GLOBAL JIHAD: COUNTING THE COST

An investigation by the BBC in collaboration with the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation

METHODOLOGY

WHY DID YOU CARRY OUT THIS RESEARCH?

The aim of the project was to produce an estimate of the scale and geographical distribution of reported deaths caused by jihadist groups, networks, and individuals. It is not an account and/or investigation of individual incidents.

While we acknowledge that modern jihadism is not a monolithic phenomenon it is still a phenomenon. We wanted to produce a picture of global jihadism today.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE JIHADISM?

We define jihadism as a modern revolutionary political ideology mandating the use of violence to defend or promote a particular very narrow vision of Sunni Islam.

Explanation:[1]
While jihad is an Islamic concept which means 'struggle' and has both military and spiritual connotations, the term jihad-*ism* describes a political ideology; and while many Shia groups and individuals refer to themselves as 'jihadists' this count focuses on a particular movement categorised by Al Qaeda, its affiliates and those who subscribe to a similar philosophy.

- These jihadists believe that Islam is under attack – from the West, Israel, apostate Muslim rulers, and the Shiites – and that every Muslim must come to its defence.
- What differentiates jihadists from other groups and individuals that have justified violence in Islamic terms is their doctrine and long-term political vision. The jihadists' aim is to create states or societies that are governed by an extremely narrow, puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam known as Salafism (or Wahhabism).
- Salafi doctrine accounts for the jihadists' aggressive hostility towards other sects and religions; their rejection of man-made laws and democracy; and their enforcement of public morality, dress codes, and social norms.
- Many groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan – most prominently the Taliban – do not classify as Salafist or Wahhabist. They typically follow the Deobandi or Ahl e Hadith traditions, which are similar to Salafism in their emphasis on literalism and have developed more or less in parallel. For the purposes of this study we have included them as jihadist groups.
- Some of the beliefs listed above are held by other Muslims but it is a combination of all of these beliefs along with the readiness to kill in the name of those ideas that defines jihadism in this count.

Only a minority of Sunni Muslims worldwide are Salafists, and only a small fraction of Salafists are jihadists. Jihadists, therefore, do not represent mainstream Islam, and their doctrine, views and methods are not shared by the vast majority of Muslims.

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[1] The definition relies on the following sources: Dirk Baehr, *Kontinuität und Wandel in der Ideologie des Jihadi-Salafismus* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2009); Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: 2009).' Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action' in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 33-50; Thomas Hegghammer, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism' in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism,* op. cit., pp. 244-266; Roel Meijer, 'Introduction' in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism,* op. cit, pp. 1-32; Guido Steinberg, *Der nahe und der ferne Feind: Das Netzwerk des islamistischen Terrorismus* (Munich: CH Beck, 2005); Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements (Terrorism Studies)* (Routledge 2009).

HOW ARE YOU DEFINING GROUPS OF JIHADISTS?

This research is based on the assumption that, in addition to acts of violence carried out by (nameless) networks and individuals, the majority of jihadist incidents are the responsibility of groups. The methods we used for identifying groups in this study were based on:

1) The definition of jihadism as laid out in the methodology of this project.
2) The feedback from three independent reviewers (Prof Mark Sedgwick; Prof Martha Crenshaw; Dr Omar Ashour).
3) An academic 'Jihadist Scoring System' devised by John David Payne, Donna Lee Bowen, and Joseph Woolstenhume[2], to determine whether "jihadism" is the predominant motivation for all the groups and actors included in this exercise.

This study has not set out to study all Islamist violence. We are aiming to produce data focused on a particular type of violent conflict – namely Al Qadea groups, their affiliates and other groups motivated by a very similar ideology.

DO YOU HAVE A LIST OF JIHADIST GROUPS?

We have published a list of the jihadist groups reported to have been responsible for fatalities in the month of November. We have not published a list of all the jihadist groups in the world because no such list can ever be definitive or uncontentious for the following reasons:

- Jihadism is a social movement, which means that relationships aren't always formalised and followers don't usually carry membership cards. In addition to groups, there are plenty of networks and unaffiliated individuals (esp. in Europe) which are part of the movement without belonging to any specific group. The Moroccan *Salafia Jihadia*, for example, isn't a formalised group but rather, a network of individuals that has been given a name – Salafia Jihadia – by the media and the Moroccan authorities.
- In places like Libya and Syria the situation is changing fast. Hardly a month goes by without new groups announcing their existence, or existing groups becoming involved in coalitions and mergers.
- The Syrian conflict, which accounts for a significant share of contemporary jihadism, is challenging because nearly all of the groups involved in opposing the Assad regime are Islamic in character and those along with some secular-nationalist leftist groups profess to be involved in some kind of 'jihad'. Based on our analysis of the groups, their statements, members, and overall character, only three Syrian groups can at the time of writing be classified as jihadist in the sense of fighting for a Salafist political order: Ahrar al Sham, Jabhat al Nusra, and ISIS.
- We recognise that the motivation of most important groups is not purely jihadist but comprises of a rage of factors including the absence of a functioning state, tribal custom, reactions to foreign invasion, outside encouragement, personal loyalty and money. The question then arises *how much* jihadist they are. We have classified all the groups or individuals included in our data according to a scale which shows that jihadism is their strongest motivating force.
- The jihadist scale takes into account 7 factors: ultimate aims, immediate objectives, membership, explicit and implicit appeals to constituents, suicide terrorism and third party appeals. The groups that score high on all or almost all these categories will be considered jihadist for the purposes of this exercise.

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[2] John David Payne, Donna Lee Bowen, and Joseph Woolstenhume, "How Religious Is Islamic Religious Terrorism?" in *Religion and Terrorism: The Use of Violence in Abrahamic Monotheism,* Veronica Ward and Richard Sherlock, eds. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014): 119-152.

WHY HAVE YOU ONLY LOOKED AT A ONE MONTH PERIOD (NOVEMEBER 2014)? HOW REPRESENTATIVE IS THIS FIGURE?

One month is the limited period which the money and resources available for this project have allowed. This limitation means that the data gathered will not show how far the trajectory of violence has increased or decreased over time. We also acknowledge that the figures for November 2014 will look very different if re-examined in a few months' time

However, no other organisation or individual has attempted to quantify this phenomenon before and so whilst the research is limited to November these figures will offer a unique insight and will provide us with a unit that allows comparisons with other like data, such as the total number of reported deaths in Syria and Iraq during that same month. These kinds of comparison should provide interesting perspectives for the published final figure.

HOW ROBUST ARE THE FIGURES?

These figures represent the best possible compromise between meeting the aims of the project while mitigating the limitations, challenges and difficulties of gathering this data.

This count is the number of reported fatalities and so the findings rely on information and raw data provided by third parties. We fully recognise the difficulties associated with gathering data in this area, especially in the context of civil wars:

- Attribution remains unclear at times;
- Reporting can be patchy, biased, and delayed;
- Data gathering can be dangerous, and some incidents may go unreported.
- The definition and categorisation of groups as "jihadist", as well as the creation and execution of rules for counting and coding incidents, were guided by the principles of transparency, clarity, and rigour.

In conceptualising and executing the project, we have drawn on the BBC's extensive resources (including BBC Monitoring) and experience with foreign and conflict reporting, and have, additionally, sought the advice of academic experts in the areas of conflict and terrorism studies, jihadism and Islamic studies, as well as scholars directly involved in devising methodologies on gathering data in conflict zones. We are confident that, despite its inherent limitations, the project's findings are valid and meaningful.

WHY HAVE YOU FOCUSED ON COUNTING REPORTED DEATHS AND NOT INCLUDED INJURIES?

There are many effects on populations as a result of jihadist fighting including serious injury, forced displacements, seizure of territory and societal and economic disruptions; however this exercise will be limited to recording reported deaths. It is almost impossible to count injuries, even for people who are on the ground when an attack happens. Injury could include someone who has lost a limb as well as someone who has a small cut, a burst eardrum or even suffers for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – affects which are often difficult to determine. It would be impossible therefore, to provide any meaningful figures that include statistics for those who have been injured in attacks. Kidnappings are often difficult to verify in the short space of time that this count is limited to.

HAVE YOU DIFFERENTIATED BETWEEN CIVILIAN AND NON-CIVILIAN DEATHS?

In an attempt to produce the most accurate figure possible the research has encompassed civilian, jihadist and other fighters or military deaths presented as one single unit. It is difficult to differentiate, even for those monitoring events on the ground, between a civilian and someone who was acting as a combatant when an attack happened. Where reports of attacks do differentiate between civilians, jihadists, military, police, government officials and children we have tried to reflect those figures in the break-down of the data.

WHAT IS THE RAW DATA?

We are conscious of the fact that local information, esp. from war zones, is often disputed and sources can be limited. Our aim was to perform a daily search aiming to capture as many sources of data as possible.

What we looked for were incident reports which we hoped to gather by approaching the subject from three different angles:

- **Type of incident:**
  - We programmed news alerts and searched the BBC Monitoring system for "terrorist", "insurgent" and "jihadist" incidents wherever they may have happened.
- **Groups:**
  - We performed the same kind of search for news of groups that fit our definition

- **Regional/local:**
  - We searched for news of violent incidents in each of the areas associated with jihadist groups plus their neighbouring countries.
  - We also reviewed local newspapers, broadcast media, and specialist blogs.
  - In addition, we reached out to local NGOs, civil society and human rights groups, as well as data gathering projects in each of the areas/regions in which jihadist groups are active.

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN INCIDENT?

Incidents are violent actions and attacks resulting in human fatalities.

One of the limitations of this kind of survey is that we rely on third party information and not every single incident can be investigated. Given the global nature and ambition of this survey, we have opted for breadth rather than depth: the idea is to present a global picture of the intensity and geographical spread of jihadist violence.

WHEN WERE INCIDENTS "JIHADIST"?

- If an attack was claimed or can clearly be attributed to one of the jihadist groups that fit our definition it was counted.
- If an attack could not be attributed to a group but was suspected to be jihadist in nature and/or intent, the coders put it into the "hold" category.
- At the end of the month BBC staff and the academic consultant and researchers, looked at each of the incidents in the "hold" category and decided whether they could be attributed to a jihadist group.

HOW WILL YOU VERIFY FIGURES?

When there is disagreement about numbers (of people killed), we have used the number that was used in BBC reporting, or – if the incident wasn't reported by the BBC and/or its various language services – whatever was considered the most independent/objective news source in that region/country.

In the cases, where no such determination can be made, we will opt for the method adopted by ACLED - the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project – which is the most comprehensive public collection of political violence data for developing states. Their methodology states:

"If records from sources differ or a vague estimate is provided, the lowest number of fatalities is reported. However, if reports mention several, many, or plural 'civilians' and 'unknown' and no other reference, this is recorded as '10'. If report mentions dozens, this is recorded as '12'. If report mentions hundreds, this is recorded as '100'. If a note mentions 'massacres', a default number of 100 fatalities is recorded.

If summarized fatalities are reported, but events occurred across several days or in multiple locations simultaneously, total number is divided and that fraction is recorded for each day of the event (if over 1). If an odd number, the proportion of fatalities is divided by assigning the first day the additional fatality and distributed as evenly as possible."

http://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ACLED_Codebook_2014_updated.pdf P17

WHAT DATA SOURCES HAVE YOU USED?

Beyond the incidents reported in the media this study will be making use of data compiled by the following civil society groups:

- Syrian Network for Human Rights http://sn4hr.org/
- Violations Documentation Centre http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/
- Iraq Body Count https://www.iraqbodycount.org/
- ACLED http://www.acleddata.com/
- The South Asia Terrorism Portal http://www.satp.org/.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION WAS RECORDED?

The spreadsheet in which each incident was recorded contains the following fields:

- Date
- Local Time (Morning/ Afternoon/ Evening)
- Location / Lat and Long (Country, Province, City)
- Type of attack (eg: beheading, IED, Shooting, car bomb etc)
- Those killed (total, jihadist, civilian, military, police, government, other official, children)
- Target (exact name of place/institution targeted)
- Type of target
- Group responsible
- Method for determining group (claim of responsibility, media reporting etc)
- Source (link to original reports)
- Notable aspects (e.g. new type of explosives used)
- Other information