

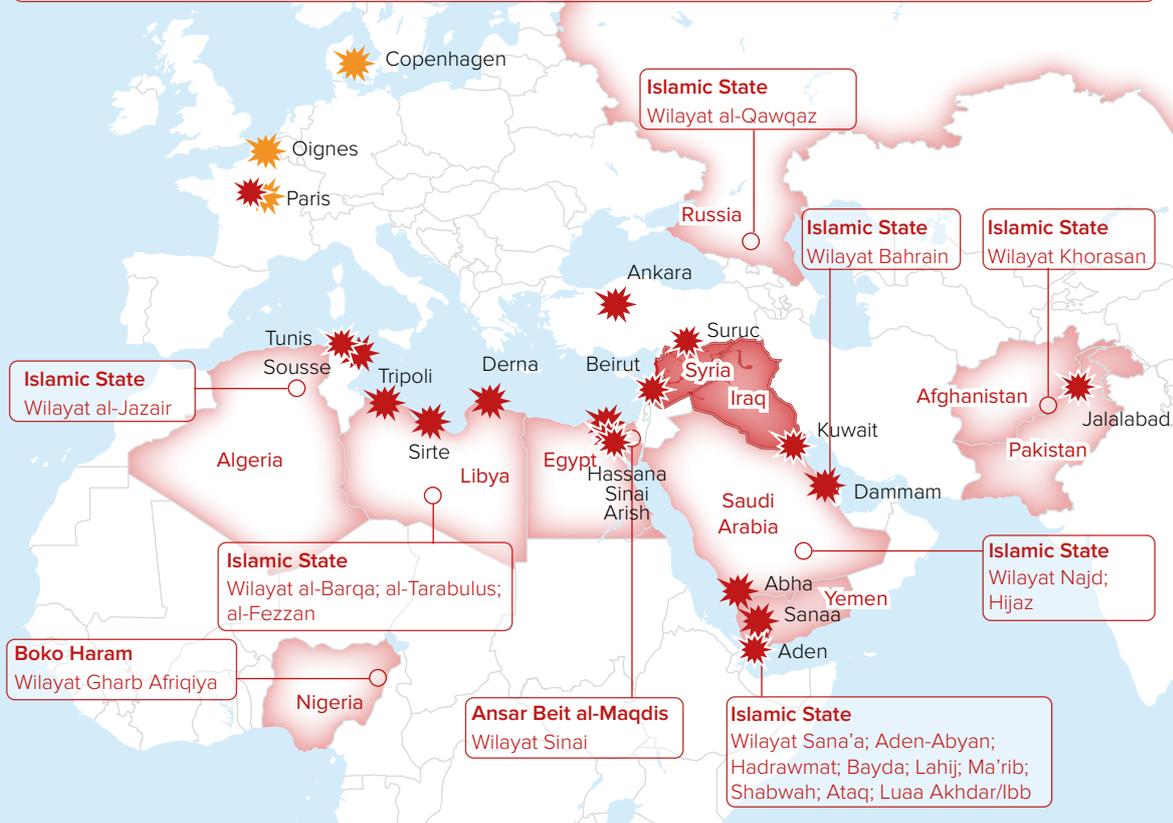


Anticipating Islamic State group's next move

How will it impact your organisation?

Islamic State expansion ambitions and terror attacks in Europe (affiliated or inspired)

- Islamic State group-declared **Wilayat** (provinces')
- Attacks claimed by Islamic State group outside Syria and Iraq in 2015
- Attacks claimed by Islamist militants in Europe



Sources: Reuters, other media reports, Oxford Analytica

The past month has seen a sudden upsurge in terrorist attacks claimed by Islamic State group (ISG) beyond its main area of operations in Iraq and Syria.

The attacks – in Paris, Beirut, the Sinai, and Tunis – raise the question of whether ISG has begun a global terrorist campaign. If so, this would represent a significant shift from its previous focus on state-building and sectarian conflict in Iraq and Syria.

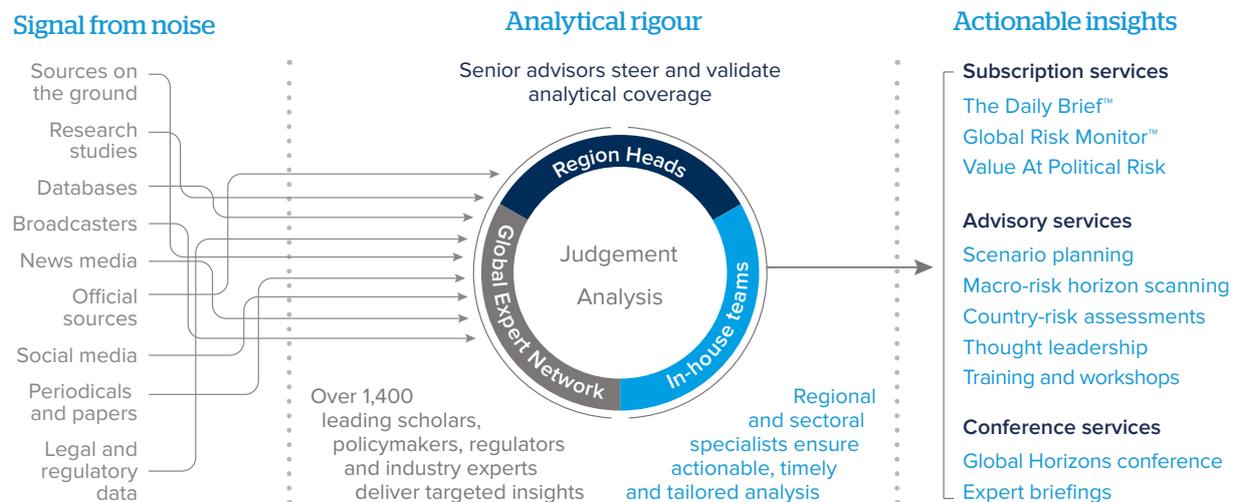
Unparalleled analysis for decision superiority

Oxford Analytica is uniquely positioned to enable organisations to assess the threat from Islamic State group, and the implications for policy, strategy and business continuity.

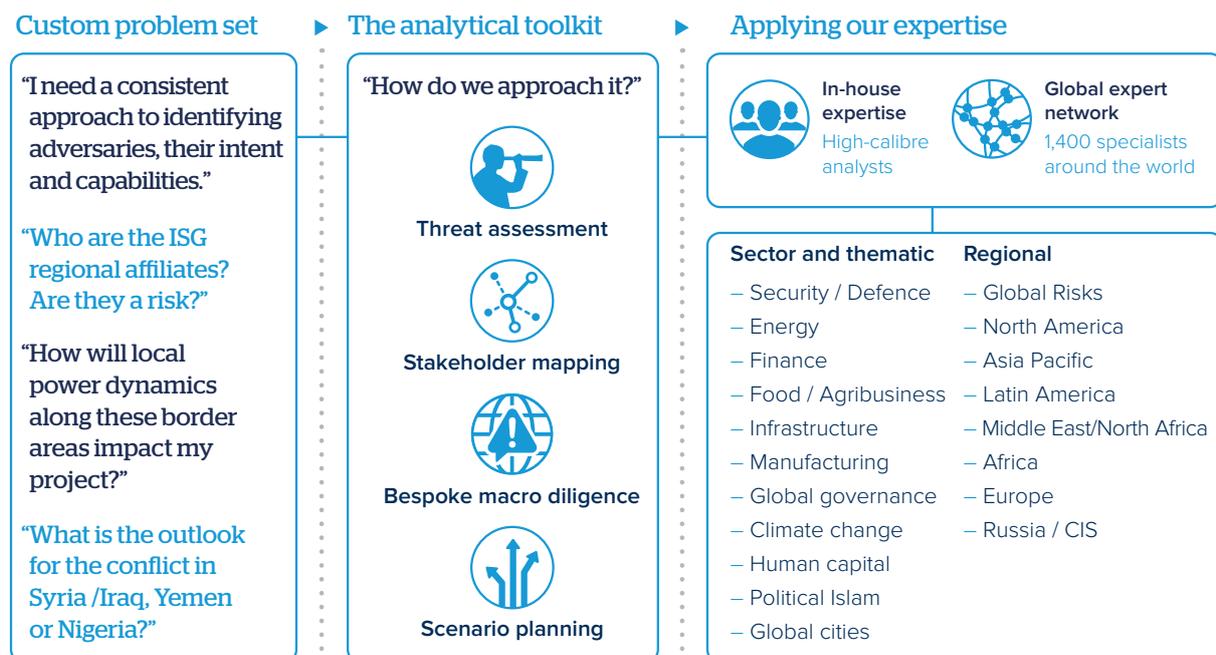
Oxford Analytica is a global analysis and advisory firm which provides an edge in understanding the impacts of political events, and economic and social trends. Our global network of over 1,400 experts delivers authoritative and relevant analysis and advice.

A rigorous process of validation ensures timely and impartial insights. Our empirically proven methodology results in heightened prediction accuracy.

Unique methodological process



Addressing your challenges through expert insights



Contact: Roger Cabrera, Director of Advisory
rcabrera@oxford-analytica.com +44 1865 261 604

oxan.to/NextMove



Islamic State global expansion builds resilience

Wednesday, October 21 2015

Over the past sixteen months, the international community has focused its campaign to counter the Islamic State group (ISG) primarily on Iraq and Syria. This approach overlooks ISG's accelerating regional affiliate programme, which gives ISG strategic resiliency outside of its "caliphate" within the two main countries. A strategy to defeat ISG cannot succeed without addressing its formal affiliates in Libya, Egypt, Afghanistan and elsewhere.



A security official guards the site of a bomb blast at a state security building in Shubra Al-Khaima, on the outskirts of Cairo, (Reuters/Mohamed Abd El Ghany)

What next

ISG's global affiliate network will likely expand over the next year. Affiliates and supporters in Libya, Afghanistan-Pakistan and Yemen will try to exploit domestic conflicts to recruit and seize terrain, while those in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria will aim to undermine local governments through terror attacks. This transregional presence will enable ISG to withstand pressure from local and coalition forces within Iraq and Syria, ensuring the long-term viability of the organisation.

Analysis

ISG is conducting a successful campaign to establish affiliates in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, in parallel with its campaign to defend and expand its existing territory.

ISG's expansion strategy

ISG has declared governorates, or 'wilayat', in nine countries since November 2014: Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan-Pakistan, Nigeria and Russia's North Caucasus region (see RUSSIA: Syria action risks growing terrorism risk - October 16, 2015).

ISG argues that its "caliphate" is legitimate in part because of these governorates. They enable ISG to claim international presence and victory at all times, even when it is losing on certain fronts. This narrative of constant momentum is a source of strength for ISG.

Impact

- ISG's affiliate in Egypt will rekindle ties with extremist groups on mainland Egypt in order to launch more attacks.
- ISG will encourage new supporters globally to launch spectacular terrorist attacks.
- Russia's escalation in Syria will aid ISG's expansion by degrading the Syrian opposition and ensuring the continuation of the civil war.



The governorates are part of ISG's strategic campaign to expand its caliphate beyond Iraq and Syria. Specifically, ISG seeks to foster affiliate relationships with jihadist groups globally and set conditions for its expansion in the medium and long term.

Affiliates allow ISG to claim armed operations in many historically Muslim countries. They also help ISG to assert presence in almost every location where its rival al-Qaida also maintains affiliates (see INTERNATIONAL: Caliphate claim divides jihadis - July 10, 2014).

Wilayat selection

The affiliate creation process is intentional and highly formalised. Numerous jihadist groups have pledged allegiance to ISG since it declared its caliphate in June 2014. ISG has accepted the allegiance of all of these groups, but chooses its wilayat with care.

In order to qualify for wilaya status, supporters in a geographic area must consolidate under one leader, reaffirm their pledge of allegiance to ISG leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and present a proposal for local operations to ISG's leadership. ISG declares a new wilaya once it approves that proposal.

ISG carefully selects which area can become a 'wilaya'

Operational support

ISG likely provides training and support to at least some of its wilayats. Almost all of ISG's wilayats have adopted some elements of ISG's military and social control methodologies since their pledge of allegiance to ISG, indicating a tangible consequence of the affiliate relationship.

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in the Sinai Peninsula, for example, increased the intensity and sophistication of its operations after it pledged its allegiance to ISG in November 2014. The group initiated a campaign to intimidate and degrade the Egyptian security forces in June 2015, launching house-borne explosive devices -- similar to those ISG used to intimidate Iraqi Security Forces before its offensive on Mosul in 2014.

This adoption of a signature capability suggests that ISG's leadership may be sending military trainers to help its affiliates plan and conduct operations.

Local sources claimed ISG sent such envoys to central Libya, after its affiliates consolidated control over the city of Sirte in August 2015. The group subsequently implemented sharia law and administrative control resembling ISG's activities within its areas of control within Iraq and Syria.

Nigeria may be an exception to this pattern. Although Boko Haram's leadership publicly pledged allegiance to ISG, there is little evidence of a change in Boko Haram's military or social control behaviour -- only some limited media cooperation.

ISG leadership may not have been ready to incorporate Boko Haram in a meaningful way. Boko Haram's oath of allegiance may have also been an attempt to show strength while under pressure from the security forces; the group has lost ground in recent weeks and leadership splits have become more public.

Regional campaigns

ISG adapts the method it used to break the Iraqi state and gain power in the Syrian civil war to cultivate affiliates both in stable nations and conflict zones (see IRAQ/SYRIA: Islamic State can thrive within limits - July 15, 2014).

In centralised states such as Saudi Arabia, mainland Egypt, Tunisia and Nigeria, its affiliates and supporters aim to destabilise central governments through spectacular attacks, primarily suicide bombings.

These attacks cause panic, divert state security forces, and suggest that the government in question is incapable of providing for its citizens' security. Examples include suicide bombing on Shia mosques in Saudi Arabia on May 22 and 29, and on international and security targets in Cairo on July 11 and August 20 (see MAGHREB: Islamic State fears will fuel political risks - February 18, 2015).

In conflict zones such as Libya, Afghanistan and Yemen, ISG affiliates seek to escalate local wars in order to recruit and seize terrain. Some already control population centres in Libya and perhaps also Afghanistan. This will allow ISG to claim that its caliphate survives even if it loses all of its territory within Iraq and Syria.

Disorder and sectarianism
allow ISG to attract recruits
and expand territorial control

Prospects for expansion

Few international actors have suggested any strategy for countering ISG's regional expansion. The US-led anti-ISG coalition has focused on combatting the group within Iraq and Syria.

Meanwhile, ISG's affiliate campaigns have gained their own momentum, and will likely progress over the next year:

- Its Libya affiliates are potentially preparing for an offensive on the lucrative Sirte Oil Basin in the near term, which would expand the terrain they already hold along Libya's central coast.
- The Afghanistan affiliate may control some districts in southern Nangarhar Province, and has claimed attacks in the regional capital of Jalalabad.
- In Yemen, the local affiliate is capitalising on the civil war to launch spectacular attacks against the Zaydi Shia Huthis as part of a campaign to make the conflict more sectarian. Stoking sectarian tensions will bolster its recruitment within Yemen and the region at large.

ISG concurrently aims to undermine and degrade the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen in order to proclaim itself the legitimate leader of Sunni populations across the Middle East, as demonstrated by ISG's first claimed attack on UAE coalition forces on October 5.

ISG has also continued efforts to expand its affiliate programme, hinting at support bases in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Tunisia.

ISG may provide extra rhetorical or material support to its affiliates as a buffer against increased pressure from its multiple opponents in Iraq and Syria. Trans-regional presence likely will enable ISG to withstand pressure from local and coalition forces within Iraq and Syria, ensuring its long-term viability.

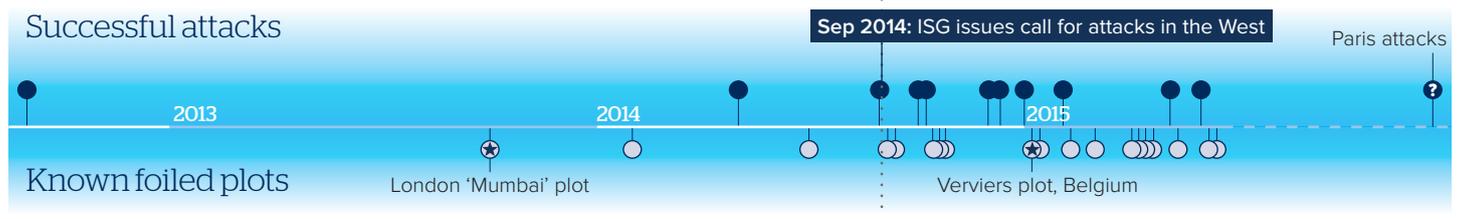
November 24, 2015

Sympathisers feed Islamic State threat to West

The Paris attacks will sharpen focus on the roles of sympathisers and returned foreign fighters in terror attacks

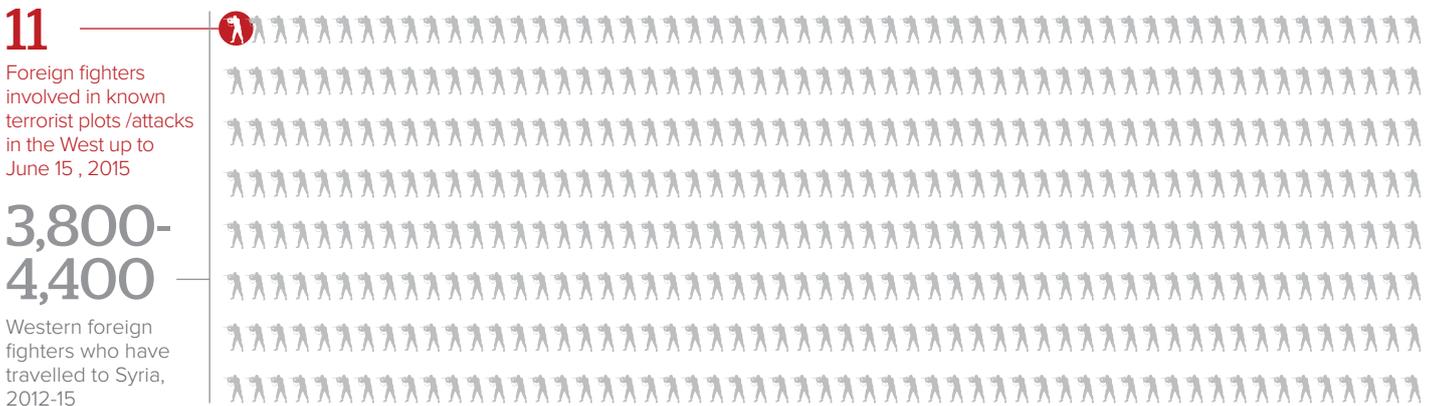
ISG-linked efforts to attack the West* have risen since mid-2014

Islamic State leadership involvement in ISG plots in the West ★ High-level ISG involvement



Returned foreign fighter involvement is lower than public perception...

Numbers of Western foreign fighters who have travelled to Syria -- and numbers of returnees participating in attacks in the West



... but foreign fighter involvement makes an attack deadlier

7.3 Deaths per attack with foreign fighter involvement

1.2 Deaths per attack without foreign fighter involvement

* "The West" = Australia, Canada, Western Europe and the United States

Islamic State group (ISG)'s spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani called for attacks on the West in September 2014. However, high-level leadership involvement in plots in the West has been low, according to Norwegian researchers [Hegghammer and Nesser](#), who compiled and analysed terrorist plots between January 2011 and June 2015.

ISG has been very successful in inciting 'individual jihad', surpassing al-Qaida. Since mid-2014, ISG has inspired on average two sympathiser attacks per month in the West. They tend to be small-scale, but sympathiser attacks outnumber those with foreign fighter involvement and are more likely to be carried out.

Few foreign fighters have been involved in a plot in the past four years, but attacks they organise tend to be deadlier than sympathiser ones.

See also: [Paris attacks boost Russia's Syria stance](#) -- November 16, 2015

- Paris could indicate that ISG has shifted to a strategy of coordinating attacks on the West -- though further evidence will be needed.
- High-profile ISG attacks will spur al-Qaida to carry out 'spectaculars' of its own, raising the global risk of terrorism.
- ISG-linked attacks on the West will bolster international support for the Iraqi government and Assad regime.
- The West may home in on deradicalisation, but studies suggest that religious radicalisation does not necessarily precede terrorist acts.

Sources: CSR, Perspectives on Terrorism (Hegghammer and Nesser), Oxford Analytica