

Terrorism Index in the Arab Region 2021



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Terrorism Index in the Arab Region report revealed a surge in the number of terrorist operations carried out in 2021, compared to its number in 2020. As a consequence, the rate of terrorist operations, deaths and injuries resulting from these attacks have also increased. Civilians have become vulnerable to indiscriminate attacks that lead to their killing, displacement, and internal migration, which, in turn, undermines a range of basic human rights, such as the case in many conflict zones countries including Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. In countries undergoing difficult transitional stages such as Iraq, the Houthis continued to threaten neighboring countries by expanding the use of unmanned aircraft and ballistic missiles, and during 2021, some armed groups in the Arab region were active alongside Da'esh, such as the Houthis in Yemen and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria, while other groups disappeared, such as Al-Qaeda in Yemen, which only claimed six operations in 2021.

Da'esh remained the most active terrorist group in the Arab region in 2021. ISIS alone has claimed responsibility for 206 terrorist attacks, which makes up 23.7% of the total terrorist operations in the Arab region in 2021, and 35% of the total deaths due to terrorism in the Arab region during the reporting period. Although Da'esh has lost its first-ranking leaders in the last three years, it is still able to adapt, plan, and carry out terrorist operations, especially in rural areas of Iraq and on the outskirts of urban cities and the capital, Baghdad, and in the Syrian Badia region, using guerrilla warfare and hit-and-run tactics. In 2021, the organization made only minimal attempts to control the territory, when the organization entered the village of Lahiban in Kirkuk governorate in December 2021, a village that was quickly emptied of the organization's elements by the Iraqi joint forces. The priorities of Da'esh in 2021 were to exhaust the security forces; avoid direct confrontations; inflict losses on government and military forces and army checkpoints in Iraq and Syria, damage military vehicles and equipment, and undermine infrastructure projects such as power plants and power towers, in addition to attacking oil fields, which are practices that have been demonstrated in Syria.

The accelerated use of drones, which are emerging technologies that can be used to ward off terrorism, was demonstrated in 2021. However, the arrival of this

technology to terrorist groups represents a challenge to Arab national security and a direct threat to it, and the use of these drones has been demonstrated by the Houthis in Yemen for offensive purposes against neighboring countries in contravention of the principle of good neighborliness contained in the Charter of the United Nations, and in clear and explicit defiance of the rules of international humanitarian law; While Da'esh in Syria and Iraq, and Al-Shabab in Somalia used these planes for reconnaissance and information-gathering purposes, and in a small number of cases to carry explosives¹. These groups' acquisition of more drones may pose a threat to the national state, in addition to causing heavy losses to civilians, civilian objects, and economic facilities.

Iraq topped the index of terrorism in the Arab region. According to Maat, ISIS and pro-Iranian militias claimed responsibility for about 248 operations in Iraq in 2021. Iraq comes second in terms of the number of casualties resulting from terrorist operations, with 478 injuries, after Somalia, which ranked first in terms of the number of injuries resulting from terrorist operations, with approximately 555 injuries. Somalia also came second in the terrorism index, with 192 terrorist attacks. The Arab Maghreb countries came as the least Arab countries subjected to terrorist operations with 22 terrorist attacks, which is only 2.5% of the total terrorist operations in the Arab region. It is noteworthy that more than 72% of the total operations in the Arab Maghreb region were carried out in Libya alone, besides 27% in Tunisia and Algeria, while no operations were carried out in Morocco and Mauritania.

In total, 11 Arab countries in 2021 maintained their record free of any terrorist operations, thanks to the efforts made to combat the terrorist phenomenon, which were made by the security services and institutions in a number of countries in the region, as well as the preemptive strikes to ward off terrorism and the tight policies to combat its financing, in addition to the adoption by some countries of comprehensive approaches to combating terrorism, and the intellectual rehabilitation of extremists, considering the ideological dimension is the main catalyst for extremism and terrorism. While preventing extremism has become one of the pivotal and indispensable dimensions of the policies of these countries, in addition to these countries' implementation of the four pillars of the United

¹ How to Keep the Islamic State Down in 2022 and Beyond, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Nibb45>

Nations counter-terrorism strategy, and the adoption of a dual strategy to contain terrorism by arresting those involved in terrorism and bringing the alleged perpetrators to justice; At the same time, addressing the economic and social causes behind terrorism. But the lack of respect for human rights in the context of combating terrorism may contribute to the slowdown in its defeat, and cause renewed grievances that terrorists may be able to exploit for recruitment and fuel ethnic and sectarian divisions, which lead to surges in terrorist operations.

The report concluded a number of recommendations, including:

Consider amending the third paragraph of Article 1 of the Arab Anti-Terrorism Convention to include terrorist attacks using drones as a terrorist crime;

Urging the countries that have not yet ratified the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism to complete the ratification procedures and deposit the ratification documents with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States;

Arab countries that are not members of the international coalition to combat Da'esh must join the coalition to share good practices and lessons learned and benefit from advice;

Adopting unified Arab positions to expel all mercenaries and foreign forces from Arab countries, particularly countries in conflict situations;

Working to promote religious tolerance and combat hate speech, in addition to investing in programs for the rights of women and religious minorities, in addition to providing social services to deserving groups, all of which are solutions that reduce the conditions that promote terrorism;

Participating in global counter-terrorism forums in a way that allows the exchange of expertise, information, and good experiences and in a manner that enhances the ability of countries to curb terrorism;

Preventing and countering terrorism should not be used as a tool to silence dissent and impose restrictions on civil society and human rights defenders.

Why this report???

Maat was handling the phenomenon of terrorism in the Arab region as a major part of the Arab report issued annually, but starting from 2021, Maat found a pressing need to separately develop an indicator of terrorism in the Arab region, given the gravity of this phenomenon on human rights, which threatens the stability and security of the region and in the context of working on the foregoing, Maat issued three quarterly reports on terrorism in the Arab region. The Arab region was opted for several reasons: First; Although Arab countries constitute only 5% of the world's population, they were affected by more than 45% of terrorist attacks before 2020. Second; The spread of terrorism in the conflict areas in the Arab countries, where armed groups motivated by external interventions from third countries have used terrorism to undermine governance, and because the chaos created by these conflicts allows terrorism to operate without the ability of these countries to curb it or confront it in a way that curbs it or contributes to mitigating its effects and repercussions at all levels. Third; the scarcity of previous indicators and literature that shed light on terrorism in the Arab region was an additional incentive for Maat to issue this indicator, hoping that this effort would serve as a database and a reliable reference for all scholars, researchers, and think tanks concerned with studying this phenomenon and for decision-makers in Arab countries.

Based on this, Maat has been guided to issue this indicator quarterly with the issuance of a comprehensive annual report on terrorism in the Arab region, through monitoring and complete documentation of terrorist operations in the Arab region, and analyzing them in the light of the statistics that the association verifies in different ways, and what happens to this phenomenon in terms of fundamental changes, in an attempt to dismantle the factors that contribute to the exacerbation of terrorist operations in an Arab country and their extinction in another Arab country, and finally the main challenges that constitute an obstacle against confronting terrorism in the Arab region in a way that makes this region enjoy stability at all levels and prevents further bloodshed from civilians and military alike.

Key outcomes

- ☞ In 2021, the Arab region witnessed an increase in the rate of terrorist operations by 904 terrorist operations, an unprecedented increase compared to the operations in 2020, which did not exceed 203 terrorist operations that had been monitored by Maat, bearing in mind that 2020 witnessed successive waves of the Corona pandemic, which imposed restrictions on the movements of terrorist elements and the financing of terrorism. More than 10 Arab countries have maintained an environment that is not conducive to establishing stability, where armed conflicts, political unrest, and external interventions from third countries are sustained, in addition to the national armies' loss of control over the territories in favor of armed non-state actors.
- ☞ The death rate resulting from terrorist operations in the Arab region increased in 2021, as more than 1,799 people were killed, among military and civilians. More than half of the deaths were in three Arab countries: Iraq; Syria; Somalia; In the three countries combined, 81.9% of the total number of deaths due to terrorist operations were killed. While 2020 witnessed the death of 800 people as a result of terrorist operations, which means that the number of deaths from terrorist operations in the Arab region has doubled in the reporting period compared to 2020.
- ☞ Da'esh and its affiliated groups in Syria and Iraq, Al-Shabab in Somalia, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham in Syria were the most active terrorist groups in the Arab region in 2021, as these groups claimed 651 terrorist attacks, which is 72% of the total terrorist operations in the Arab region in 2021, and they are also responsible for the largest percentage of deaths in Arab countries as a result of terrorism in 2021.
- ☞ The weapons used in a wide range of terrorist attacks were: firearms; about 13% of all attacks; IEDs accounted for 8.8% of the total number of attacks, car bombings, and suicide attacks with explosive belts. Terrorist groups also used the tactic of setting up ambushes in a wide range of attacks, specifically in Syria and Iraq. These ambushes focused on targeting the army forces with a greater percentage than the forces of the police.
- ☞ Terrorist groups expanded during 2021 in what is known as economic terrorism, which is the attack on infrastructure projects such as electricity transmission towers, power generators, water lines, and oil fields, Da'esh alone claimed more than 68 terrorist operations, targeting infrastructure projects in Iraq, while the organization attacked oil fields In Syria, this

strategy aims to harm the national economy and fuel the anger of the population against the governments in Arab countries.

- ☞ Despite the measures to combat the financing of terrorism, the most active terrorist groups in the Arab countries during 2021 retained financial capacity and diversified sources of income that make them able to plan and carry out operations and recruit other individuals to fight and pay the salaries of mercenaries, these groups have used the internet as an effective tool to achieve this purpose, relying on the call for the caliphate to reach this purpose, however, the ability of terrorist groups in the Arab region to recruit remained limited in 2021, with the exception of the Houthis, who began to recruit more individuals in Yemen using a policy of intimidation and economic destitution among the majority of the population in the areas under their control in North Yemen.