

Section  
8

## Trends in International Terrorism

## 1 General Situation

Conflicts or disputes concerning racial, religious, territorial, resources and other issues are occurring or continuing in various places in the world. Human rights violations, refugees, famine, poverty, or any other consequences of conflicts or disputes can have impacts on not only parties to the conflicts or disputes but also a wide range of other countries.

There are prominent cases where power vacuums in some countries with political instability or weak governance have become a hotbed for activities of international terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). These organizations are leveraging inadequate border control to obtain personnel, weapons and funds, and to send fighters to various places to carry out organized terrorist attacks or give some instructions to local individuals or groups, expanding and stepping up their operations across national borders. In recent years, they have also been spreading their violent extremist ideologies through the Internet and other means across the world. As a result, there were cases where young people in Western and other developed countries felt sympathy for the violent radical beliefs due to their social discontent, participating as fighters in international terrorist groups and carrying out terrorist attacks in their home countries. Terrorist organizations such as ISIL and Al Qaeda have propagated practical tactics of terrorism through their journals and other media and encourage their supporters to implement them. Under the

circumstances, what is called “home-grown” terrorism, in which residents are inspired by violent extremism spread by terrorist organizations to conduct terrorist attacks at home, remains a threat. In recent years, particularly, “lone-wolf” terrorist attacks, planned and committed by individuals or groups who have no official relations with international terrorist organizations but have become influenced by them in some ways, have occurred in Western and other countries. The characteristics of “lone-wolf” terrorism include that it uses items that are relatively easy for individuals to obtain, such as knives, vehicles, and guns, and that it is difficult to detect signs of planned attacks and prevent them from happening.

In March 2019, an unprecedented incident occurred in Christchurch, New Zealand, where the perpetrator of a terrorist attack (a shooting) live-streamed the crime on social media and the footage was instantaneously disseminated.

Concerning international counterterrorism measures, international cooperation has grown even more important as terrorism threats have diffused and deepened on the diversification of terrorist attacks and the improvement of terrorist groups’ attack capabilities. Currently, countries are cooperating not only in military measures but also in initiatives in various other fields to cut off funding sources for terrorist organizations and prevent the international movement of terrorists and the diffusion of violent radical beliefs.

## 2 Trends in ISIL-related International Terrorist Organizations

The objective of ISIL as an organization is to claim the establishment of the caliphate<sup>1</sup> based on its own interpretation of Sharia law and the protection of Sunni<sup>2</sup> Muslims. ISIL expanded its presence from 2013 in Iraq and Syria, which had been destabilized due to religious disputes and civil war, and took control of northern and eastern Syria and northern Iraq

from January 2014. In June 2014, ISIL unilaterally declared the establishment of the Islamic State, with Baghdadi as its leader.

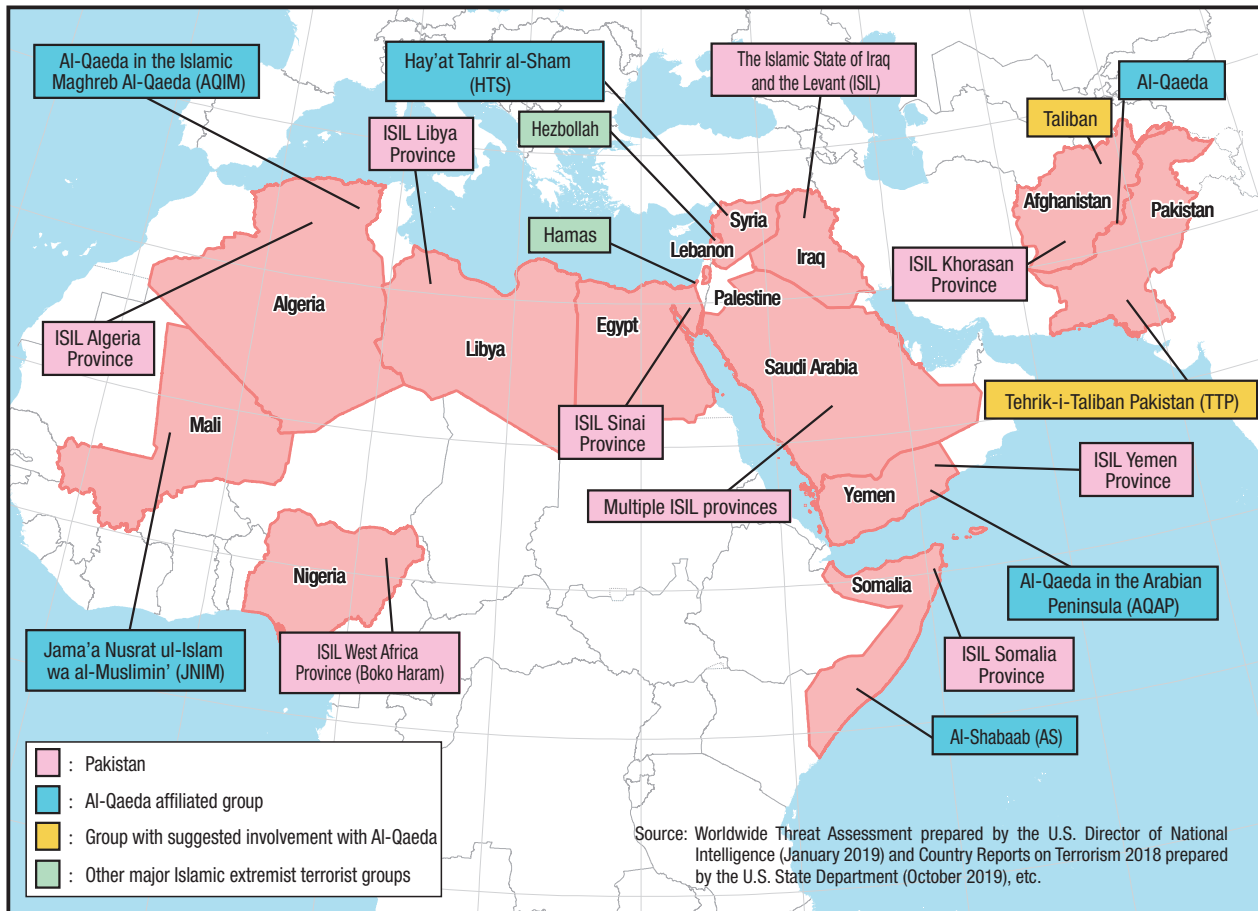
In response to the expansion of ISIL’s reach, the Coalition forces led by the United States have been conducting air strikes in Iraq and Syria since August and September of the same year, respectively. The coalition forces have also

<sup>1</sup> The term means “successor” in Arabic. After Prophet Muhammad died, the term was used to refer to the leader of the Islamic community. Afterwards, monarchs of hereditary dynasties, including the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, utilized this title.

<sup>2</sup> One of the two major sects of Islam. The split from the Shia sect originated in the difference in views on the successors (caliphate) to the Prophet Muhammad (died in 632), who founded Islam. Sunni Islam, currently the largest sect, is the majority in most of the Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. Shia Islam is the state religion in Iran and Shiites are also the majority in Iraq.

Fig. I-3-8-1

Major Terrorist Groups Based in Africa and the Middle East



engaged in providing local forces with education, training, and weapons, and conducting hostage rescue by the special forces. In cooperation with such military operations and with support from the United States and other countries, the Iraqi Security Forces and local forces in Iraq and Syria proceeded to recapture ISIL's strongholds. In March 2019, U.S. President Trump declared in a statement that the United States and coalition forces had liberated 100% of ISIL-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, with the support from Russia, the Assad administration conquered ISIL strongholds mainly in southern and eastern Syria. In December 2017, Russia declared that Syria's entire territory had been liberated from ISIL. In October 2019, the United States announced that it had killed ISIL's leader Baghdadi in northwestern Syria.

While anti-ISIL military operations have made progress, it is pointed out that about 11,000 ISIL fighters remain in hiding in Iraq and Syria.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, terrorist attacks believed to be conducted by ISIL are occurring in various regions of Iraq and Syria, targeting security forces, the Coalition forces, citizens and others, indicating that ISIL remains still active. In Syria, in particular, it is pointed out that ISIL may regain strength by exploiting the drawdown

of some U.S. forces in northeastern Syria and the launch of Turkish military operations against Kurdish forces in October 2019 to reconstitute its capabilities and resources in Syria and strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, after ISIL declared the establishment of the "Islamic State," multiple "provinces" have been established outside of Iraq and Syria as the "Islamic State" territories, and these "provinces" have been conducting terrorist acts in various places.

**Q See** Fig. I-3-8-1 (Major Terrorist Groups Based in Africa and the Middle East)

Organizations supporting ISIL exist in Southeast Asia and have conducted terrorist attacks targeting security forces and citizens. Moreover, in South Asia, large-scale explosions occurred simultaneously in Sri Lanka in April 2019, claiming the life of a Japanese national. The Sri Lanka authority exposed a local Islamic extremist organization as the perpetrator while referring to possible support for the organization from a foreign terrorist organization. After the attack, ISIL claimed responsibility for it, and the United

<sup>3</sup> According to "U.S. Forces Reset in Syria, ISIS Struggles to Re-form" (November 27, 2019) posted on the website of the U.S. DoD.

<sup>4</sup> According to a November 2019 report submitted to Congress by the U.S. DoD Office of the Inspector General.

States points out that the terrorist attacks may have been inspired by ISIL. As ISIL is spreading violent extremist ideologies through social media and other means, there are concerns that the threat is spreading to South Asia and other areas.

In addition, there continues to be a concern in Western countries that foreign fighters entering Iraq and Syria will return to their home countries to carry out a terrorist act after receiving combat training and gaining combat experience in the countries. Terrorist attacks in which ISIL fighters with

fighting experience in Syria have allegedly engaged have taken place in Europe, including simultaneous attacks in Paris in November 2015 and serial bombings in Belgium in March 2016. Western countries have begun to accept some of these foreign fighters following Turkey's announcement in November 2019 that it would repatriate as many as the 1,200 ISIL fighters it had detained. The international community will need to continue various efforts to prevent terrorism by foreign fighters.

### 3 Movements of International Terrorist Organizations Other Than ISIL-Affiliated Groups ....

Al Qaeda, which operates primarily in Pakistan and Afghanistan, is believed to have weakened as many of the group's senior members were killed by U.S. operations. However, it continues activities as a central organization, such as issuing instructions and recommendations to its affiliates in North Africa and the Middle East. In addition, the current Al Qaeda leader Zawahiri has repeatedly issued statements calling for terrorist acts against the West. The possibility of Al Qaeda attacks has not disappeared.

Other currently active Sunni Islamist militant organizations associated with Al Qaeda include Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) based in Yemen, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) based in Algeria and operating

in neighboring Mali, Tunisia and Libya, and Al-Shabaab based in Somalia.

The Taliban, an Islamic extremist organization based in Afghanistan, continues to conduct armed activities in various parts of Afghanistan. Although an agreement was signed between the United States and the Taliban in February 2020 that included a conditional phase-out of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and the start of negotiations between Afghans, the Taliban has since carried out attacks on Afghan security forces and there is no denying that it may continue to carry out suicide bombings and shootings targeting the government and foreigners.