



***INSS Insight*** No. 887, January 5, 2017

## **Suicide Bombings in 2016: The Highest Number of Fatalities**

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2016 was the deadliest year in suicide terrorism, a main weapon of deterrence and one of the most effective tools for promoting the political goals of terrorist organizations since its use began in the early 1980s.

According to the Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict Research Program at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), in 2016, 469 suicide bombings were carried out by 800 perpetrators in 28 countries, causing the deaths of 5,650 people. These numbers represent bombings that were reported by at least two independent sources; many unverified reports by organizations seeking to glorify their name, headed by the Islamic State, were not counted, and coordinated bombings on a number of targets carried out simultaneously were counted as one bombing. At first glance, these figures appear quite similar to those from 2015, when 452 suicide bombings were carried out by 735 perpetrators. In 2016, however, the number of fatalities rose sharply (approximately 5,650 in 2016, compared with 4,330 in 2015), as did the number of those injured (from 8,800 in 2015 to 9,480 in 2016). In addition, the number of countries in which suicide bombings occurred reached a new height (28 in 2016, compared with 22 in 2015). Note that the Islamic State declared that it had carried out hundreds of suicide bombings in addition to those documented in this report, but many of these bombings were neither reported in detail in the media nor supported by independent sources or evidence from the field, and were therefore not included.

The Islamic State continues to be the leading perpetrator of suicide bombings in the world, and is directly or indirectly responsible (through organizations that swore allegiance to it and joined its ranks) for approximately 70 percent (322) of the suicide bombings in the world. As in previous years, the Middle East was the main arena for suicide bombings. On the other hand, there was a slight decline in the frequency of suicide terrorist bombings in southern Asia, and a substantial drop in their frequency in Africa. The involvement of women in suicide terrorism was again apparent this year, indicating the persistence of their willingness to take part in this activity. In

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Our thanks to Jonathan Roll, Naama Prins, Natan Dublin, Nurit Yohanan, Ido Zakai, Ran Peretz, and Reut Hasson, interns in the INSS research program on terrorism, for their help in gathering and analyzing the data on suicide bombings appearing in the report.

addition, the Islamic State and the different elements inspired by it stepped up their efforts to export suicide terrorism to Europe.

More specifically, the number of suicide bombings rose 45 percent in the Middle East in 2016 over the preceding year (298 bombings in 2016, compared with 207 in 2015), and the number of suicide bombers and victims also rose significantly (513 suicide terrorists and approximately 3,915 fatalities in 2016, compared with 353 suicide terrorists and 2,294 fatalities in 2015). The vast majority of the suicide bombings in the region (about 90 percent) were carried out by the Islamic State and its affiliated organizations.

The prolonged campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq by Iraqi forces, backed by the Western coalition, and in particular the offensive that began last March to liberate Islamic State-controlled territories, led to a noticeable increase in the number of suicide bombings launched by the Islamic State, in comparison with the preceding year (146 bombings in 2016, compared with 115 in 2015). In Syria, which also saw a major escalation in the civil war featuring increased brutality on the part of the Assad regime and its partners and the involvement of foreign forces in the fighting, the number of suicide bombings rose by some 38 percent (55 bombings in 2016, compared with 40 in the preceding year). Most of these bombings (42) were launched by the Islamic State, and the remainder by the various opposition organizations, including the Salafi-jihad organizations. In Libya too, the struggle between the army and the Islamic State caused a major increase in suicide bombings (28 bombings in 2016, compared with 13 in 2015).

A steep rise in the number of suicide bombings was also noted in Turkey (21 bombings in 2016, compared with five in 2015) and Yemen (34 in 2016, compared with 13 in 2015). Turkey's involvement in the fighting in Syria, combined with the internal conflict with the Kurdish minority in that country, made Turkey a target for deadly suicide bombings by both the Islamic State (9) and the Kurdish underground (12). The escalation in Yemen is partly attributable to competition for dominance in the region between the Islamic State, which was responsible for 13 bombings, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which carried out 14 bombings. Isolated suicide bombings also took place in Saudi Arabia (4), Egypt (4), Jordan (2), and Tunisia, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Israel (1 each).

In comparison with the rise in the number of suicide bombings in the Middle East, the number of bombings in southern Asia dropped (78 bombings in 2016, compared with 95 in 2015). This region has been a key theater of suicide bombings, mainly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, for more than a decade. Yet despite the fall in the number of terrorist bombings in Afghanistan in 2016 (52, compared with 69 in 2015) and Pakistan (20, compared with 24 in 2015), the bombings became more deadly: in Afghanistan there were 500 fatalities in 2016, compared with 400 in 2015, and in Pakistan there were 382 fatalities in 2016, compared with 220 in 2015. Additional bombings took place in Indonesia (3), Russia (3), India (2), Kyrgyzstan (1), China (1), and Bangladesh (1). Most of the suicide bombings in southern Asia were committed by the Afghan

Taliban (39), the Pakistani Taliban (12) and the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar Pakistani organization (5). In addition, for the first time since it was founded, the Islamic State launched suicide bombings in this region (13 in Afghanistan and 3 in Pakistan). On August 8, 2016, in the framework of the inter-organizational rivalry, both the Islamic State and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar took responsibility for the suicide bombing in a hospital in the Balochistan province of Pakistan, which claimed over 90 lives.

The number of suicide bombings in Africa (in countries that are not classified as part of the Middle East) also declined: 86 bombings in 2016, compared with 144 in 2015, a 40 percent drop. The main reason was a steep decline in bombings carried out by the Boko Haram organization in Nigeria (37 bombings in 2016, compared with 96 in 2015), and Chad (1 bombing, compared with 8 in 2015), with a slight insignificant increase in Cameroon (15 bombings, compared with 13 in 2015). This decrease is attributable to the success of the campaign against Boko Haram led by the new regime in Nigeria, backed by the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISON) coalition. In Somalia, where the al-Shabaab group affiliated with al-Qaeda has been active for years, 29 suicide bombings were carried out in 2016, compared with 18 bombings in the preceding year. Most of these bombings were against military targets of the AMISON force. Three bombings were also carried out by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in Mali, compared with 4 bombings in 2015, and the Islamic State staged 1 bombing in Kenya.

The involvement of women in the suicide bombings in 2016 was again significant: 44 suicide bombings were carried out during the year with the involvement of 77 women in 8 countries around the world, causing the death of approximately 400 people. Although the number of suicide bombings carried out by women fell sharply, compared with the record number of 118 suicide bombings in 2015, it appears that the use of women as suicide terrorists expanded this year, primarily in theaters in which they had not previously operated: France, Austria, Morocco, Libya, Bangladesh, and Indonesia (most of these operations were foiled by the security forces).

Western Europe became a more active theater for suicide bombings in 2016. Signs of this trend emerged already in late 2015 in a series of bombings in Paris in November that marked the first fulfillment of the Islamic State's threat to strike in the heart of Europe. Suicide bombings took place in Belgium and Germany in 2016, and a number of attempted suicide bombings were foiled.

In conclusion, the map of suicide bombings in 2016 indicates that this mode of action continues to be significant in the operational strategy of many terrorist organizations, the vast majority of which belong to the Salafi-jihad movement – the Islamic State and its partners, and the al-Qaeda camp and its affiliates. These groups have adopted *istishhad* (self-sacrifice in God's path) as a principle of faith. In view of the Islamic State's territorial losses and the increasing international efforts to drive it out of the areas it controls, it is likely that the Islamic State and its partners,

together with other terrorist groups, will redouble their efforts to carry out large scale terrorist bombings with many victims. It appears that suicide terrorism will be a key tool for the Islamic State in consolidating its image as unconquerable, creating deterrence against its enemies, and taking revenge for the international activity against it.



