed throughout the Spanish geography yields interesting ideas that should be highlighted. First of all, Barcelona has concentrated a total of six police actions, being notably the Spanish province with the highest number of operations carried out against jihadism over the last year. While some of these interventions have been part of other devices that have also been carried out simultaneously in different latitudes<sup>2</sup>, others have taken place exclusively in Barcelona or any of its municipalities, as was the case with the arrest in August by the National Police of a Foreign Terrorist Combatant (CTE) during the development of Operation Besos-Mifta. This operation had an international implication with the arrest in Austria at the same time of another CTE who also had links with Spain.

<sup>2</sup> Such is the case of Operation Kital, which took place on February 1 and involved a police deployment in the provinces of Barcelona, Girona, and Valencia. This intervention ended with the arrest of three people, two of Libyan nationality and a woman from Morocco, who were charged with alleged crimes of financing terrorism.



If we broaden the focus by autonomous region, Catalonia also stands out, with a total of 12 operations. This means that 45% of the operations carried out against jihadism during the last year in Spain have taken place in Catalonia. Likewise, we can see how the Mediterranean coast continues to be the main axis of police activity against jihadism, with most of the operations taking place along it. The Community of Madrid and the Autonomous City of Melilla are the other focal points, with a total of three operations in both regions over the last year. In contrast, the westernmost part of the Spanish territory has barely registered any interventions against jihadism, as can be seen in the figure below.

**FIGURE 4. Geographical distribution of the operations carried out**



*\*The same operation can be conducted simultaneously in different provinces.*

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**



### **3. Major operations**

The operations carried out against jihadism in Spain are the result of the effort and dedication of thousands of people who daily watch over the security of the whole society and who give their lives to try to prevent the repetition of terrorist actions such as 11-M or the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils that occurred in August 2017. If Spain has not suffered again highly lethal attacks like the two mentioned above, it is thanks to the not few operations carried out during the last years that have managed to disrupt plans and attempts to commit attacks by individuals or terrorist cells. Last year, once again, left us with several police actions that are the best example that illustrates this reality, although the 27 operations carried out as a whole are the best example of why our country is considered one of the major references in the global fight against terrorism.

Throughout 2022 there were at least four operations in which the person arrested had openly stated his intention to commit a terrorist act, something that would probably have happened more or less imminently if he had not been arrested. Two of these occurred in June. The first was when an individual was arrested by the Mossos d'Esquadra in Tarragona after proclaiming his desire to commit an attack in Catalonia before going to Syria to join jihadist groups. Something similar happened in another case the same month in Elche, Alicante, where a 41-year-old man was arrested by the Guardia Civil who also planned to travel to Syria after committing a terrorist act. Likewise, this operation, which counted with the collaboration of the CNI, showed that the detainee was in direct contact with the perpetrators of other jihadist-inspired attacks. One of the cases that attracted the most attention was the arrest in July of a man of Albanian nationality who was wanted by EUROPOL and who had launched several calls for the commission of attacks in which he extolled the figure of the suicide bomber. The striking fact about this individual is that at the time of his arrest, he was found to have a pen that had been converted into a pistol by means of homemade manipulation. A last one arrested in September by the Mossos in Empuriabrava (Girona) had also stated, like several of the previous terrorists, his intention to commit an attack before leaving for conflict zones.

As for the rest of the operations, and in chronological order, the first to be highlighted for its particularity is the one that took place on the first day of February, when three people were arrested, including a woman, in a device deployed in Barcelona, Girona, and Valencia. The three people involved



were charged with an alleged crime of financing terrorism through a complex business network with international connections that would have allowed them to send money to terrorist fighters associated with Daesh in Libya. Likewise, the detainees would have paid in 2019 for the treatment of wounded jihadists in private clinics in Barcelona, rejoining their terrorist activities in Libya once they had recovered from their wounds. Unlike other years, this Operation Kital was the only one carried out in Spain in 2022 with exclusive involvement in the financing of terrorism<sup>3</sup>.

The second of the actions to be highlighted also took place in February and was called Operation Sakina, carried out by the National Police with the collaboration of the CNI and EUROPOL. This operation involved an extensive operation deployed in four Spanish provinces (Barcelona, Girona, Jaen, and Granada) and the dismantling of a cell made up of five Pakistani nationals belonging to the extremist movement Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan<sup>4</sup>. The operation was carried out after it was found the degree of fanaticism with which the members of the cell interacted in social networks, from where they encouraged the commission of terrorist attacks. Likewise, the five detainees, aged between 21 and 32, had organized a propaganda structure to disseminate their extremist ideals. This operation, known as Sakina, had a second phase in June, when another individual in his thirties, also of Pakistani nationality, was arrested in Hospitalet del Llobregat (Barcelona), as part of an international macro-operation which took place mainly in Italy. This arrest took place due to the existence of a judicial claim for a Euro warrant issued from Italy for terrorism offenses<sup>5</sup>. The multiple connections maintained by those involved in the two phases of Operation Sakina with the rest of those arrested in Italy, as well as the link they had previously established with the terrorist who committed the attack near the former headquarters of Charlie Hebdo in 2020, highlights the extensive networks and interconnection that continues to exist within the current European jihadist movement.

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3 If we had to highlight an operation carried out to combat the financing of jihadism in our country, it would undoubtedly be the one carried out in June 2019, which resulted in the arrest of a dozen people linked to the Kutayni clan, who allegedly financed Al Qaeda in Syria through various mechanisms from Madrid.

4 This radical group justifies the assassination of those who blaspheme Islam. The perpetrator of the attack in Paris near the former offices of Charlie Hebdo in 2020 belonged to this same movement.

5 The excellent cooperation that Spain maintains with neighbouring countries is also manifested, for example, through another operation carried out by the National Police at the beginning of the year in which an Algerian citizen was arrested, who was the subject of another Euro-order, in this case from France, to proceed with his arrest.



On the other hand, August saw the arrest in the national territory of the first CTE with direct links to Spain. This individual, of Moroccan nationality, arrested in Operation Besos-Mifta, had resided in the country until 2014, at which point he decided to move to Syria to fight under the Al Qaeda affiliate. His arrest took place simultaneously with that of another CTE in Austria, who also had Moroccan nationality and links with Spain. According to the police investigation, the two detainees would have entered Europe via the Balkan route.

This section could not conclude without mentioning once again the previously mentioned Operation Talikodos, which involved the participation of more than a hundred agents and was carried out both in Spain and Morocco. The nine members of the cell arrested in Spain ranged in age from 23 to 58 and had a similar profile in many respects. They were all men, Spanish nationals, and legal residents of the country. Most of them were heads of households, had an active employment situation, were professionally engaged in activities related to the tertiary sector, and were in charge of several people. All the members of the cell were aligned with the postulates of Daesh and focused their activity on recruitment and indoctrination both online and physically. As a characteristic feature, it can be highlighted that their target audience was minors. The members of the cell, including the two members who were arrested in Morocco, as well as the two women also arrested in Morocco in Operation Marzu, had strong ties of friendship and family, something that led to a greater degree of cohesion among the members of the cell.

**The multiple connections maintained by those involved in the two phases of Operation Sakina with the rest of those arrested in Italy, as well as the link they had previously established with the terrorist who committed the attack near the former headquarters of Charlie Hebdo in 2020, highlights the extensive networks and interconnection that continues to exist within the current European jihadist movement**



## **4. Profiling study of the detainees**

From the information known about the 46 detainees arrested in 2022 for their involvement in activities related to jihadism, it is possible to establish a dozen variables that address the sociodemographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial fields and that yield useful data both at the individual level of the detainees and the relationship established with their environment. However, the impediments when trying to access certain information on certain detainees are elements that in some way hinder or affect to a greater or lesser extent the result of an analysis that starts from the premise of the existence of multiple jihadist profiles that share in few cases common elements, patterns, and traits.

### **4.1. Nationality**

When it comes to identifying the nationality of the persons arrested, we find a reality that has historically been frequent, given that Moroccan or Spanish nationality is present in the majority of those arrested<sup>6</sup>. In 2022, 18 of them had Maghrebi nationality, while another 15 had Spanish nationality, some of them being of Moroccan or Algerian origin. Therefore, 72% of those arrested in Spain in 2022 for their involvement in jihadist-related activities were of Moroccan or Spanish nationality.

On the other hand, the six cases of Pakistani nationals arrested in our country also stand out. As mentioned above, all of them were involved in Operation Sakina and remained attached to the extremist movement of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, which has multiple connections with European jihadism, as evidenced by the links between those arrested in Spain and those arrested in Italy in the middle of the year. Finally, and less representative, there are four Algerian nationals, two from Libya and one from Albania who were arrested in various operations.

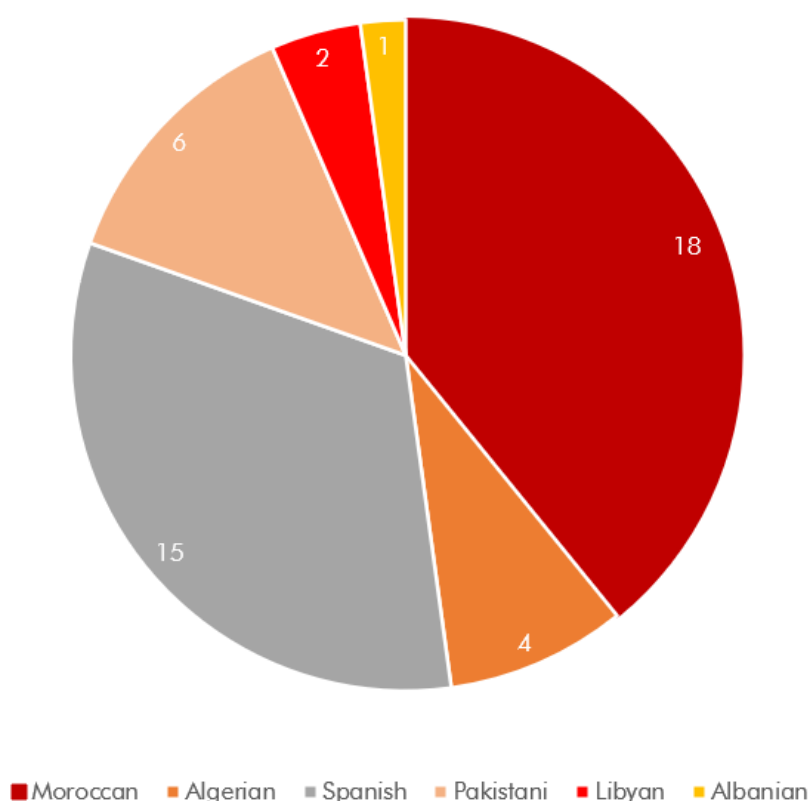
**72% of those arrested in Spain in 2022 for their involvement in jihadist-related activities were of Moroccan or Spanish nationality**

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard, 2021 can be considered an exception, as more arrests of Algerian nationals than Spanish nationals were recorded.



**FIGURE 5. Nationality of the detainees.**



*\*Sample: 46 detainees*

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

## 4.2. Age

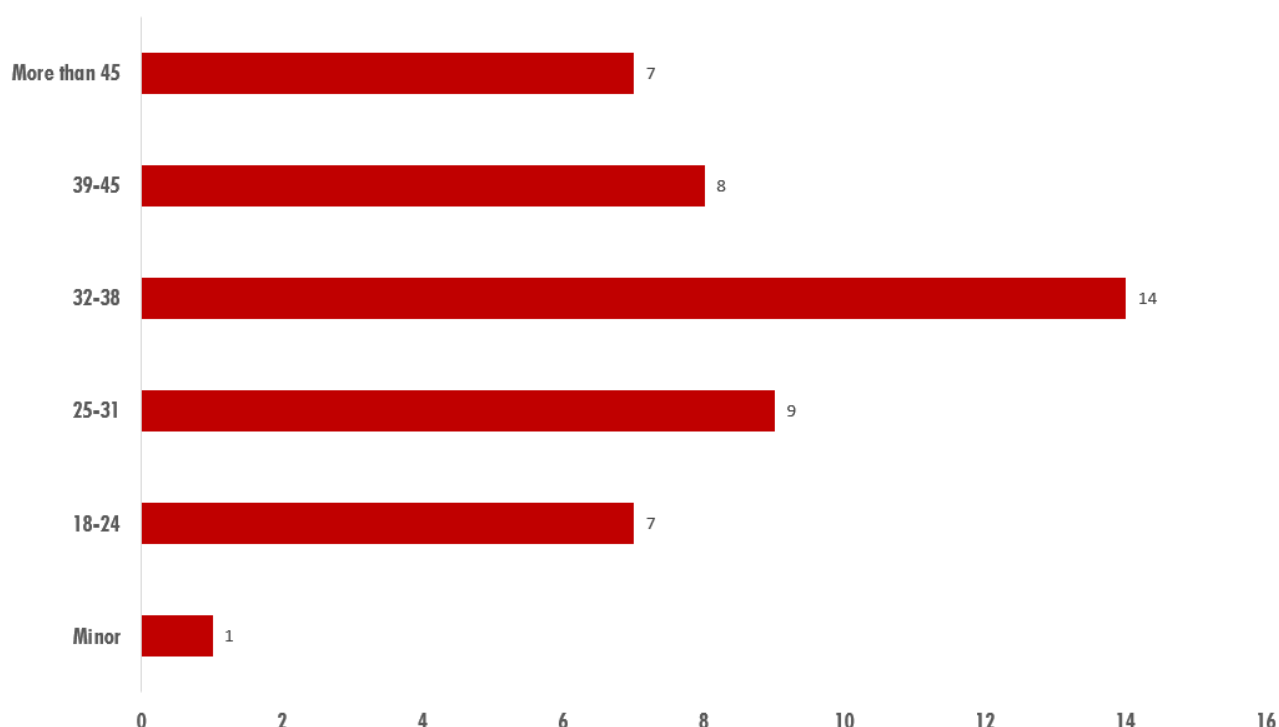
Age is one of the parameters that in itself reflects the non-existence of a single jihadist profile. Although the analysis of this element in previous years has already allowed us to reach this conclusion, the ages of some of those arrested in 2022 open up an enormously wide range. If we put the focus on the youngest person arrested for involvement in jihadist activities, we see that the age corresponds to a 15-year-old minor arrested in the middle of the year during the course of Operation Jakwar in the Madrid municipality of Algete. The young man arrested is alleged to have committed crimes of self-training and terrorist self-education, having found abundant propaganda material and manuals aligned with the postulates of the Daesh terrorist organization. So much so that, for some of the investigators, the content found in the minor's devices could represent "the largest collection of Daesh propaganda material intercepted" (Muñoz, 2023). On the other hand, the case of the older detainee is particularly unique in several respects. First, at the time of the arrest in San Antonio de Benafeger (Valencia) the person involved was no less than 72 years old. Second, the detainee was a woman, which is noteworthy because the representation of the female gender in



jihadist activities is considerably lower than that of men, as will be seen below. Third, she had been self-radicalized years earlier and was currently carrying out proselytizing and indoctrination work both online and physically. And fourth, he had acted as a radicalizing agent on the 20-year-old known as the “fallera de Cullera”, who was charged with crimes of belonging to a terrorist organization and financing terrorism after her arrest in November 2020, being sentenced to five years in prison for sending money to Daesh in Syria (Rallo, 2022). Thus, the age range between the youngest person arrested (15 years) and the oldest (72) is 57 years.

As for the grouping of age groups, as can be seen in Figure 6, there are no significant differences between them, although the age group between 32 and 38 years is the most representative, bringing together 30% of the detainees. The rest of the age groups, except for minors, hardly present differences that could or deserve to be highlighted. In conclusion, all this shows the impossibility of establishing a pattern in terms of the identification of people who could be involved in jihadist activities according to their age.

**FIGURE 6. Distribution of the age ranges of the detainees**



*\*Sample: 46 detainees*

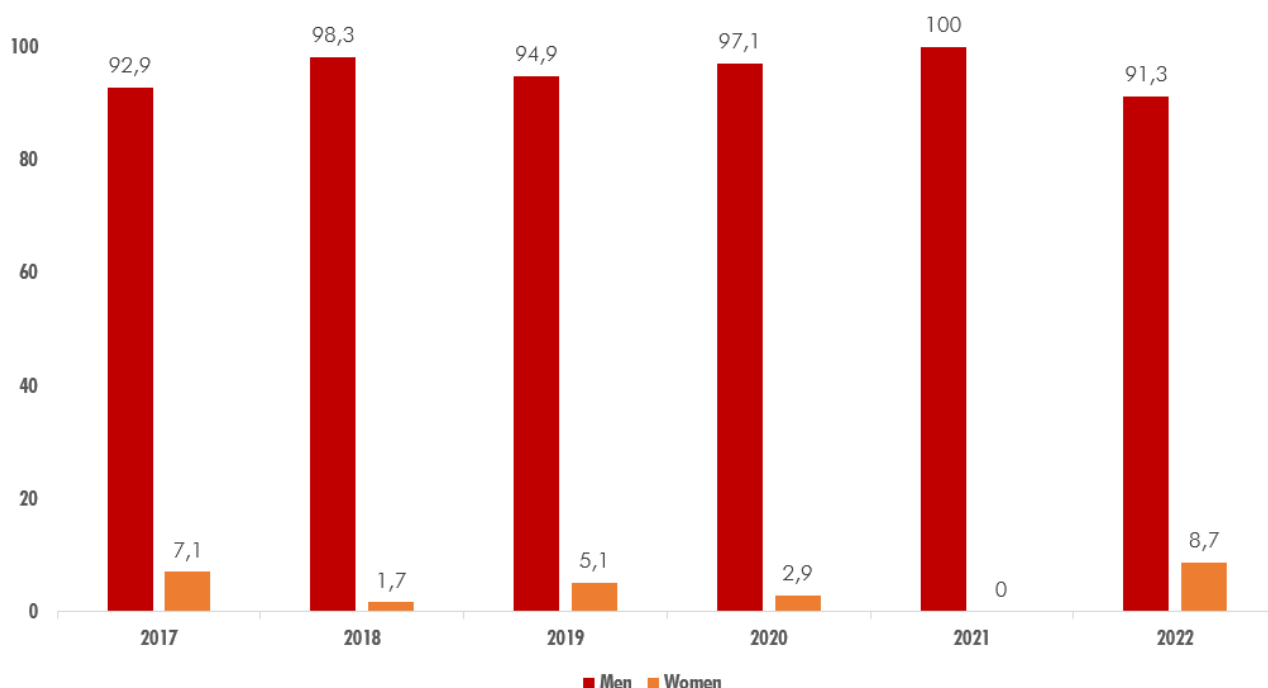
**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**



### 4.3. Gender

The four women arrested in 2022 for their participation in jihadist activities in Spain represent a new maximum in percentage terms that had not been recorded in the five previous editions of this research. Likewise, this data contrasts even more if we compare it with 2021, a year in which there were no arrests of any women related to jihadism (Igualada, 2022). The detainees share a common trait that makes mention of the active role that women have acquired in recent years in terms of the creation and dissemination of propagandistic content, as well as their involvement in radicalization work. The two young Spanish women, aged 23 and 29, arrested in Melilla as part of Operation Marzu at the beginning of October, perfectly represent this role acquired by women in today's jihadism, as they were linked to the cell dismantled in Operation Talikodos. Both were assigned tasks related to the edition of jihadist material that was later used for recruitment and indoctrination. They were also attributed to activities related to online radicalization and maintained relationships with other individuals arrested for terrorism, as well as with CTEs.

**FIGURE 7. Percentage of detained men and women (2017-2022)**



*\*Sample: 46 detainees*

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**



#### **4.4. Offenses attributed**

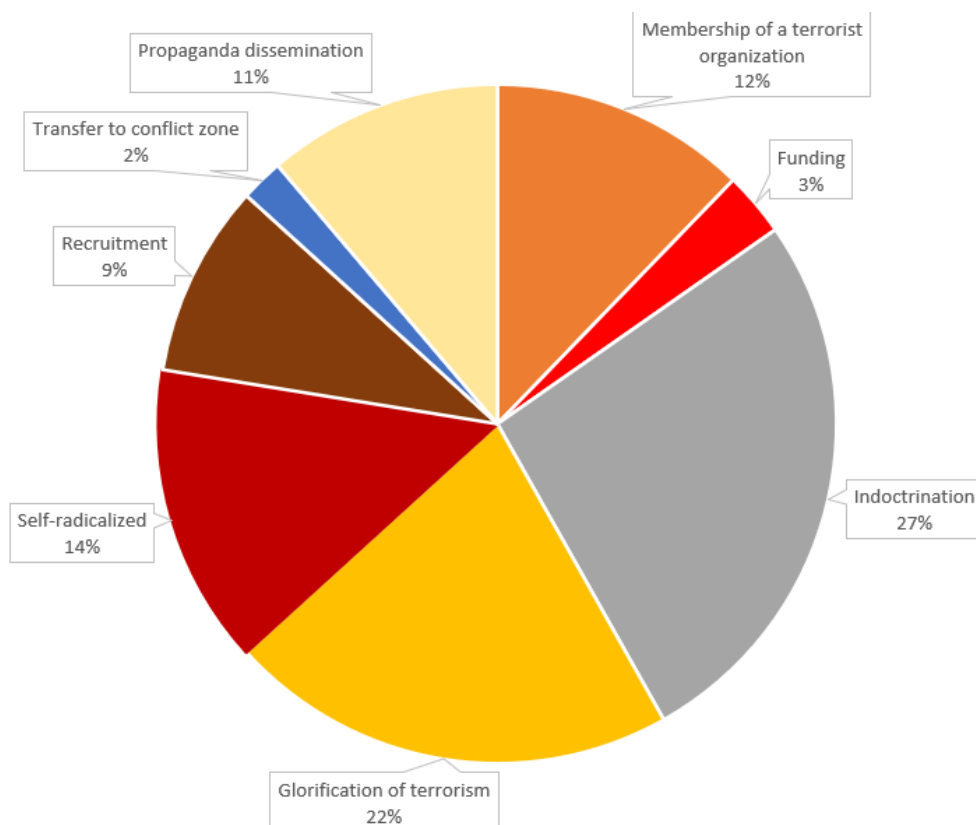
The multiple practices associated with the development of jihadist activity have their reflection and response in the different crimes of terrorism typified in the Penal Code which, as we have seen above, in the case of Spain underwent a reform in 2015 to adapt the mechanisms and legal and police tools to the new challenges coming from a terrorist threat in constant evolution and mutation.

When talking about crimes attributed to persons arrested for their alleged involvement in jihadist activities, we must bear in mind that they are generally charged with several of them, since not few terrorist practices are interrelated or associated with various crimes. For example, throughout 2022 it has been reliably verified how several detainees associated with activities related to recruitment and active indoctrination are also attributed in more than a few cases to the crime of glorification of terrorism. Likewise, they are also frequently charged with the crime of belonging to or collaborating with a terrorist organization. Such is the case of the two women arrested in Operation Marzu or the two Moroccan men arrested in February in the Barrio de la Cañada in Melilla during the course of Operation Farcol. Something similar occurs with other crimes that are also often associated with each other, as is the case with self-education and the glorification of terrorism. Both crimes are frequent in self-radicalized individuals who in advanced stages decide to share jihadist propaganda through social networks, praising terrorist actions committed or calling for their commission. This is the case of the person arrested in Operation Jare, who shared and disseminated jihadist content associated with Daesh through various social network profiles in which he was very active.

If we look in general terms at the crimes most commonly attributed to the persons arrested in 2022, we find that indoctrination and glorification stand out in particular, with one or both of them occurring simultaneously in almost half of the detainees. As for other crimes attributed that have been recurrent throughout the 27 operations carried out, self-teaching, integration into a terrorist organization, and dissemination of content inciting to terrorism stand out. Thus, there are no substantial variations between the most common crimes attributed to those arrested in 2022 and those others that had already been charged in recent years to others arrested for their involvement in jihadist practices.



**FIGURE 8. Offenses attributed to detainees**



*\*Sample: 39 detainees*

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

#### **4.5. Ideological affiliation**

The influence that certain organizations exert on individuals willing to initiate a radicalization process is key when it comes to assimilating the radical ideology emanating from them as their own. This influence can be exerted in multiple ways, either through the consumption of propaganda, through the link established with someone already belonging and integrated into the group, with the intermediation of CTEs, etc.

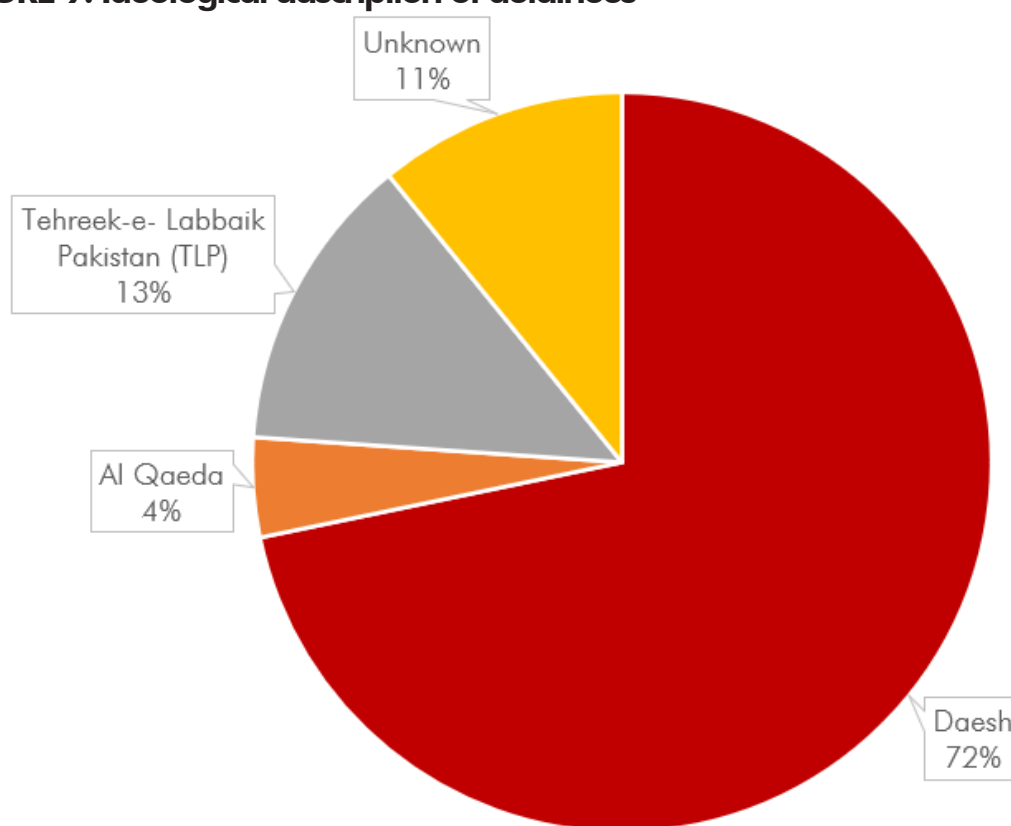
Since the emergence of Daesh, there have been numerous cases of people arrested in Spain who in one way or another have ideologically adhered to its ideology and narrative. So much so that, in recent years, this type of detainee profile stands out significantly from that represented by sympathizers or followers of Al Qaeda. The data and information documented in 2022 that we have been able to access serve as an example. Of the 41 people arrested with a clear ideological affiliation, 32 of them were aligned with the postulates of Daesh. That is to say, eight out of ten people arrested for jihadist practices in Spain have ideologically positioned themselves with Daesh. In contrast, only two of those arrested shared the cause of Al Qaeda. Likewise, it is also important to highlight



the prominence during the last year of the ideology promoted by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, a radical movement emanating from this South Asian country and which has an increasing presence and connections in different European territories, as mentioned above.

Finally, it is striking that one of those arrested in Operation Miya was ideologically attached to the territorial branch of Daesh in the Sahel, something that could also be explained by the increase in propaganda that the core of the organization has been carrying out in recent months about this region in which Daesh is managing to grow significantly.

**FIGURE 9. Ideological adscription of detainees**



*\*Sample: 41 detainees*

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

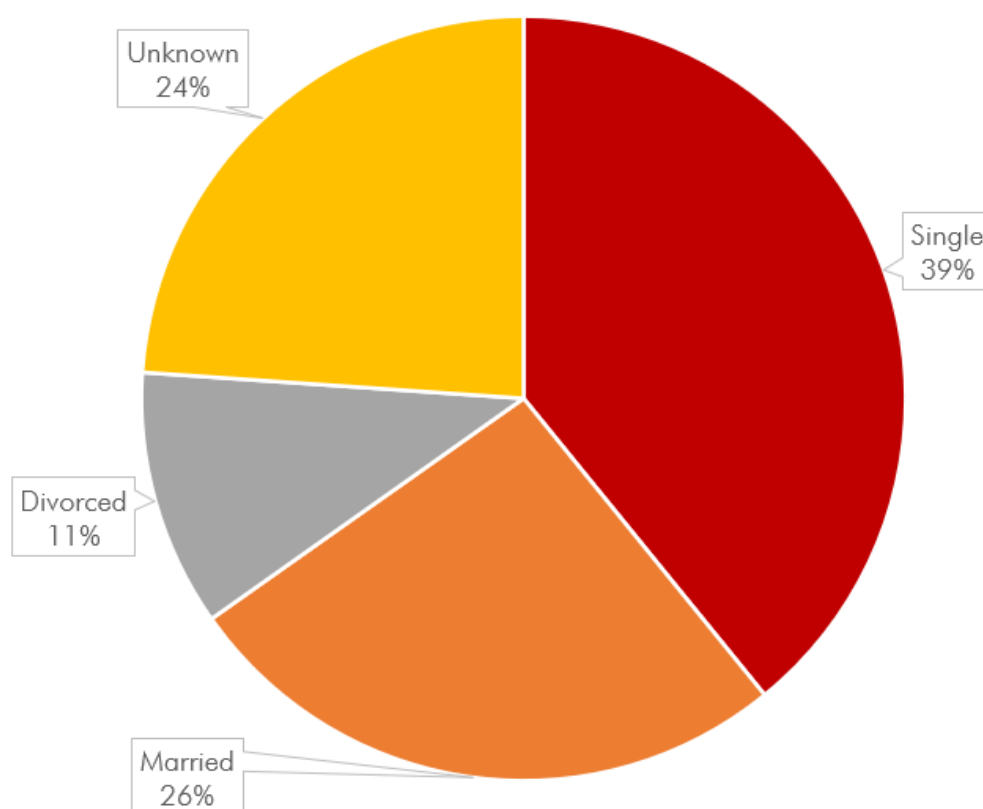
#### **4.6. Marital status**

The analysis of the marital status of the detainees continues to present a duality between those who present themselves as married and those identified as single, regardless of whether the latter may be in a romantic relationship or are living with a partner, as is the case with several of the detainees. Nevertheless, the figures for the last year point to the presence of five separated persons, something that for example in 2021 did not occur on any occasion (Igualada, 2021).



Another characteristic fact is that all the persons who were married had at least one dependant, being in most cases their own children. The only exception is the case of one of the four people arrested in Operation Hazara, carried out by the National Police in Algeciras and Murcia in mid-January. Everything suggests that it is precisely this individual who would have initiated the radicalization process of the rest of the group, all of them calling themselves the “Soldiers of the Caliphate”.

**FIGURE 10. Civil status of the detainees persons**



\*Sample: 35 detainees

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

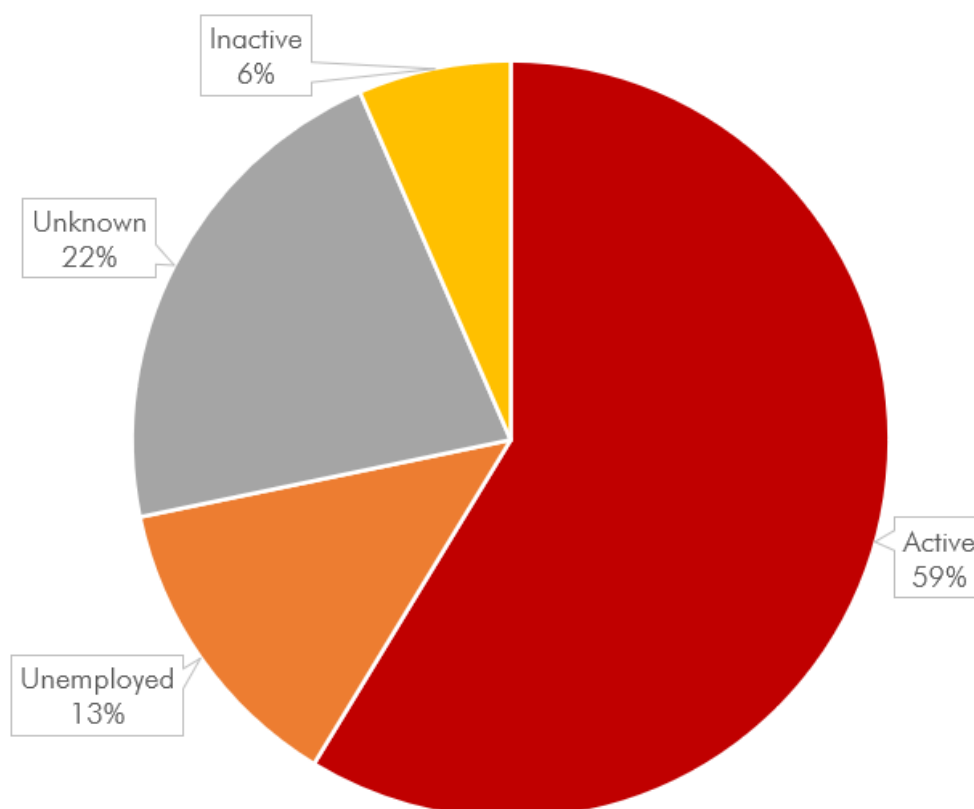
#### **4.7. Employment status and sector of economic activity**

The profile of individuals associated with jihadist practices is often wrongly associated with people who are isolated from society and who do not engage in any legal economic activity. However, the evidence shows the opposite. Of the 36 people arrested for whom information related to their professional activity has been documented, 27 of them were in an active situation, that is to say, three out of four had a job at the time they were arrested. In addition, it should be noted that three of the remaining nine were inactive, these being the minor arrested in Algete (Madrid), the 72-year-old woman arrested in San Antonio



de Benafeger (Valencia) who is a pensioner, and the one arrested in Operation Taquiyya, who had been in pre-trial detention until well into 2022 for a terrorism offense. Once released and before being able to return to work, he was arrested again, in this case, last April for self-training for terrorist purposes.

**FIGURE 11. Employment situation**



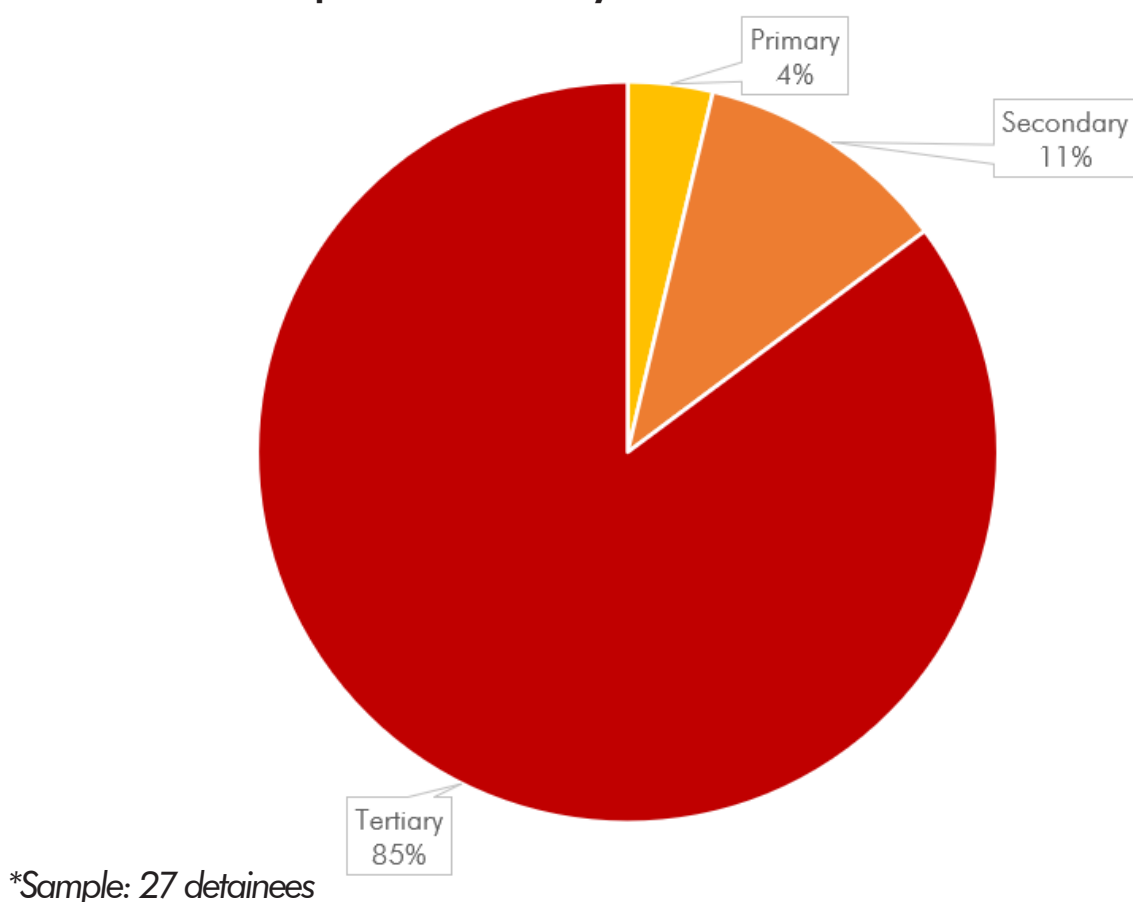
*\*Sample: 36 detainees*

**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

Regarding the sectors of professional activity in which the detainees were engaged, of the 27 people who were active at the time of their arrest, the vast majority of them, 85 percent, worked in activities related to the service sector. Three were in the secondary sector and only the 21-year-old Moroccan national arrested in Operation Rakmu in November worked in the primary sector.



**FIGURE 12. Sector of professional activity**



**SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION**

#### **4.8. Relationship circles**

One of the most interesting aspects when trying to outline an analysis of the profile of those arrested for their links to jihadist activities is precisely to know the types of relationships they establish with their closest environment and the dealings they may have had previously with other people who were or had been involved in terrorist activities or other types of criminal activity, as well as the background they themselves had.

The study of these circles reveals some interesting information. On the one hand, 41% of the detainees were related to other individuals involved in terrorist activities. Although this figure is considerably high, it is necessary to qualify the data, since when several cells were dismantled, it is logical that there was a relationship between the detained members. However, there have also been cases in which the operation has resulted in only one detainee who has claimed to have links with individuals previously arrested for terrorist offenses. For



example, this is the case with the Moroccan citizen arrested earlier this year in Madrid under Operation Sham, the first phase of which took place in August 2021 and ended with the arrest of another person. Something similar occurred with the 72-year-old woman whose profile has already been commented on above and who logically presented a direct relationship with the young woman arrested in Cullera in November 2020 as she was responsible for energizing her radicalization process.

Likewise, family ties also play an important role in the formation and development of terrorist cells (Hafez, 2016). This has been evidenced historically with different structures composed of members who presented kinship ties, as was evident, for example, with the terrorist cell that committed the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils in 2017 and which was formed by several pairs of siblings (Igualada, 2018). In 2022 there has been another case that also illustrates this reality itself, since after the Talikodos Operation in which a cell of eleven individuals was dismantled, the investigation found that at least two of the detainees had family ties.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that at least nine of the detainees had previous convictions for terrorist crimes in Spain or other countries. Among these individuals are several of those arrested on national territory in Operation Talikodos, as well as the two CTEs arrested in Operation Besos-Mifta. Likewise, 35% of those arrested in 2022 also had previous convictions for common crimes. Finally, we must not forget the relationship that some of those arrested in Spain during the last year had with different CTEs, since at least eight of them had direct contact with this type of figure that can pose a special security risk. Being fighters displaced to conflict zones, the level of experience acquired in the handling of weapons, as well as the high degree of extremism achieved make them real threats, without forgetting that they can also share all their knowledge with other radicalized individuals and help them in the planning of terrorist actions or take their degree of extremism to higher levels. This is why it should come as no surprise that some of the individuals arrested last year in Spain with direct links to CTEs showed an extreme degree of radicalization and deep hatred towards those they considered their enemies, such as law enforcement officers. This was evident, for example, in the case of the two people arrested in Operation Farcol, who focused part of their activity on the recruitment and radicalization of minors.



# INDIVIDUAL PROFILING AND MATCH RATE

## 2020-2022 COMPARATIVE

### AGE

32-38	18-24	32-38
2020	2021	2022
38%	29%	30%

### GENDER

MALE		
2020	2021	2022
100%	100%	91%

### NACIONALITY

MOROCCO		
2020	2021	2022
59%	42%	41%

### MARITAL STATUS

#### SINGLE

2020	2021	2022
44%	56%	56%

### IDEOLOGICAL AFFILIATION

#### DAESH

2020	2021	2022
83%	71%	72%

### EMPLOYMENT STATUS

#### ACTIVE UNEMPLOYED ACTIVE

2020	2021	2022
71%	62%	59%

### PREVIOUS TERRORIST OFFENCES

2020	2021	2022
7%	21%	20%

### PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER DETAINEES FOR TERRORIST OFFENCES

2020	2021	2022
41%	29%	41%

### LINKS WITH FTF'S

2020	2021	2022
11%	13%	17%

### PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS FOR COMMON CRIMES

2020	2021	2022
29%	42%	35%





## 5. Conclusions

The 27 operations against jihadism carried out in Spain over the last year once again highlight the need to remain alert to a phenomenon that is constantly mutating, evolving, and adapting. Institutions and personnel dedicated to the fight against terrorism are particularly aware of this and require all possible resources and tools to try to guarantee the security of citizens.

From the study, carried out both of the operations carried out and of the profile of the people who have been arrested for their involvement in jihadist activities over the last year, several ideas can be extracted.

First, and in purely quantitative terms, we continue under the same paradigm initiated in 2015, the date on which the threat that Daesh represents for the West began to manifest itself irrefutably. Since then, the number of operations has remained above twenty per year and the number of detainees is generally between 30-40 people.

Secondly, the qualitative analysis reveals the existence of multiple jihadist profiles that make it impossible to establish common elements that would allow all of them to be identified under the same pattern. The fact that in 2022 both a 15-year-old minor and a 72-year-old woman were arrested is a graphic illustration of this reality. Something similar occurs with the analysis of the rest of the variables that have been studied, which only confirms the existence of multiple profiles and roles within Spanish jihadist circles.

Third, to all this we must add the growing prominence that women are beginning to have within the jihadist movement, acquiring a more active and participatory role. This has been confirmed by the analyzed profile of the four women arrested last year for their involvement in jihadist activities and directly related both to the creation and dissemination of propagandistic content and to the financing of terrorism.

Fourth, the passing of the years has finally demonstrated how the reform of the Penal Code carried out in 2015 enabled and provided those responsible for the fight against terrorism with the necessary tools to enable them to act in advance in the face of possible jihadist threats. This is evidenced by the criminalization of offenses such as self-training, which is currently one of the most common offenses charged against detainees.



Fifth, the series of evidence gathered throughout the investigation indicates that the persons involved in jihadist activities in Spain have an intense social activity with certain circles among which there are both family connections and links with individuals also arrested for terrorist crimes and/or who have a record for common crimes.

And finally, the growing connections and the degree of relationship that some of those arrested last year had with foreign terrorist fighters should not go unnoticed. The threat they pose to security is not only measured by their presence on the territory but also by their ability to establish direct communication and to indoctrinate and instruct from a distance other individuals who may have the intention of committing terrorist attacks.

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# THE RETURN OF EUROPEAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM SYRIAN DETENTION CAMPS: HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS, SECURITY RISKS AND REINTEGRATION

Daniel Pérez-García

## 1. Introduction

The repatriations of Spaniards Yolanda Martínez and Luna Fernández from Syrian detention camps add to the growing list of European women who have moved to Iraq and Syria to join Daesh, Al Qaeda, or related groups. These women - most of whom were wives or widows of foreign terrorist fighters - are often accompanied by their children, who have been placed in the care of relatives or at the disposal of local children's services when their mothers' legal case was opened, and who have suffered from the unsanitary and squalid conditions in the camps run by Kurdish militias in Syria.

For this reason, this research focuses on the European experience of repatriation, treatment, and management of the challenges arising from the return of these people to their country of nationality or residence. In addition to consulting bibliographical sources, this publication is based on a series of semi-structured interviews<sup>1</sup> with experts in the field. These personal communications will help to fill the gaps in the academic literature on such a recent phenomenon and provide the views of frontline professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> Expert interviews will be referred to as "Personal Communications". Thus, Personal Communication 1 corresponds to the researcher Christian Trazti, Personal Communication 2 to a police inspector with responsibilities in the field, Personal Communication 3 to a senior civil servant consulted with responsibilities in the field, and Personal Communication 4 to the researcher and trainer Josep García Coll. The anonymized testimonies were made at the express request of the interviewees, given the security sensitivity of the areas in which they work. All were semi-structured interviews on their areas of expertise and were conducted telematically.



In line with these considerations, the structure of this chapter begins with an introduction to the large wave of mobilizations of foreign terrorist fighters to Syria and Iraq and the profile of those returning with or without their family members. Secondly, different models of response are analyzed through the political-judicial and social intervention practices of EU member states such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Spain. Given that comparative analyses of specific practices on women and minors are scarce, a classification of the political-legal and social intervention approaches to return will be offered based on the experience of the aforementioned countries.

Thirdly, it is essential to delve into the serious humanitarian situation in which tens of thousands of people live in the Al Hol and Al Roj camps, especially the situation of the women and minors residing in these camps. This section also addresses the challenges to the security of European countries that these repatriations entail. Finally, this chapter includes international recommendations and expert testimonies for the institutional design and professional implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration plans for the wives or widows of terrorist fighters and their dependent minors.

## **2. The return of the foreign terrorist fighters**

Foreign fighters are a historical phenomenon with numerous precedents. On the one hand, there are precedents of foreign fighters such as Che Guevara, Lord Byron, the international brigades in support of the Second Spanish Republic, the Zionist movements of the 1940s, or the Muslims who went to fight in Bosnia, Afghanistan or Chechnya at the end of the 20th century (Marrero, 2020). Even so, the mobilizations to fight in Iraq and Syria constitute a category of their own - the so-called foreign terrorist fighters - with distinctive elements. What is characteristic of this wave of foreign fighters that has emerged since 2011 is that: 1) they become part of a belligerent actor in an armed conflict that has been designated as a terrorist organization, 2) the crimes committed are classified as terrorist offenses, and 3) there is a potential willingness to attack their return to their countries of residence or nationality (Marrero, 2017).

Thus, these foreign terrorist fighters - as they are referred to academically and institutionally - grew from between 1,000-1,500 at the beginning of the Syrian War, in 2011, to around 42,000 at the end of 2017 (Schmid, 2015; Ragab, 2018). Of the more than a hundred nationalities of those who traveled to join the ranks of global terrorist organizations, 5,000-6,000 European nationals or



residents stand out (between 1,500-2,000 from France, 1,100 from Germany, about 250 from Spain, etc), around 5. 500 Russian nationals, about 5,000 from Turkey, another 5,000 mobilized from China, more than 3,000 Tunisians, about 2,000 from Saudi Arabia, about 1,600 from Morocco, and about 900 British (ICCT and TMC, 2023). In addition, among those affiliated with Daesh in Iraq and Syria, an estimated 75 percent were men, 13 percent were women, and 12 percent were minors (Cook and Vale, 2018).

Daesh's military decline between 2017 and 2019 diminished *hijras* - hegira<sup>2</sup>- to wage jihad in the jihadist organization's traditional fiefdoms (Aguilera, López-González and Pérez-García, 2023). Despite this, there seems to be a resurgence of the phenomenon through Daesh's propagandistic calls to travel to fight in the Western Sahel or the emergence of platforms such as Hurras al Tawheed that call for the union of Western jihadists beyond the acronyms of Daesh and Al Qaeda to mobilize troops in hotspots of jihadist activity such as Somalia (Aguilera, López and Pérez-García, 2023).

## **2.1 Profiles of Returned Terrorist Fighters and their Families**

The heterogeneity of those who left to fight in Iraq and Syria is also reflected in those who are beginning to return. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)<sup>3</sup> has updated its response manual on returned foreign fighters and their families to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in Europe. In this regard, RAN distinguishes three generations of returned foreign terrorist fighters: 1st) those who traveled for humanitarian motivations or positions opposed to Bashar al-Assad, subject to subsequent disillusionment with the Daesh project and potentially less aggressive; 2nd) foreign fighters with experience on the ground and with a greater jihadist ideological alignment, who are potentially more determined to attack upon their return; and 3rd) terrorists captured by Kurdish militias and who remained loyal to Daesh, Al Qaeda, or other terrorist groupings until military and territorial defeat (RAN, 2022).

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2 The hegira refers to the migration of the prophet Mohammed to Medina in the year 622. For Christian Tratz, a researcher attached to UCM-CSIC and consulted for this publication, the hegira has a high propagandistic weight in Daesh's media bet (Personal communication 1, 2023). This is based on a self-interested approach to the theological relevance that the journey of the prophet Mohammed to Medina and his return for the conquest has within the disputes in the Quraish tribe. Moreover, in the personal interview, the researcher states that this jihadist narrative has been directed primarily towards second- and third-generation Western migrants who have been indoctrinated - mainly online - in the maxim of "returning to Islam and practicing jihad" (Personal communication 1, 2023).

3 The RAN is the European Commission's main advisory body on issues of prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. It brings together leading practitioners, academics and experts from across the European Union involved in preventing and responding to violent extremism.



Even so, these profiles do not show the totality of the phenomenon as they mainly reflect the experience of the men mobilized, 75%, and not that of women and minors in the lands of Daesh's defunct caliphate. Therefore, the RAN also provides a profile of the categories of mobilized persons into 1) men with combat experience, possibly involved in war crimes and with a diversity of roles within jihadist organizations; 2) women primarily engaged in raising, recruiting, and indoctrinating minors, and who traveled mainly for the promise of life within the Daesh project; 3) minors with a high level of jihadist indoctrination, hugely traumatized and usually recruited as child soldiers from the age of nine (RAN, 2022).

The numbers of returnees vary from country to country, although they are smaller in comparison to those mobilized because of the possibility of death in combat, detention in Syrian camps, remaining in a terrorist organization, or the difficulty of repatriation. Thus, in terms of the numbers of returned foreign terrorist fighters and their family members of European nationality or residence, there are very different absolute figures between EU member states. In this sense, Germany has completed the return of 383 people, France that of 250, 130 in the case of Belgium, 100 in the Netherlands, 73 cases in Denmark, 52 in Spain, and 12 in Italy (ICCT and TMC, 2023).

**These profiles do not show the totality of the phenomenon as they mainly reflect the experience of the men mobilised, 75%, and not that of women and minors in the lands of the defunct caliphate of Daesh**



### **3. European approaches to the return of women and minors from Syrian detention camps**

European nationals and residents who mobilized to fight with Daesh, Al Qaeda, or related jihadist groups have potentially been involved in the commission of war crimes, crimes of aggression, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Therefore, in addition to differences in numbers, there are different judicial, political, and social intervention models and approaches to the repatriation of family members of foreign terrorist fighters -women and minors- from Syrian detention camps among European states that deserve to be discussed. In the following, typologies of responses based on the experience of Germany, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and Spain will be presented to classify them according to their political-legal approach and social intervention.

In the case of the return of wives or widows and children of terrorist fighters who traveled from Germany, the Central European country's authorities claim to have completed the repatriation of their nationals<sup>4</sup>. Thus, 25% of those returned to Germany are women, who have been charged with crimes such as membership in a foreign terrorist organization, failing in their duty to care for and educate their children, and war crimes against property (Koller, Sallach and Schiele, 2022). In this regard, German prosecutors argued that these women sponsored their husbands to fight for Daesh and that they contributed to the strengthening of the internal jihadist structure (Koller, Sallach, and Schiele, 2022). Moreover, there is already the pioneering precedent of a woman returnee to Germany who has been convicted of allowing and instigating the Yazidi genocide, given the proven actions of German terrorist fighters against people belonging to this ethnic minority in Iraq and Syria (Togni, 2022). In the treatment of children of these fighters, German procedures allow close relatives to take care of children instead of local services or host families (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

On the other hand, repatriations in the Netherlands were initiated by judicial decisions of Dutch courts, as the Dutch executive was very reluctant to initiate the return of its nationals mobilized to the lands of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. Dutch law has the particularity of being able to initiate prosecutions in absentia<sup>5</sup>,

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<sup>4</sup> Germany claims that German nationals who remain in Syrian camps do so because they have expressed their willingness to stay in the camps (Koller, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Although this legal figure exists in other legal frameworks such as in France or Belgium, it is not without controversy from a rule of law perspective because it conflicts with Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which establishes the guarantees of fair trials, including the right to be present at the trial (United Nations, 1976). Thus, balances must be struck between international and national legality, such as notification of the opening of the indictment, the possibility of testimony via telematic means, and the willingness to repatriate the accused to serve his or her sentence (Mahra, 2022a).



something justified by the Dutch authorities given the benefits of shortening investigation times for large-scale crimes that send the message of impunity to Dutch convicts (Mahra, 2022a). In the case of children of Dutch terrorist fighters, they are separated from their mothers upon arrival in the Netherlands and placed in the custody of Dutch social services, which assess the children's vulnerabilities and risks to begin their reintegration into the community (Mahra, 2022b).

**The numbers of returnees vary from country to country, although they are smaller in comparison to those mobilised because of the possibility of death in combat, detention in Syrian camps, remaining with a terrorist organisation or the difficulty of repatriation**

A similar initial reluctance to repatriate is found in the return of fighters of French nationality or residence. In the experience of France, a country heavily punished by jihadist attacks in the last decade, judicial authorities have handed down lengthy sentences for membership in a foreign terrorist organization and there are accusations of crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity; although the focus of the accusations and convictions has been on crimes related to crimes classified as terrorism (Koller, 2022). Unlike in other countries, in France, the fact of travel to Iraq or Syria is already sufficient grounds for alleging and being convicted of membership in Daesh or Al Qaeda, which has facilitated the prosecution of women who traveled to these countries to join the ranks of jihadist organizations (Koller, 2022). In the case of minors returned to France - whose legislation allows for prosecution of those over the age of 13 - they are also separated from their mothers and, in addition to being sent to social services, priority is given to host families, which differs from the broad social practice of EU Member States (Mahra and Wentworth, 2022).

Sweden, on the other hand, has a particular approach compared to its European neighbors. The Swedish legal framework did not have the legal and penal structure to prosecute nationals or residents who traveled to Iraqi and Syrian territories, nor those who have returned from territories formerly controlled by jihadist organizations (Eriksson, 2022). In this regard, none of the twelve women



of terrorist fighters repatriated to Sweden have been convicted for their terrorist links; although there is legal protection to re-launch the process at any time, as the relevant legislation does exist to prosecute international criminal offenses such as those committed by Daesh members (Eriksson, 2022). Upon return, wives or widows of terrorist fighters were sent to court and their children to municipal social services (Repatriate the Children - Sweden, 2022). Similarly, the phenomenon of repatriation in Sweden is characterized by the immediate family reunification of mothers and children once they have been released. In addition to the lack of a final conviction, this immediate reunification is justified by the Swedish authorities based on experience and psychosocial research related to crisis support for children (Repatriate the Children - Sweden, 2022).

Finally, Spain is also among the European countries that have initiated repatriations of women and children of foreign terrorist fighters. In this regard, precedents of convictions include women who traveled to territories controlled by Daesh and were detained in Turkey in their attempt to return from Syria or were captured when trying to travel to the lands of the self-proclaimed Islamic State caliphate (Requeijo, 2022). Recently, two Spanish women repatriated from Kurdish detention camps in Syria have been brought to trial on similar charges. Thus, the 2015 reform of the Spanish Penal Code allows for the conviction of traveling or settling in foreign territories to collaborate with a terrorist organization (BOE, 2015). In addition, and given the difficulty of proving the commission of international crimes perpetrated by these women (Cebrián, 2021), Article 575 of the Penal Code also covers charges of indoctrination or training, to oneself or other individuals, for the commission of crimes classified as terrorism (BOE, 2015).

The testimony of the repatriated Spanish women is documented and attests to the process of radicalization shared by the members of the so-called Al Andalus Brigade (Cebrián, 2021), even though they have not yet received a final conviction. The treatment of the sons and daughters of these wives of terrorist fighters of Spanish nationality or residence has followed the line of other EU member states, as they have been separated from their mothers and placed at the disposal of social services (Gálvez, 2023).

Likewise - among the most noteworthy findings of the investigation and according to the statements of a senior official with responsibilities in this area consulted - the repatriation of the women and children of Spanish terrorist fighters held in the camps in northeastern Syria was carried out with full guarantees of respect for their rights and freedoms (Personal Communication 3, 2023). Furthermore,



this senior official stated that all repatriations were carried out with the written consent of the Spanish parents and that they were duly informed of their procedural situation in Spanish territory (Personal Communication 3, 2023). Finally, in relation to the Spanish case, he assures that the Spanish security forces carried out the transfer of these persons from the camps in Syria with absolute respect for their condition as women, and minors and with full respect for their religious beliefs (Personal Communication 3, 2023).

All in all, and to offer a classification of response models based on the experience of different EU Member States, the political-legal and social intervention approaches are summarised in the following tables:

**Table 1: Political-Legal approach**

Country	Political reluctance to repatriate	Criminal focus on terrorist offenses	Criminal focus on international crimes	Trials in absentia	Sentences for repatriated women
Germany			X		X
The Netherlands	X	X		X	X
France	X	X		X	X
Sweden			X		
Spain	X	X			

**Source: Own elaboration**



**Table 2: Social intervention approach**

Country	Separation of children from their mothers at the beginning of the judicial process	Immediate reunification after mothers' release from prison	Priority referral of minors to social services	Priority referral of minors to close relatives	Priority referral of children to host families
Germany	X			X	
The Netherlands	X		X		
France	X				X
Sweden	X	X	X		
Spain	X		X		

**Source: Own elaboration**

## 4. Humanitarian and security implications of the return of women and minors

### 4.1 The humanitarian situation in Syrian detention camps

One of the main arguments motivating the positions in favor of the repatriation of the thousands of foreign women and children living in Syrian detention camps is based on the humanitarian implications of the phenomenon. The origin of this concentration lies in the development of the Syrian conflict and the fight against the territorial power of Daesh, which led to the displacement of millions of people. Of those internally displaced in Syria or refugees there, around 60,000 are in detention camps controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces<sup>6</sup> such as Al Hol and Al Roj<sup>7</sup> (Save the Children, 2022a). It is precisely from these places that the bulk of repatriations of family members of foreign terrorist fighters with European nationality or residence are taking place, although they are also occurring from Iraqi camps such as Jeddah (IOM, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is a coalition of armed militias in opposition to the Alawite government of Bashar al-Assad that emerged in the context of the Syrian civil war. The Kurdish groupings of the YPG and YPJ stand out. They de facto rule the Rojava region of Syria and the Al Hol and Al Roj camps, despite their lack of international recognition.

<sup>7</sup> Al Hol is the largest of the refugee and detention camps in north-eastern Syria. This center, located on the border with Iraq, has its origins in assisting Iraqis fleeing armed conflict in the 1990s (UNHRC, 2022). In 2016 it was reopened to shelter Syrians and Iraqis fleeing the Syrian conflict (UNHRC, 2022). In the case of Al Roj, this camp was established in 2014 for the same reasons and has also sheltered Iraqi and Syrian families (UNICEF, 2021).



## **Humanitarian conditions in camps run by Kurdish militias are leading to a host of security problems, and international response and assistance is not being sufficient to alleviate the day-to-day hardship faced by their nationals until their eventual repatriation**

Thus, the bulk of the inhabitants of Al Hol and Al Roj are Syrian and Iraqi nationals, who join the more than 60 nationalities of people who fled from Daesh-controlled territories (Save the Children, 2021). In the Al Hol detention camp in particular, half of the population is under 12 years old (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2022), and despite increased repatriations, 7,000 children still live in camps in north-eastern Syria (Save the Children, 2022b). All of them live in conditions of insecurity, insalubrity, starvation, economic precariousness, psychological instability, and in an environment of corruption, violence, and lack of access to basic services (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2022). In addition, these children in camps such as Al Hol and Al Roj have not been socialized in conditions of freedom and security, have not enjoyed full schooling, and live in a constant state of alarm that generates anguish, despair, and sustained stress (ICRC, 2022).

Life in detention camps like Al Hol has severe psychological consequences for all inhabitants. Attestation of this impact is found in research with field testimonies and materializes in high levels of depression and sadness, hopelessness about the future, sleep, and eating problems, somatized bodily pain due to the mental health crisis, and even an increased potential for suicide (IOM, 2022).

As in other scenarios, terrorist groups fill the gaps in state and international action to gain followers and justify their extremist vision. In the case of the detention camps in northeastern Syria, Daesh financially supports women sympathetic to the jihadist organization who live in these centers (Mironova, 2020). In return, in addition to preaching and indoctrination in Salafist-jihadist ideology, their alignment is manifested in social networks, where they share or disseminate propaganda pieces of the jihadist organization (Mironova, 2020). Even through their digital propaganda channels, some of these women swore their *bay'ah* - oath of allegiance - to the new leader of Daesh after the death of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi (Mironova, 2020). However, not all of them enjoy such support or protection, and for many women held in Syrian camps, the situation is so untenable that escape attempts - often with their children - are already in the



hundreds (Soz, 2022). In other words, the humanitarian conditions in the camps run by the Kurdish militias are resulting in an accumulation of security problems, and the international response and assistance are not sufficient to alleviate the day-to-day life of their nationals until their eventual repatriation.

In the specific case of children, the development of their first years of life - even from birth - in a context such as this has a direct impact on their mental health. Children in Syrian detention camps suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, high levels of hopelessness, without parental references to provide them with emotional and behavioral stability, and without the necessary tools to efficiently manage their emotions (ICRC, 2022). Such is the sustainability of these unfavorable psychosocial conditions that the United States Central Command, among other organizations, has stated that camps such as Al Hol are breeding grounds for the violent radicalization of these minors (CENTCOM, 2022); something that coincides with humanitarian reports (Save the Children, 2022; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021) and those of organizations specialized in monitoring radicalization (RAN, 2022).

## **4.2 Security risks associated with the return**

The different political and judicial approaches to the phenomenon of women and children returnees, coupled with the humanitarian context described above, have many common security implications. Firstly, at the source, the Syrian Democratic Forces have recognized the difficulty of maintaining the security of detention camps and the growing potential for Daesh to take control of these centers<sup>8</sup> (Elcano, 2022). This makes the maintenance of European nationals in camps such as Al Hol and Al Roj untenable and motivates the positions of the United Nations and the United States to promote and facilitate repatriation campaigns for foreign terrorist fighters, with European nationality or residence, and that of their families (Elcano, 2022).

This view is shared by the senior official consulted, who warns that the less time these people remain in the camps, the less exposure they will be to the processes of Jihadist radicalization and, therefore, the lower the risk to the national security of each state (Personal Communication 3, 2023). Along these lines, and based on an interview with a police inspector with responsibilities in

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<sup>8</sup> In pursuit of Daesh's increased influence in Syrian camps, it is a serious concern for the US Department of Defence that the jihadist organization is forcibly recruiting minors, forcibly indoctrinating young people, and punishing those whom Daesh considers disloyal (US Department, 2022).



this area, repatriation means, in addition to less exposure to violent extremism, a greater possibility of monitoring the risks derived from return and, therefore, a strengthening of the security of states (Personal Communication 2, 2023).

Although less risky than other expressions of jihadism, when these individuals are repatriated or returned, implicit vulnerabilities for the national security of the countries of origin to which they return must be considered. On the one hand, there is the potential of wanting to carry out attacks in such territories, following their passage through the domains of Daesh (RAN, 2022). These scenarios should be extended to the specifics of female returnees, for while it is true that they mostly served as recruiters or as the social foundation of the organization, there are cases of combat experience as snipers or suicide bombers (Barrett, 2017); as well as being particularly active in Daesh's attempt to maintain control of Baghouz in 2019 (Elcano, 2022).

Moreover, there are also precedents of jihadist attacks committed by returned terrorist fighters in Saudi Arabia and Belgium (Ragab, 2018), and thwarted attempted attacks led by female returnees in France (Koller, 2022). This security risk must also be added to the possible creation of recruitment cells made up of wives or widows of repatriated jihadists, such as the one dismantled in Morocco in 2016 (Ragab, 2018). Although they are minority cases and cannot be generalized, this experience confirms that the spectrum of returned wives and widows of foreign terrorist fighters is a heterogeneous group in terms of the functions performed (García-Calvo, 2022). These women have participated in the development of Daesh as indoctrinators of Salafist-jihadist ideology, as recruiters, in its financing networks, and even in armed combat (García-Calvo, 2022).

In the case of minors - boys and girls - returnees, there are other differentiated security implications. It is estimated that Daesh recruited and trained 2,000 minors between the ages of 9 and 15, having served the terrorist organization as fighters, in intelligence work, preachers of jihadist ideology, or even as suicide bombers (Rageb, 2018). Therefore, given the high levels of indoctrination received, there is a risk of violent radicalization if these minors are not effectively reintegrated upon return; or of radicalization in detention camps if they are not repatriated (Repatriate the Children - Sweden, 2022).

This empirical experience of a variety of profiles makes it all the more pertinent to identify, monitor and assess the risk of European women returnees - as well as their children - in an individualized manner adapted to the complexity of



the phenomenon (Brown, 2021). In this sense, in addition to the wide range of European psychosocial risk measurement tools<sup>9</sup>, the RAN has developed a specific risk detection tool for returnees, the RAN CoE Returnee 45 (RAN, 2022). Thus, this tool developed by the European Commission's advisory body is based on areas such as psychosocial factors, susceptibility to indoctrination, adherence to Salafist-jihadist ideology, exposure to extremist propaganda, criminal background, experience in conflict and the determining factors of return, among others (RAN, 2022:45-47).

## **5. Rehabilitation and reintegration of returnee women and children**

States that decide to repatriate their nationals from Syrian camps, to avoid a continuation or resurgence of their violent radicalization, must rely on rehabilitation and reintegration programs adapted to the specifics of each case (Sandi, 2022). The first challenge in the treatment of returnees - where the majority of adult women go to a regime of deprivation of liberty - lies in disengaging from violent behavior and facilitating behavioral reorientation toward community reintegration and resocialization<sup>10</sup> (Kumar, 2021). For the researcher Josep García Coll<sup>11</sup> -consulted for the elaboration of this chapter-, the condition of the possibility of rehabilitation and reintegration should not be denied given the high empirical knowledge related and successful experiences in the disengagement of extremist and terrorist violence; and despite the reluctance of many States to bet on this type of psychosocial programs (Personal Communication 4, 2023).

Thus, some of the fundamental principles for implementing disengagement from terrorist action are based on: the regularity of interventions offered in prison contexts, especially training and those aimed at preparing prisoners for their resocialization in their post-sentencing period; as well as working on

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<sup>9</sup> There are specialized risk measurement tools for members of extremist groups such as ERG22+, IR46, VERA-2, or TRAP-18. The common elements assessed by these initiatives are indicators related to 1) beliefs and attitudes, 2) context and purpose, 3) commitment and motivation, and 4) protective factors against violent radicalization (RAN, 2022:43).

<sup>10</sup> In the European Union, some of the best practices in disengaging from violent extremism can be found in Exit programmes. Initiatives such as Exit Germany or Exit Finland stand out, not only in disengaging from violence but also in reintegrating former extremists into society. Some of them, particularly successful among members of right-wing extremist organizations, have become employees of these programs. In terms of the experience of jihadism, other programs such as Hayat in Germany stand out.

<sup>11</sup> Josep García Coll is a researcher in the Area of Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism at the Fundación Euroárabe and co-author of the book *"La encrucijada entre la radicalización y la desradicalización. Teorías, herramientas y aspectos aplicados"*.



the ideological sphere through individualized counseling or group work with other prisoners (RAN, 2017). In addition, recommended practices for frontline professionals include providing spiritual and religious support, interventions to palliate psychosocially derived traumas, reconnection activities with their family or close circle, and complementing interventions in mentoring programs within the prison and after their release from prison (RAN, 2017).

It is necessary to incorporate a gendered approach to this situation, as there are differentiated indicators of realities and interventions to be deployed. The inconsistency of gender-disaggregated databases makes it difficult to approach the phenomenon quantitatively, as well as having fewer social intervention plans designed for women makes it qualitatively difficult (CTED, 2021). This influences the design of specifically targeted responses for women returnees and members of terrorist groups such as Daesh, as recognized by the United Nations, as the concrete experiences of states are still very recent (CTED, 2021).

To address the disengagement and rehabilitation of returnee and convicted women, several specific considerations must be considered. Firstly, it is inadvisable to approach these women returnees as passive actors, as “mere wives of jihadists”; many of them mobilized voluntarily and consciously. Others were involved in combat work and may have been active recruiters or indoctrinators, and their underestimation can have a negative influence on an effective assessment of risks and vulnerabilities<sup>12</sup> (RAN, 2020).

Along these lines, comparative analyses of European experiences show that another of the particularities of this perspective is that these cases are more related to emotional and personal aspects than in the case of men, and where indoctrinating elements are found such as the romanticization of terrorist groups or the promise of life within the jihadist project (Winterbotham and García-Calvo, 2022). Likewise, for the researcher Josep García Coll, among the differential risk factors for these women is the idealization of masculinity and religiosity that motivated many mobilizations and processes of jihadist radicalization (Personal Communication 4, 2023).

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<sup>12</sup> In the case of women returnees, we must consider their possible double status as victim-victimizer. On the one hand, not all of them traveled voluntarily, nor have their rights always been respected in the lands of the defunct caliphate of Daesh. On the other, they have also been able to commit or sponsor international crimes such as genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. This variety of realities further motivates the need for individualized assessments of returnee women’s risks and vulnerabilities.



Likewise, the socio-economic dimension that motivated violent radicalization also needs to be considered when designing rehabilitation plans, as well as a commitment to incorporate families in these reintegration strategies (Winterbotham and García-Calvo, 2022). These areas, in turn, can be reoriented to become protective factors against extremism that encourage disengagement from violent action, given recent experiences with terrorist prisoners (Personal Communication 4, 2023). Moreover, in this holistic vision of prevention, private sector actors should also be involved in facilitating and sharing these pathways to make the socio-economic reintegration of these women effective (Personal Communication 2, 2023).

The specific issue of minors also deserves detailed attention. Returnee children suffer consequences that go beyond their potential radicalization, and these derive in greater risks and vulnerabilities to be monitored and evaluated. Social psychology has extensively studied Adverse Childhood Experiences, which, in the case of returnee children, have specific consequences linked to behavioral risks and mental pathologies (Vink and Cadet, 2022). As a result, these minors suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders and develop subsequent somatic health problems (Vink and Cadet, 2022). For this reason, European research projects such as PREPARE are designing tools to measure vulnerability and to intervene with minors exposed to the effects of violent extremism, such as that represented by jihadism (Vink and Cadet, 2022).

**It is necessary to incorporate a gender perspective to the treatment of returnees, as there are differentiated indicators of realities and interventions to be deployed**

In the reintegration of minors recruited or exploited by extremist groups, three pillars stand out: 1) support for psychosocial and physical health recovery, 2) educational and vocational opportunities, and 3) return to community and family life (UNODC, 2017). To this end, the United Nations advocates for the measurement of the impact of recruitment, the violent experience, and the armed conflict on the mental and physical development of children; to prevent the development of diseases and ensure the psycho-emotional well-being of children as they grow (UNODC, 2017). In addition, reintegration strategies for these minors should focus on the development of emotional and behavioral



autonomy, as well as include their aspirations and wishes in the implementation of these programs (UNODC, 2017). Given that their return breaks with their family ecosystem, reintegration interventions for these minors must focus on rebuilding their social and relational fabric through reconnection with their families and their resocialization in safe environments (UNODC, 2017).

Experience in reintegration initiatives for returnee children, such as those led by the Swedish authorities, warn that rehabilitation and reintegration must be based on the particular needs of each child, assume the important role of mothers in the process and approach the intervention from a multi-agency perspective of collaboration between public authorities and civil society organizations (Eriksson, 2022). Likewise, the Swedish experience can be seen as a condition for the possibility of successful reintegration of children and adolescents returned from Syrian detention camps; having a good re-socialisation with their peers, enjoying leisure activities and developing a comparatively positive schooling (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

For the police inspector with responsibility in this area consulted, the reintegration of the children of foreign terrorist fighters seems to be easier and in shorter periods of time than in the case of mothers (Personal Communication 2, 2023). This feasibility, appreciated by the inspector interviewed, is reflected in the empirical experience of research such as that of Human Rights Watch, which reflects a high level of perception of integration, 70%, in the opinion of frontline professionals dedicated to the reintegration of returned minors (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Similarly, Save the Children has analyzed the treatment of child returnees and has denounced the lack of guarantees of respect for the rights of minors in the repatriation and return process, the insufficient indicators and standards to provide an effective response to the reintegration work of child returnees, as well as the lack of subsequent evaluation of this type of intervention (Save the Children, 2019). In addition, the children's organization recommends incorporating inclusive and comprehensive educational principles in the context of working with returnee children, strengthening minimum standards of accountability in resocialization initiatives for these children, increasing preparation before returning to their countries of nationality, as well as expanding research and community awareness-raising on the repatriation of children of foreign terrorist fighters (Save the Children, 2019).



Based on this research, and assuming that zero security risk does not exist in open societies, for states to develop effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies these must be individualized and adapted to each target group -women and minors in this case-. Therefore, interventions deployed in prison and in the community are essential to mitigate the risks and vulnerabilities arising from the return, even more so when the gaps and shortcomings that are not provided by states are most likely to be filled by terrorist groups, as was the case in the radicalization at source and the Al Hol and Al Roj detention camps.

**Interventions deployed in prison and in the community are essential to mitigate the risks and vulnerabilities arising from return, even more so when gaps and shortcomings that are not provided by states will most likely be filled by terrorist groups; as was the case in the radicalisation at source and in the Al Hol and Al Roj detention camps**

## **6. Conclusions**

The phenomenon of wives or widows of foreign terrorist fighters and their children is a very recent challenge that stands out - as has been argued - for its complexity and diversity. This breadth is attested to by the variety of profiles and experiences in the period of Daesh's expansion and after its fall, in the stay in Syrian detention camps, and their subsequent return.

Furthermore, as has been analyzed and classified, within the framework of the EU Member States, there are different approaches depending on how favorable the executives are to repatriate their nationals and the legal framework under which they are judged in each country. Thus, we find countries that base prosecution more on transfer to conflict zones and terrorist crimes, such as France and Spain, others on the prosecution of international criminal offenses, such as Germany and the Netherlands; and others that do not have the legal framework to criminally prosecute their nationals returned from Iraq and Syria, such as Sweden. In the case of social intervention, the greatest differences are found in terms of the priority referral of children to close relatives (Germany), to host families (France), or to social services (the Netherlands, Sweden, and



Spain). This categorization is one of the main contributions of the research in comparing and classifying the experience of European countries in the return of women and children.

In any case, it is also relevant to reflect on the seriousness of European nationals or residents having been involved in the commission of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. To this end, specialized investigation teams should be expanded to provide judicial support for the prosecution of these nationals who fought with jihadist organizations during the years of expansion of Daesh and other jihadist organizations in Iraq and Syria. This must also be linked to the need for repatriation given the serious humanitarian conditions and the delicate security situation in the Al Hol and Al Roj camps, especially for the development of minors and adolescents. Similarly, states facing the repatriation of wives or widows of terrorist fighters and their dependent minors must face security challenges such as the formation of recruitment cells, growing radicalization among them, and even the potential for jihadist attacks.

Finally, to avoid these security challenges, individualized and specialized itineraries - in terms of gender and age - towards disengagement from terrorist violence must be institutionally designed and professionally implemented. Furthermore, as has been corroborated by research and the experience of leading professionals, the commitment should be extended to risk and vulnerability assessment tools for women and minors who have returned, as well as to rehabilitation and social reintegration strategies that prevent the pursuit of extremist ideas and behavior related to jihadism. Finally, these programs should be based on prison accompaniment for women, socio-economic support, mentoring initiatives, vocational plans for minors, the involvement of families in disengagement, or the accountability of related initiatives.



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# **TERRORISM AND ITS RELATION TO ARMS SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING IN WEST AFRICA**

Ana Aguilera

## **1. Introduction**

Arms trafficking and smuggling are part of a web of strongly interconnected illicit markets across West Africa and within the Sahel. The existence of flows of arms, drugs, migrants, or wildlife coexist with the episodes of social violence and political disorder that have undermined the stability of many of the countries in the region and constitute a solid source of both economic and power benefits, providing substantial importance for the lucrative trade.

In the case of small arms and light weapons (SALW), their trafficking and smuggling place them at the pinnacle of revenue-generating activities, along with migrant smuggling, as they can be used both for sale and as a means of buying protection and exercising control over populations and transit routes. Thus, their proliferation, in the absence of strong state authority, has ended up encouraging the irruption of different armed actors in the region, fueling violence and local conflicts.

The prevalence of violent and criminal groups in West Africa, the Sahel, and North Africa, as well as the links between cross-border illicit activities, have led to the militarization of traditional trade routes in recent years (Arbia and Kartas, 2015; de TESSIÈRES, 2017; FES, 2014). However, this securitarian component



has not managed to exert its force on the affected countries to the same extent, as not all have the resources to exercise strong state authority and control, and new security challenges have eventually emerged in the current criminal web.

Due to the virulence of violent extremism, the Sahel has positioned itself as the epicenter of terrorist violence worldwide over the last decade. The phenomenon of terrorism, especially jihadist terrorism, left almost 5,000 dead in West Africa alone in 2022, with a strong presence in countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso<sup>1</sup>. The consolidation of the global jihadist movement and its strong irruption on the African scene has had far-reaching implications for the economic, social, and political stability of the countries of the region, which occupy the highest positions in the number of victims, as well as for the human security of their inhabitants.

The cooperative relationship between organized crime and terrorism is a complex issue because of the multitude of actors that converge around this phenomenon, especially in the post-revolutionary scenario present in Libya today. The rapid access to weapons by violent groups following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011 and the ability to move them across borders into the Sahel, the Middle East, and other conflict zones have since posed significant challenges to national and international security.

One could date the availability of firearms as a catalyst for violent extremism in North Africa from well before 2011, but the outbreak of civil war in Libya and its ramifications in local conflicts marked a paradigm shift in the impact of terrorism on the current regional landscape. The Islamist armed groups, undermining the social and tribal realities that gave rise to the revolts that, in 2011, affected almost all the Arab countries in Africa and the Middle East to a greater or lesser extent, were able to take advantage of the situation, looting arsenals and snatching weapons and ammunition from the security forces that had fallen in combat. Thus, groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and later the branch of the Islamic State in Libya, collected all the firearms and ammunition they could get their hands on to carry out their armed struggle, in a context where corruption among rulers and criminal networks exacerbated the situation of insecurity in national arms depots. Now, it is the JNIM coalition, affiliated with Al Qaeda and in which AQIM is integrated, which is responsible for benefiting from both the possession and the smuggling of weapons in the regions under its control, especially in Mali. The Daesh branch in Libya does the

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1 For more information on these aspects, see Chapters 1 and 2.



same, favoring its cells in the region and financing itself from arms trafficking and smuggling (Security Council Report, 2023:10). For its part, Boko Haram does the same in the Lake Chad basin, sustaining a degree of collaborative linkage that allows extremist groups to have weapons and ammunition to carry out their attacks, amplify their financing and power in their areas of operation and extort the local population.

As will be discussed throughout these pages, the nexus between firearms trafficking and terrorism constitutes a major threat to global security. The availability of firearms has fueled the growth of terrorism and other violent crime in power and influence, causing significant human suffering and exacerbating current social, economic, and political turbulence. The impact of firearms trafficking and terrorism has been felt around the world, from terrorist attacks in major cities to armed conflicts in rural areas, but it also encourages terrorist groups-especially Al Qaeda's territorial branch in West Africa-to de facto contest government authority by providing security and bringing the population under their control.

The impact of firearms trafficking and terrorism on human security is significant. In conflict-affected countries, the availability of weapons has perpetuated cycles of violence, aggravated the humanitarian situation, and made it difficult for personnel on the ground to deliver aid, especially to the most vulnerable. In urban areas, the threat of terrorist attacks has led to increased security measures, including the deployment of military and police forces, which is hurting civil liberties and, at times, human rights themselves.

The following sections examine in greater detail how organized crime engaged in arms smuggling and trafficking and violent extremism interact, highlighting the impact of this business in feeding back into the resilience of groups and the role they play as a facilitating vector for terrorist activities. The specific relationship between firearms/SALW and terrorism in the region will be analyzed, examining how the availability of these weapons has had a profound impact on the rise of terrorism, especially from 2011 onwards. To this end, this study focuses on the implications of the regime collapse in Libya, which led to an increase in the illicit trade of SALW, complicating the already fragile security situation in the area. It also analyzes how the use of weapons has enabled extremist violence both as a means of attack (direct use) and as an extortion tool for blackmail, extortion, or kidnapping activities (indirect use). Thus, the study will explore the trends emerging from this criminal nexus, outlining the main points to be closely monitored on the link between the two criminal actors by practitioners, law enforcement, and counter-terrorism policy decision-makers.



## **2. Nature of firearms trafficking and smuggling**

The relationship between terrorism and transnational organized crime in Africa has been one of the greatest security threats for more than a decade, as it has proved to be a permeable challenge that can acquire various nuances or degrees of linkage.

In recent years there has been an increase in the trafficking of firearms, especially small arms and light weapons, and their smuggling has taken place by land, sea, and air. Criminal organizations and terrorist groups, taking advantage of weak government structures, corruption, and conflicts to exploit loopholes in national and international regulations, have benefited from the activity of organized crime in a business that reaches over one million dollars in monthly revenues.

The trafficking and smuggling of firearms/ SALW have been identified as a major security threat due to the possibility of having terrorist individuals as end users, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Terrorist organizations have taken advantage of the ready availability of weapons, making them a priority for acquisition through illegal channels such as the black market, brokers in conflict, or from personnel killed in combat. The arms trade, as it exists today, is an opaque and complex network of suppliers, intermediaries, and end users, making it difficult to track and intercept illegal arms flows. Among the characteristics that favor firearms over other types of contraband goods is the fact that they are a durable good compared to other types of transit merchandise, such as the drug market. If kept, firearms can last for several decades, and their rapid availability in outbreaks of conflict makes them strategic goods both for use in attacks to gain power and territory (direct use) and for their availability as a tool to attract recruits and, failing that, for extortion and blackmail (indirect use).

Employing firearms in terrorist activities has become increasingly common in recent years, providing terrorists with the ability to inflict mass casualties and generate fear and panic among the population they seek to subdue. Wielding a gun is a choice for terrorists because of their lethal nature and ease of use, especially if they are small or easy to handle, and because they have become widely available through illicit arms trafficking and stockpile looting networks.

The use of SALW in terrorist activities has had a significant impact on the tactics and strategies of terrorist groups. Firearms have provided terrorists with the ability to carry out attacks from a distance, increasing their effectiveness and



reducing the risk of detection. They have also been used as an extortion tool to swell their ranks, which has often resulted in large-scale massacres when locals refuse to buy into the violent extremism narrative. Their indiscriminate use in public spaces, moreover, has had a significant psychological impact on communities, creating a prolonged sense of vulnerability and fear.

Terrorist groups also stockpile firearms to create a climate of lack of control and institutional incompetence, being able to divert weapons intercepted in national stockpiles back and forth across borders (Mangan and Nowak, 2019:5) in the face of an authority unable to monitor and prevent what happens inside its borders. The advance and consolidation of extremist movements along border axes and in wide spaces in the heartland of countries hit by terrorist activity has ended up undermining political stability in many nations, by creating a climate of lawlessness and violence that has as its ultimate goal the erosion of the institutions legitimized to exercise the use of force and the rule of law.

**Criminal organizations and terrorist groups, taking advantage of weak government structures, corruption, and conflicts to exploit loopholes in national and international regulations, have benefited from the activity of organized crime in a business that reaches over one million dollars in monthly revenues**

The sources of origin are both internal (from West Africa and the Sahel) and external and can be located in other regions of the continent or at the international level<sup>2</sup>. Production in the region, although limited, is designed to meet the demand of domestic security forces, although these have also often been targeted by terrorists through ambushes and attacks (Mangan and Nowak, 2019:5).

Estimating the total number of weapons produced domestically is complicated by the absence of rigorous record keeping, but corruption and theft of national stockpiles and evidence on the ground provide some clues to intra- and inter-regional supply. Armed groups in northern Mali, for example, were found to be employing weaponry from the Malian arsenal (Anders, 2015:179). In Burkina Faso, significant quantities of weapons were also diverted from government stockpiles following a military and police mutiny in 2011 (Mémier, Luntumbue,

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<sup>2</sup> The international black market, with ramifications in Europe, the Americas and/or Asia, is an interconnected network of intermediaries, key individuals and support personnel with the sole mission of supporting criminal structures and perpetuating the influence of the illicit economy in global trade.



and Ravet, 2012:164-65). For its part, Niger acts as a regional distribution and transit hub, while Burkina Faso and Mali serve as two of the main final destination points. In the latter, the outbreak of the separatist conflict in the north of the country in 2012 has caused flows to become more intense and the end-users benefiting from the weapons to become increasingly diverse. In North Africa, effective responses to terrorism and organized crime through the militarization of strategies in countries such as Algeria, while proving successful at the national level - except in some parts of the south of the country - have further concentrated the focus of criminal action on neighbors such as Libya and Mali.

If we consider the main points of origin of the weapons, not counting those of home-made or difficult to register, the trans-regional trafficking route from Libya into the Sahel has acted as one of the main catalytic sources of armament in West Africa and its demand at the regional level since 2011. While this flow has been reduced by domestic demand in the Libyan political crisis and intercommunal conflicts in the south of the country, arms proliferation in Libya remains a major source of SALW in the region, and its role in the current illicit economy markets and how different stakeholders, including violent extremist organizations, benefit from it needs to be reviewed.

### **3. Libya's role in arms smuggling and trafficking**

Libya has become a hub of the regional and trans-Saharan illicit economy, ranging from human and drug trafficking to oil and arms smuggling. The absence of effective governance and the constant clashes for political recognition between factions in Tripoli and rival forces in the west of the country today act as a catalyst for the illicit economy as a method of survival, not only between armed groups and insurgent movements but also between rulers. The country's geographical location and porous borders, moreover, make it an important transit point for smugglers of goods, such as arms, diverted to the Sahel and other ongoing conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. The presence of mercenaries, armed militias, foreign fighters, and international powers involved in the current conflict has ended up further exacerbating the national scenario, stalling the political process for more than a decade and favoring the return of arms flows back into Libya.



## **The use of SALW in terrorist activities has had a significant impact on the tactics and strategies of terrorist groups**

The absence of a central authority, amid political upheaval, as well as the desertion of security forces and the proliferation of armed groups, have facilitated the trafficking of arms and ammunition across the Libyan border, diverted from Gaddafi-era stockpiles, from the battlefield or intercepted without authorization from other actors involved in the conflict. Overt instability in hot spots in Mali, Sudan, or Libya itself, in turn, has opened up an economic corridor demanding arms and ammunition from rebel groups, businessmen, and the civilian population itself. In 2018, the independent research project tracking the flow of small arms and light weapons Small Arms Survey held that the country with the most weapons in private possession was precisely Libya, with 13.27 weapons per 100 inhabitants (Small Arms Survey, 2020).

During the Qaddafi era, the country was a major source of SALW for various armed groups in the region. Qaddafi viewed arms procurement as a strategic priority for Libya, and spent billions of dollars on arms purchases, mainly from the former Soviet Union (and later Russia), and to a lesser extent from France and Italy (SIPRI, n.d.). The Libyan leader was a key personality in the Arab nationalist movement and saw himself as a leading figure in the struggle against Western imperialism in the Middle East and Africa. A strong advocate of arms procurement as a means of maintaining Libya's independence and countering the power of neighboring countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, Qaddafi made use of his enormous oil wealth in exchange for the import of more than 30 billion arms and then redistributed them to various groups in the region sympathetic to Libyan interests. In the Sahara-Sahel, Qaddafi supported various Tuareg rebel groups fighting for greater autonomy and independence for their respective countries, while backing Arab nationalism in Darfur and funding rebel groups in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Tufts University, n.d.). In short, Qaddafi used Libya's vast oil wealth to purchase arms abroad and fund armed groups aligned with his pan-Arabist vision of Libyan foreign and domestic policy in the pre-revolutionary context. These ranged from small arms and light weapons to even anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles. Subsequently, much of the arms that Libya acquired during the Qaddafi era were distributed to various armed groups in the region, which continued to operate long after his fall.



The collapse of the Qaddafi regime opened up new opportunities for the illicit economy, transforming the country into one of the central hubs of arms smuggling and arms sales across the continent. With the man with the biggest monopoly on firearms trafficking and smuggling gone, he left behind a chaos that allowed armed groups to loot military bases and weapons caches. The Libyan regime's arsenals were dispersed in the neighborhood at an alarming rate after the revolution and the knock-on effect it had on the Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali - subsequently appropriated by radical Islamism - energized conflict throughout the region and strengthened criminal operational capacity from Mali to South Sudan. According to Small Arms Survey, it is estimated that more than one million firearms and light weapons were smuggled out of Libya after the revolution. In Niger alone, most of the weapons seized between 2013 and 2017 came from Libyan stockpiles, while in Mali, Tuareg fighters in Qaddafi's ranks returned to the Azawad region with armored vehicles, caches of anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, mortars, and heavy machine guns (Marsh, 2017:82). Despite the diversion in arms proliferation to Libya itself in the years after 2014, the report of the UN Security Council Panel of Experts on Libya concluded in 2015 that weapons from the former Italian colony had significantly strengthened the military capacity of terrorist groups in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia or Mali (Panel of Experts, 2015:47).

The situation in post-revolutionary Libya also facilitated the development of a thriving black market for small arms and light weapons, which were openly sold on marketplaces and online platforms. The government's lack of effective control over the country's borders and the weakness of the national security structure facilitated the smuggling of weapons in and out of Libya. This black market has continued to thrive even after the establishment of sanctions, international missions, and task forces on the ground, which have struggled to establish a firewall on illicit flows into the country and take joint measures aimed at countering arms proliferation in the region.

While it is true that domestic demand for arms has diverted its volume back into Libya since 2014, its spike in recent years has allowed the proliferation of weaponry to have a devastating impact on the security situation in West Africa (Micallef et al, 2019). Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al Din, and Boko Haram have benefited from the permeability and availability of weapons in the area, using SALW to carry out attacks against civilian populations, military targets, and international forces. The use of these weapons has led to a dramatic increase in the number of casualties in the



region and has contributed to the displacement of more than one million people, according to data from the Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Center (IDMC, 2022).

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons at the regional level has also had a significant impact on organized crime. Criminal networks have used these weapons to carry out a range of illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, or illegal mining. The availability of weapons has made it easier for these groups to establish control over territory and challenge the authority of the state, a *modus operandi* shared by terrorism as a method of subjugating the population under their control.

In addition to supplying weapons to non-state actors, Libya has also been a transit point for arms traffickers. The country's vast desert borders and weak security infrastructure have made it an attractive place for smugglers to move their goods across borders undetected. According to numerous investigations, arms traffickers have used Libya's southern borders to transport weapons to neighboring countries such as Mali, Niger, and Chad (Aguilera, 2022; Micallef et al, 2019; Strazzari and Zampagni, 2018). Also, terrorist groups use Libya as a base of operations, taking advantage of the country's political instability and lack of effective governance. Without going any further, Daesh found fertile ground for its operations in Libya in the fall of 2014, taking advantage of the political chaos and security vacuum, and managed to take control of several key coastal cities, including Sirte, where it established its *de facto* capital in the country.

Libya's role in the interplay between illicit economies and the trans-Saharan terrorist presence has been significant. The huge stockpiles of weapons, coupled with its weak security infrastructure and political instability, have made it an ideal place for arms smugglers and terrorist groups to operate. Following the collapse of the regime in Libya, some authorities indicated that a multitude of types of weapons had been smuggled into countries such as Mali by returnees, especially by former Libyan regular army fighters or mercenaries during the conflict (Security Council Report, 2012:10). The same sources warned of an increase in the arms trade in the West African region. In Tunisia alone, the authorities went so far as to claim in 2015 that "most of the military equipment used in terrorist activities came from Libya" (Panel of Experts, 2015:48). Despite this, some countries managed to repel the attempted diversion of weapons within their territories. This was the case in Niger, whose army managed to seize weapons, ammunition,



and explosives suspected of originating from Libyan stockpiles in the hands of returned fighters, arms traffickers, and AQIM terrorists. Niger authorities even seized a convoy carrying 645 kg of explosives and 445 detonators, warning that they were destined for the AQIM camp in northern Mali, which came to show that the terrorist group had been acquiring weaponry from Libyan arsenals. For their part, representatives of the then-Malian government reported a channel of dialogue with the returnees, mainly Malian Tuaregs, encouraging them to surrender their weapons voluntarily (Security Council Report, 2012:10), which also shows that some countries did not have mechanisms in place to contain the threat of organized crime and terrorism that had grown since the war in Libya as much as their neighbors.

The process of militarization of countries such as Algeria or Tunisia, moreover, has condemned organized crime and violent extremism to share closer spaces, which increases the risk of a possible convergence in the face of a common enemy. The long episodes of violence in West Africa, exacerbated since the post-2011 context, have caused the criminal business to expand to larger and more diverse clients in the area, including terrorist groups. To this end, it is necessary to review the relationship between the arms smuggling and trafficking industry and the consolidation of violent extremism in the region, considering a relationship of coexistence and, at times, cooperation, which has often allowed both criminal groups to circumvent the operations of the security forces.

#### **4. Arms trafficking as a driver of the rise of terrorism and violence in conflict zones**

The possession of firearms/SALW is an essential factor in many of the strategies and modus operandi of jihadist groups. Its impact on the success of their objectives is significant, as weapons are an asset that contributes to the growth of extremist groups both directly and indirectly. As mentioned above, their use can be related as a tool to perpetrate attacks (direct use), as well as an extortion tool to subdue or conquer potential recruits and the local population (indirect use), which, coupled with the durable nature of a well-preserved weapon, makes it a coveted commodity for these violent groups.

The kidnapping for ransom industry and extortion are two of the most important sources of income for terrorist groups such as Daesh and Al Qaeda in Africa today, using weapons as the preferred tool for these criminal activities. In this regard, it is estimated that the JNIM coalition, encompassing different Al Qaeda-affiliated groups that in turn have found an additional source of funding



from organized crime, has earned up to \$40 million from this practice since its creation in 2017 (Micallef et al, 2019:5). In light of increased complexity in committing these abuses against tourists and foreign personnel, the rise of kidnapping and extortion of locals has opened up a lucrative new opportunity in this criminal industry, especially in countries that, like Burkina Faso, did not have a long history with this type of criminal practice (Micallef et al, 2019). In this process, weapons are of great use both in an external strategic objective and as part of an operational mindset shift towards different victims by amplifying the ability to subdue their targets and control their actions.

The expansion of territory and influence by radical Islamism and the success of trans-Saharan military operations in recent years have further amalgamated organized crime dedicated to arms trafficking and jihadist groups. The Malian region of Mopti, which had historically stayed away from serious crime, now constitutes the power center of arms trafficking in the country, the cradle of local vandalism and jihadist presence (Micallef et al, 2019:25). Successive counter-terrorism campaigns, especially since the militarization of the Sahara-Sahel from 2014, have eroded the capacity not only of jihadism but indirectly also of organized crime, with a military presence that has shifted the gravitational force of terrorism and illicit economies to strategic points such as the Salvador Pass, a border enclave between Niger, Libya, and Algeria. The transfer of criminal activity to other centers of action, adapting to different contexts and benefiting from the current diplomatic reformulation of countries such as Mali or Burkina Faso with their traditional international partners, adds yet another degree of insecurity to the future of the fight against terrorism, which has succeeded in relegating organized crime to quite demarcated routes and very limited margins<sup>3</sup>.

Against this backdrop, it is important to note that firearms smuggling has played a key role in the growth of terrorist organizations such as Daesh, Boko Haram, and the various groups of the Al Qaeda-affiliated JNIM coalition. In this regard, it received, in 2017, the Panel of Experts of the UN Security Council repeated reports by the Tuareg community related to arms transfers to Ansar al Din, belonging to JNIM (Panel of Experts, 2017:51). The deliveries, allegedly through the Ansar el Haqq website, would be of light weapons, such as assault rifles, anti-tank weapons, and explosives. For its part, Boko Haram has relied on arms smuggling into Nigeria, especially through Cameroon and Benin (Odey

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<sup>3</sup> The tension between Mali and Burkina Faso with France has led to the end of Operation Barkhane in the Sahel and the Takuba Task Force, relegating the French presence to a military strategy dependent on coordination with other regional forces. Current diplomatic relations between the African countries and Paris are strained, to the point of the French ambassador having been expelled from the former and recently invited to leave the latter.



et al, 2022:389). However, the Nigerian group, led by Abubakar Shekau until he died in 2021, also has among its strengths the stockpiling of weaponry in the assault on military checkpoints and police stations. The same is true of its main competitor in the Lake Chad basin. ISWAP, the West African branch of the Islamic State, is inclined to rearm its militancy by looting regional arsenals in Nigeria, Chad, and Niger and seizing weapons from personnel killed in combat (Conflict Armament Research, 2022:8), something on which its counterpart in the Western Sahel, the Islamic State of the Sahel, also depends<sup>4</sup>.

The impact of the firearms business on the rise of terrorism is not limited to the direct use of firearms in attacks or operational models: the illicit economy has created a broader culture of violence and lawlessness that systematically challenges political-institutional stability and the rule of law. The criminal arms trafficking industry, in turn, has contributed to the growth of organized crime and facilitated the spread of corruption and other forms of criminal activity, while it has been strengthened as a guarantor of survival and self-defense for ethnic communities, cattle ranchers and other civil society groups frightened by the violence in their territory. Having a private weapon is now more necessary than in the pre-revolutionary context, as the diversification of the threat and the constant reminder of the model of radical Islamism and inter-communal conflicts leads civil society to be supplied with weapons in informal trades and interconnected networks at the communal and tribal levels. The illicit arms trade also serves the local population as a vector for economic development, as they often have no alternative economic sources within the legal system itself to meet their needs and ensure their survival. In the case of the arms market, as well as in the illicit business of other goods such as drugs or the illegal extraction of natural resources, local society is highly dependent on strong leaders and elites of reference, who often control the trafficking networks, the intermediaries and authorities involved, as well as the established routes of entry and exit of the cargo.

The impact of arms smuggling and trafficking on terrorism in the conflict zones of the Sahel is devastating for the humanitarian situation in the region. The availability of weapons has fueled the intensity and duration of conflicts, causing displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and loss of life. Terrorist groups, taking advantage of the availability of weapons, have committed heinous crimes against the civilian population, including abductions and summary executions.

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<sup>4</sup> In March 2022, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) was renamed to Islamic State in the Sahel, (IS-Sahel), to give them greater independence from their other regional branch in West Africa (also known as ISWAP).



The impact of these acts of violence is profound and long-lasting, and more often than not the victims end up being the most vulnerable, especially women and children.

The proliferation of weapons in the region has also impacted the humanitarian response to crises. Humanitarian actors face significant risks when operating in conflict zones, as they are often targeted by armed groups seeking to disrupt their activities or methods of survival. Indeed, the presence of weapons in conflict zones makes it difficult for humanitarian personnel to access communities in need, as they are often caught in the crossfire or are the target of violent attacks. This is attested to by the numerous condemnations of attacks against international mission personnel, with recent examples just a few weeks ago against the UN mission in Mali<sup>5</sup> (Security Council, 2023).

In addition to aggravating humanitarian crises, cooperation between organized crime and terrorism also has a serious gender impact. Women and girls in these regions face particular challenges as a result of the proliferation of weapons, where the prevalence of firearms/SALW makes them more prone to violence against these groups. In conflict zones where armed groups are active, women and girls are often subjected to sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriages. The easy availability of weapons facilitates these crimes, as perpetrators often use this tool as a method of intimidation and control over their victims. These crimes are not only traumatic for the victims on an individual level but also have a broader psychological impact on the community, creating a climate of fear and insecurity that has lasting effects on the civilian population. In similar terms, the proliferation of weapons also limits the ability of women and girls to participate in public life, including access to education and health care (Aguilera, Pérez, and López, 2023). The presence of armed groups in the region has led to the closure or fear of families from taking their women and daughters to schools and clinics, leaving many without access to essential services. In addition, the threat of violence hinders women's free movement and participation in economic activities, limiting their ability to gain independence or provide for their families. At the institutional level, in practice, women and girls are also often excluded from security-related decision-making processes, with their needs and concerns not considered in policies and programs related to arms control and conflict resolution. This exclusion perpetuates gender inequality and limits the effectiveness of efforts to address SALW proliferation in the region.

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<sup>5</sup> The attack was perpetrated against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on February 21, 2023 in the vicinity of the village of Songobia, southwest of the city of Bandiagara. Three Senegalese peacekeepers were killed and five wounded.



Finally, arms smuggling and trafficking also have long-term implications for peace and stability in the region. The continued availability of weapons in conflict zones hinders the achievement of lasting peace and security, making it difficult for armed groups to regroup and continue their activities. The proliferation of weapons also perpetuates cycles of violence and revenge, making it difficult to restore trust and foster reconciliation between communities. If we return to the militarization of spaces traditionally targeted by the transit of illicit goods - such as border areas in Algeria, Tunisia, or Niger - we also see how the phenomenon is mutating into other spaces. The Salvador Pass<sup>6</sup>, a strategic point of high operational intensity for the Al Qaeda branch in the Islamic Maghreb and Daesh, is undergoing a process of intensification of trafficking and smuggling of illicit goods despite the anti-terrorist and surveillance forces in the area. This transformation and restructuring of traditional routes run the risk of finding, on the part of terrorism and organized crime, a reason to join forces despite ideological differences. The recent reformulation of the foreign policy of traditional European partners, especially France, adds a further degree of uncertainty to the operational capability and future maintenance of international forces in this and other hot spots in the area.

**In conflict zones where armed groups are active, women and girls are often subjected to sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriages. The easy availability of weapons facilitates these crimes, as perpetrators often use this tool as a method of intimidation and control over their victims**

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<sup>6</sup> The Salvador Pass is located northwest of Madama, in the Nigerian region of Agadez, a few kilometers from the border with Algeria and Libya. It is a strategic crossing due to its cross-border nature and has a presence of jihadist groups and smugglers of all kinds, especially arms and drugs. The presence of Niger security forces and European military personnel has been constant. However, the recent restructuring of foreign missions, especially by France, and the decrease in troops on the ground by European partners adds a degree of uncertainty to the success of future operations against terrorism and other criminal groups.



## 5. Conclusions

The interconnectedness of illicit economies in West Africa and the Sahel has led to the proliferation of trafficking and smuggling of all kinds of goods, including firearms, which have become one of the most influential sources of economic power. This lucrative trade, among other practices that have become entrenched in the criminal ecosystem in North Africa and the Sahel, has played a key role in exacerbating violence and social unrest in the area. The proliferation of weaponry has led to the emergence and strengthening of different armed actors at the regional level, fueling local conflicts, inter-communal disputes, and the rise of violent extremism.

The emergence of the West African space as the epicenter of global terrorist activity today exacerbates the deterioration of security, as Al Qaeda and Daesh territorial franchises can find in organized crime a competitive advantage for their criminal activities.

The complicity between organized crime and violent jihadist groups has further complicated this issue, especially in the post-revolutionary scenario in Libya. The rapid access to weapons by violent groups following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011 and the ability to move them across borders into the Sahel, the Middle East, and other conflict zones has ultimately posed significant challenges for national and international security. The collapse in the Libyan regime has marked a paradigm shift in the impact of terrorism on the regional landscape, a context that groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and Daesh have managed to capitalize on through the looting of national arsenals and the establishment of transit routes by criminal networks that have allowed them to continue to carry out their objectives with relative impunity.

The illicit trafficking of firearms and their link to terrorism pose a danger to global security. Easy access to firearms has contributed to the growth of violent extremism and other criminal activities, causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing social, economic, and political problems. The far-reaching effects of firearms trafficking and terrorism can be seen around the world, from terrorist attacks in metropolitan areas to armed conflicts in remote regions. The presence of firearms/SALW allows ever-growing terrorist organizations to challenge government authority, as seen in the territorial branch of Al Qaeda in West Africa, which on many occasions ends up taking control of the security of the population itself.



The impact of firearms trafficking and terrorism extends to human security, which is significantly affected by the availability of weapons in conflict-affected areas. The proliferation of weapons not only exacerbates episodes of violence but also hinders the delivery of aid by humanitarian groups, especially to the most vulnerable populations. Moreover, in urban regions, fear of terrorist attacks has prompted the adoption of stricter security measures, involving the deployment of military and police forces. Although this has been successful in the fight against terrorism and organized crime, there is a risk that it could be transferred geographically to other areas of the region, where the two criminal spheres could be amalgamated and share a common enemy. It is therefore essential to closely follow the trajectory of both phenomena, considering them as a challenge that, due to their transnational nature, responds to a cross-cutting issue that needs to be addressed with the same approach.

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# VICTIMS OF JIHADIST TERRORISM

## Inés Gaviria

### 1. Introduction

Jihadist terrorist activity has not been among the main topics of public and media conversation throughout 2022, which is both good and bad news. It is good news because it reveals that the majority of society - of Western societies, one might specify - no longer perceives jihadist terrorism as an imminent threat to their security. This could contribute to weakening the organizations and individuals who perpetrate jihadist attacks since the vulnerability of societies is a circumstance that facilitates their terrorist action. As General Miguel Ángel Ballesteros, currently Director of the National Security Department of the Spanish Prime Minister's Office, explained at the 2017 COVITE Annual Conference, it is essential that society has the mechanisms and resources to recover quickly from a terrorist attack, not only for the strength of citizens and the defense of the rule of law, but also to weaken the terrorists themselves. And that includes, in part, not transmitting excessive alarm about the terrorist phenomenon through the media. "Society has to send a message to the terrorists: that they are not going to achieve anything. That victims are protected by society, as they are a structural part of the fight against terrorism. Society has to be resilient, it has to recover quickly from terrorist attacks", were his words on this day held on 23 November 2017 in Madrid. Maite Pagazaurtundúa, MEP and victim of ETA terrorism - her brother Joxeba Pagazaurtundúa was assassinated by ETA on 8 February 2003 - also expressed her views in her *Libro blanco y negro del terrorismo en Europa*:



“The propagation of terrorist acts so that the message of terror reaches the furthest corners of the targeted society is essential, so terrorists become studious publicists who design a specific language to describe their terrorist acts, while seeking a staging that captures the attention of the entire population to arouse their interest and awaken their desire to put an end to terror by putting pressure on their rulers. Economically developed democratic countries are particularly vulnerable to the terrorist phenomenon if they have not developed education on the need to be resilient. In other words, the ability to resist the pressure of any attack and to return to normal civic life as quickly as possible. Resilience is one of the four guiding principles of the Spanish National Security Strategy” (Pagazaurtundúa, 2017).

However, the lesser coverage of jihadist terrorism in the general media is also, in turn, bad news. This is because, as this report shows, jihadist terrorism is far from disappearing, with a total of 2,270 jihadist attacks documented in 2022, in which 8,305 people lost their lives<sup>1</sup>. Jihadism continues to be the terrorist phenomenon that claims the most lives each year, many more than any other type of terrorism. The fact that it does not make as many headlines as it did a few years ago does not mean that it has ceased to be a serious threat to public security. Moreover, as Jesús Díez Alcalde states, it is “the greatest threat facing the world today” in terms of security (Díez, 2021). Therefore, its lack of presence in public conversation may lead to a false perception of security that does not correspond to reality.

Journalist Leila Nachawati warns that the scarcity of information about an event not only runs the risk of drawing a false appreciation of it but also “can contribute to dehumanizing the conflict and thus making it even more difficult to empathize with the victims”. (Rubio, 2015). To a large extent, this is the case with the victims of jihadist terrorism: we do not know who they were, how old they were when they were killed, what their lives were like before they died, or how many children they have orphaned. Thousands of broken lives are crammed into bulky figures whose handwriting we are unable to decipher. Thousands of people, with names and surnames, each year fall down the drain of oblivion because so many attacks are perpetrated, and so many people die in them, that it is impossible for us to keep count of all the lives shattered. There are not even official figures for the number of jihadist victims in some of the countries where, year after year, a large number of attacks are perpetrated.

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<sup>1</sup> See the chapter “Global Jihadist Terrorism. Scenarios, actors and trends in 2022” in this Yearbook.



Reducing the victims of jihadist terrorism to numbers is, in addition to dehumanizing, a mistake; fundamentally because without victims it is impossible to measure the magnitude of a phenomenon such as terrorism. General Ballesteros stressed this point during the COVITE Annual Conference 2017: “Solidarity with the victims of terrorism is a key part of counter-terrorism policy to strengthen resilience. The fight against radicalization and against ideas that can give cover and justification to any kind of terrorism is essential,” he said. In this sense, the philosopher Martín Alonso also expressed himself at another COVITE Annual Conference, in 2019: “The victims of terrorism point directly to the murderers and to the ideologies that legitimize terrorism”<sup>2</sup>.

The victims are the symbol of the aggression against the rule of law that terrorism seeks to carry out in order to erode it and thus impose a series of political, religious, or any other type of objectives by terrorists on a specific political community (Gaviria, 2022). In the case of jihadist terrorism, the objective pursued is, according to Jesús Díez Alcalde, “the overthrow of apostate Islamic regimes or those that do not support their positions, and the absolute domination of Western territories in order to expand their alleged caliphate” (Díez, 2021). This would be the “objective truth of the victims”, in the words of Joseba Arregi, which “does not lie in the political ideas of those killed, but in the intention by which the executioner turned them into victims” (Arregi, 2008). It is essential that this “political meaning” of the victims, as coined by Arregi, be highlighted in analyses of jihadist terrorism. This is the only way to delegitimize the ideologies that underpin terrorist organizations. An issue that, in Rogelio Alonso’s opinion, is not sufficiently emphasized: “It is common for political, journalistic, academic and even religious circles, both Christian and Muslim, to de-ideologize the crimes committed in the name of Islam. Under the pretext of avoiding the criminalization of this religion, the murders inspired by radical Islamism are emptied of their content, thus avoiding an essential factor in understanding the causes of the phenomenon and its prevention’ (Rogelio, 2023).

The lack of public presence of the victims of jihadist terrorism has a lot to do with the fact that the phenomenon is not analyzed from this political significance. Something similar happened with regard to ETA terrorism. It was not until the victims decided to gain a public presence that terrorism began to be analyzed from their perspective and its political significance. This is explained by Cristina Cuesta, director of the Miguel Ángel Blanco Foundation and a victim of terrorism

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<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Martín Alonso at the XVIII Annual COVITE Conference, 4 December 2019: <https://vimeo.com/380729482>



- her father was assassinated on 26 March 1982 by the Comandos Autónomos Anticapitalistas, a dissident terrorist group of ETA.

What has been COVITE's most specific contribution to the public debate since it was set up? What has it contributed to the defense of the victims of terrorism? COVITE unexpectedly revealed, from the heart-rending force of each crime and the lucidity of the testimony, that the victims of terrorism were political victims because terrorism, especially that of ETA, had decided to elect us. The victims of COVITE assume that we represent Spanish constitutional democracy, the rule of law, democratic plurality and citizenship, political realities confronted with the fanatical and sectarian conception of society that terrorists have, and the totalitarian attack that ETA tried to impose with blood and fire (Cuesta, 2018).

In the case of ETA terrorism, the victims' associative movements were fundamental for the victims to cross the threshold from the private to the public sphere, in such a way that the focus of the analysis was not exclusively on the perpetrators, but also on the passive and involuntary protagonists of the phenomenon, who are the victims. It was also essential that this public space was conquered where the terrorists obtained greater legitimacy and complicity from some political parties and civil society, which in the case of ETA was in the Basque Country and Navarre. COVITE was founded on 28 November 1998 in San Sebastian, the Basque city where ETA perpetrated the most murders - 90 fatalities. The Collective was formed 'in the midst of humiliations and conditions of contempt', as the association's spokespersons acknowledged more than twenty years later, 'because we needed it so that intolerance would not end up crushing freedom in every inch of our society' (Covite, 2021). In the case of jihadist terrorism, a strong associative movement in those countries where jihadist terrorism is most active, that is, in countries with Muslim culture and religion, would have a powerful delegitimizing effect on terrorism. However, in most of these countries, the necessary conditions do not exist for associations of victims of terrorism to emerge and consolidate.

It is important to note that, just as most of ETA's victims were Basques, most of the victims of jihadism are Muslims. This may seem obvious, but it is by no means so. ETA claimed to commit its crimes "in the name of the Basques" or to "defend the Basques" from a supposed Spanish invasion. Jihadist terrorists also claim to kill "in the name of Muslims". These self-justifying fallacies have the danger of stigmatizing all Basques or all Muslims because a handful of them



decide to commit crimes in their name. It is, therefore, necessary to emphasize that not only do the terrorists not represent the Basques or Muslims, but these societies are their main victims. If anything, the terrorists only represent a tiny part of these political communities, those that are radicalized and fanaticized.

The vast majority of Muslims are ashamed of jihadist terrorists and repudiate radical Islamism, just as the majority of Basques did not support ETA terrorism. It is a different matter that the fear spread by terrorists prevents the majority who are against violence from expressing it openly. Terror spreads a cloak of silence over the societies it directly affects. This is precisely why the public presence of victims is so necessary because they break the spiral of silence that leads societies to normalize the serious human rights violations caused by terrorism. Victims are the living and clear memory of evil, and their testimony is the greatest and most effective proof that no political, religious, or other ends justify violent ends.

## **2. Invisible victims?**

Why do the victims of jihadist terrorism barely have any public presence? Why do we know the names and surnames of almost no victims of jihadism killed in 2022? In previous editions of the Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook, specifically those of 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2021, this chapter dedicated to the victims of jihadism has resorted to the concept of the “sentimental kilometer”, created by the journalist Arcadi Espada, which continues to be useful in this chapter to explain this kind of invisibility to which the victims of jihadism are condemned (Espada, 2003).

The “sentimental kilometer” consists of the inversely proportional relationship between the emotion provoked by a murder and the kilometers away from where it occurred. The more kilometers, the less emotion. We are most shocked by events that take place in the circles closest to us. The distance that separates us from the victims is not only measured in kilometers: there is also a cultural distance. This explains why we experienced the 9/11 attacks as our own and why any attack perpetrated in Burkina Faso or Mali - countries closer to Europe, in terms of physical distance, than the US - is alien to us. In this sense, journalism and the media play an important role in the equation of the sentimental kilometer, being the intermediaries between reality, especially the most distant, and public opinion. The rules of the profession determine how this relationship is articulated in several ways. First, what is newsworthy is what is out of the ordinary; and this is often bad news. Second, bad news that happens in places where it is unusual



tends to attract more attention, and therefore to be more newsworthy, than bad news that becomes routine. Because when bad news becomes routine, it ceases to be news. This explains why we assume that a jihadist attack in Burkina Faso or Mali is the order of the day and, therefore, ceases to be news.

The five countries most affected by jihadist terrorism in 2022, in terms of number of attacks, were Burkina Faso, Mali, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, as reflected in chapter 1 of this Yearbook. In terms of the number of fatalities, the countries in which most people have died as a result of jihadist terrorism are Burkina Faso, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Afghanistan, with a total of 5,256 victims. All of these countries have two characteristics in common that lead to their lack of media focus and, consequently, to the process of making the victims of terrorism invisible.

On the one hand, all of them have been mired for years in a situation of violence, war, and state fragility that, to a certain extent, facilitates the advances of jihadist terrorism. As researcher Marta Summers explains, “The missions and strategies followed in the last decade against terrorism are not yielding the expected results in the Western Sahel, which has become one of the regions of the world most affected by jihadist terrorism, especially in the area encompassing Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger” (Summers, 2022). The near state failure situation of these countries illustrates what Mary Kaldor has defined as the “new wars”: “A mixture of war, organized crime, and massive human rights violations in which the actors are both global and local, public and private. These wars are waged for particular political objectives using tactics of terror and destabilization that are theoretically prohibited by the norms of modern warfare” (Kaldor, 2003).

On the other hand, in these countries, the most basic support and assistance that the state can provide to victims of terrorism is virtually non-existent. While in Europe the debate focuses on how to improve institutional support at all levels for victims of terrorism, in much of Africa and the Middle East the issue has barely been raised (Barrenechea, 2017). This may be for two reasons: on the one hand, given that terrorist activity in these regions is much more regular than in Europe, counter-terrorism efforts are more focused on curbing it, rather than on caring for victims, an issue that may seem secondary; and, on the other hand, states and institutions are much more fragile than in Western countries, which results in aid and care for victims of terrorism not being channeled in such a way that reparation can take place. In Western countries, this reparation generally takes the form of public policies that promote the four principles that victims of terrorism stand for: Memory, Truth, Dignity, and Justice.



Counter-terrorism efforts on the African continent and in the Middle East region focus on programs to support law enforcement and the judiciary; combat terrorist financing; control borders; fight organized crime that may in turn finance or support terrorism; and counter radicalization. All of these policies are generally supported at the European level, especially in the Maghreb and Sahel regions. But the victims of terrorism are not considered in any continental, regional, national, or local counter-terrorism policy in any African or Middle Eastern country. It is often African NGOs, such as the Youth Coalition against Terrorism in Nigeria, Victims of Terrorism Organization in Kenya, Association Djazairouna in Algeria, or Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre in Somalia, which play a crucial role in local communities, despite their limited capacity for action. They constantly face funding difficulties, as well as the lack of strong institutions to effectively channel their interests.

These precarious conditions of care and reparation for victims of terrorism in Africa and the Middle East make the emergence and consolidation of strong victims' movements that look after the rights and interests of victims of terrorism extremely difficult. In Spain, something similar happened with the victims of ETA: it took many years after this terrorist organization opened its ominous list of murders for the victims to decide to join together and ensure that their rights were respected by the institutions, which for decades were overwhelmed by the number of terrorist crimes that took place and, therefore, did not attend to the victims properly. Consuelo Ordóñez, President of COVITE and the OIET, recalls the context in which the Collective was founded:

The day COVITE was founded, 28 November 1998, was, in many ways, a historic day. It was just over a year since the release of Ortega Lara and the kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco; just a few months since the murder of councilor Alberto Jiménez and his wife, Ascensión García; of councilor José Luis Caso and his friend and substitute, Manuel Zamarreño. ETA killed, wounded thousands of people in attacks, persecuted us, harassed us, kidnapped and extorted money every week. It dominated the public space in the Basque Country and Navarre and set the political agenda. In short, it mortgaged the day-to-day life of our country.



1998 was also a year in which the citizens' response to terrorism was taking hold, drawing on the intense, albeit fleeting, spirit of Ermua. And ETA declared a truce that was greeted with unbridled optimism. From many quarters, the victims began to ask us victims to be generous, and to look to the future. There was talk of turning the page, of renouncing our legitimate rights to truth and justice, without being aware that the situation was as weak as it was deceitful.

All this led the victims, for the first time, to show our faces in the Basque city where ETA had committed the most murders. In the heart of San Sebastian, at a press conference and after having won the support of more than 200 families, we presented the Collective of Victims of Terrorism (Ordóñez, 2021).

While the conditions for COVITE to emerge in the Basque Country in those years of frenetic terrorist activity by ETA were complicated, in Africa or the Middle East they are even more so today. However, despite the difficulty of giving visibility to victims in these extreme circumstances, there have been some victims who have managed to give voice to the tragedy of jihadist terrorism. Perhaps the name that has been most visible in recent years has been that of Nadia Murad, winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize "for her efforts to eradicate sexual violence as a weapon in war and armed conflict" (BBC News, 2018). Nadia was abducted by Daesh on 15 August 2014, when the terrorists overran the village of Kocho in northern Iraq. The terrorist group systematically killed all the Yazidi men they found, including six of her brothers, and abducted and sold the women as sex slaves. Nadia was a victim of this atrocity and suffered all kinds of abuse and torture during her captivity. But she managed to escape and in 2017 she made her story public in the book *I Will Be the Last*. Since then, Nadia has become the voice and face of the endless cruelties suffered by many victims of the Islamic State:

Telling your story never gets easier. Every time you tell it, you relive it. [...] Still, I have become accustomed to giving speeches and large audiences no longer intimidate me. My story, told honestly and objectively, is the best weapon I have against terrorism, and I intend to keep using it until these terrorists face trial. There is still much to be done. World leaders, especially Muslim religious leaders, must rise up and protect the oppressed (Murad, 2017).



Sometime after her ordeal, in September 2016, Nadia Murad founded the non-profit organization Nadia's Initiative, which aims to raise the profile of the cause of jihadist terrorism, as well as to help rebuild schools and hospitals in the area where the genocide she and her family suffered was perpetrated.

Earlier this year, in February 2023, Nadia Murad visited the region of Sinjar, Iraq, with actress Angelina Jolie, so that she could learn first-hand about the consequences of the genocide and the actions being carried out to repair the victims. Initiatives in this sense are very positive and help a lot to give a public presence to the victims, so necessary in many ways for their reparation. "Angelina Jolie has been instrumental in raising awareness and meeting the needs of women, children, and refugees around the world. I am happy to have the opportunity to show such a dedicated advocate my homeland and to show her the incredible progress we have made towards recovery and the remaining needs of my community," Murad said after the visit with Angelina Jolie, in a press release (Nadia's Initiative, 2023). The internationally renowned actress said she was "happy to return to Iraq, this time to support the work of my friend Nadia Murad and other local Yazidis who are rebuilding their lives and communities after enduring the horrors. I have witnessed the progress they have made, but also the need for long-term international engagement to support their work and leadership. Survivors continue to struggle with trauma, insecurity, displacement, and slow progress on reparations" (Nadia's Initiative, 2023). In this regard, she added that she met families "who are still searching for answers about the disappearance of their loved ones and others who still lack support to meet their basic needs. Local people are working to help themselves and deserve all respect and support".

Another victim of jihadism who has also become, in a way, a symbol of all victims, is Ignacio Echevarría, known as *the skateboard hero*. Ignacio Echeverría was cycling with some friends to the London area of Whitechapel at around eleven o'clock on the night of 3 June 2017. When he arrived at Borough Market, he saw a man stabbing a policeman lying on the ground. Seeing the man leave the officer and start to assault a woman, Ignacio grabbed his skateboard and punched the attacker. Ignacio's action diverted the terrorist from his target long enough for several people to get to safety. Ignacio, however, was not so lucky: two jihadists stabbed him in the back, killing him.



Ignacio Echeverría has received numerous awards in recent years that pay tribute to his heroism and exemplary attitude in the face of terrorism, which led him to become a victim himself. He has received the Grand Cross of the Order of Civil Merit, the Silver Medal for Police Merit, the Gold Medal of the Community of Madrid, the Gold Medal of Las Rozas de Madrid - awarded to him for the first time -, the XVI International COVITE Award, the adoption of his name by the secondary school where Ignacio attended high school, in Las Rozas de Madrid, and the joint award of Commander of the London Police Corps, granted jointly by the three corps for the first time. His name has also been used to name skate parks in different parts of Spain and his skateboard is on display at the Victims of Terrorism Memorial Centre. In addition, his family was honored with the condolences of Queen Elizabeth through the head of Protocol of the Royal Household. Recently, in January of this year, 2023, his family initiated the necessary procedures to request his canonization.

### **3. Conclusion**

There are some victims of terrorism who, because of the type of attack they suffer, the context or circumstances in which they are killed, the significance of their attack, or the courage and daring they show in making their story public, become, in a way, symbols of all victims of terrorism. These victims conquer a public space that the terrorists wanted to take away from them. Terrorism is the most brutal expression of the desire to expel a person from the public space shared by victim and executioner: first, through murder, threats or persecution; and then, through forgetting and condemning the victim's relatives to silence. But there are victims who, either because of the scope of their attack, or because they show unusual personal courage, manage to break the ostracism to which those who attacked them wanted to banish them.

Those who have the courage to denounce the atrocious consequences of terrorism, precisely because they have suffered it first-hand, should receive the full support and protection of the state, since their example can serve to encourage many other victims to follow suit and courageously defend freedom and democratic values. Victims must form a structural part of a country's fight against terrorism, since they are the main victims of barbarism, and the state is indebted to them insofar as it has not been able to protect their lives and physical integrity or that of their families.



Journalist and university professor Javier Marrodán, in his text *El relato, una necesidad moral*, reflects on the potential of the testimonies of the victims of terrorism when it comes to understanding the difficulties of overcoming the phenomenon after suffering it firsthand:

It is necessary to put names and surnames to reality in order to really know it, even if it is retroactive. And in the case of terrorism, this exercise is especially necessary: it is a phenomenon that affects us all. Moreover, it is likely that we have lived for many years thinking that we knew about it, that our imagination and our references were sufficient to illustrate the magnitude of the phenomenon, to assess its consequences, to sense the pain and helplessness of those who suffered it (Marrodán, 2015).

To illustrate his reasoning, Marrodán delved into a quote from the journalist Tomás Eloy Martínez.

The journalist and writer Tomás Eloy Martínez, referring to the need to give names and surnames to major events, explained: “When we read that there were 100,000 victims in a tsunami in Bangladesh, we are astonished but not moved. If, on the other hand, we were to read the tragedy of a woman left alone in the world after the tsunami and follow the story of her losses step by step, we would know everything there is to know about that tsunami and everything there is to know about chance and about involuntary and sudden misfortunes. Hegel first, and later Borges, wrote that the fate of one man sums up, in certain essential moments, the fate of all men”.

Not only is it an ethical and political obligation for all branches of government to take an explicit stand with the victims and against terrorists, but such a stand also helps to delegitimize and weaken the message of hatred, fear, and support for violence that terrorists spread through their attacks. And not only the message is weakened, but also the messenger, i.e., the terrorist organizations themselves. How to improve the institutional, social, and political response to terrorism and how to ensure that victims feel protected and protected by the rule of law is a reflection that all countries hit by any kind of terrorism should make.

It is a reflection that deserves to be made in greater depth in those countries where, in terms of attention to the victims of terrorism, everything has yet to be done. These are precisely the countries hardest hit by jihadist terrorism. As a



result of the large number of terrorist attacks - often indiscriminate - against the civilian population in countries in the Middle East and Africa, as well as the fight of their armies against jihadist organizations, large-scale forced population displacements are taking place. The African or Middle Eastern victim of terrorism is often materially dispossessed, displaced in his or her own country or forcibly exiled to another country, and with a very low prospect of regaining his or her pre-attack life. The experience of the victims of terrorism in these regions is often extremely harsh: they have lost loved ones, even seen them murdered, seen their villages burned, seen their crops burned, and lost the chance of an education and a better future. Many of these stories are taking place in the Sahel region, not far from Europe, without receiving even a fraction of the media attention that jihadist terrorism attracts when it is perpetrated in Europe.

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