



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი  
GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

## **Security Review**

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**Transformation of the Jihadist Threat**

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Despite the fact that Daesh (often referred to as the Islamic State) has lost control over important territories in Syria and Iraq, the Jihadist movement is far from being defeated for a multitude of reasons. Furthermore, they create new kinds of threats all over the world using modern technologies which are often challenging for both small and big states to deal with.

## **Jihadist Movement and Organizations**

Creating a pan-Islamic state remains a common goal for the Jihadist movement. Jihadists aim to topple governments in the Middle East and fight against the US and its allies.<sup>1</sup> However, the movement is not monolithic – there are tactical, yet important differences among them. In addition, they are in competition with one another and, in some cases, this even leads to armed confrontation. Today, the Jihadist movement can be divided into four parts:

- 1) Daesh and its vilayets (provinces) in Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, the Caucasus, Nigeria, Afghanistan-Pakistan and Niger;<sup>2</sup>
- 2) Al-Qaeda and its affiliated organizations (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria, Al-Shabab in Somalia, branches in the Maghreb, the Indian sub-continent, the Arabian Peninsula and so on<sup>3</sup>);
- 3) Other Jihadist organizations (Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba and others);
- 4) Individual Jihadists who are inspired by the ideologies of Daesh and Al-Qaeda but not yet organizationally affiliated to them.<sup>4</sup>

Jihadist fighters today are mainly concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa. Despite territorial losses, their number does not reduce. In 2018, the number of Jihadists varied from 100,000 to 230,000. For comparison, their number varied from 20,000 to 60,000 in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

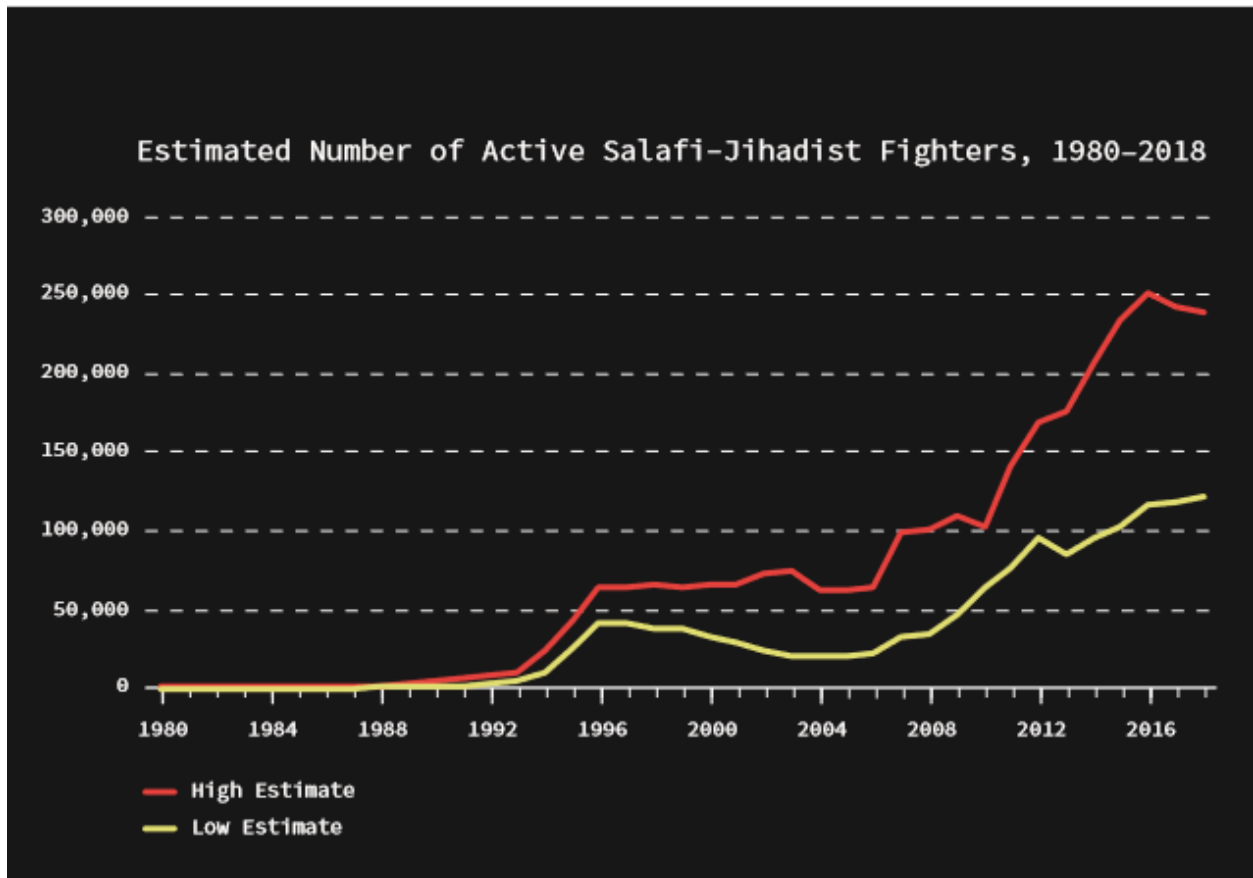
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<sup>1</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, "General Guidelines for Jihad," As-Sahab Media, 1434; Abu Bakr Naji, "The Management of Salafism in the Middle East: A Stage in the Evolution of the Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, p. 1. RAND, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, pp. 21-23.

<sup>4</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, pp. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, p. 9.



*Number of active Jihadist fighters from 1980 to 2018*

At this stage, the largest number of fighters is concentrated in the following states:

Syria	-43,600 – 70,500 people;
Afghanistan	-27,000 – 64,000 people;
Pakistan	-18,000 – 40,000 people;
Iraq	-10,000 – 15,000 people;
Libya	-4,900 – 10,000 people;
Nigeria	-3,000 – 7,000 people;
Somalia	-3,000 – 7,000 people;
Yemen	-2,300 – 3,500 people;

Mali

-1,300 – 3,200 people;<sup>6</sup>

Overall, a total of 67 Jihadist groupings were operating in the world in 2018 which is 180% more than in 2001. Of these, 44 groupings are not affiliated to either Daesh or Al-Qaeda.

### **Transformation of Fighting Methods**

Despite territorial losses, the motivation of the Jihadists is not waning. They are trying to follow the current changes and conduct their fight in the new environment.

Despite the fact that a smaller number of bombs were detonated in Europe in 2018 as compared to the previous years, the means and weapons of attack have become more diverse. Now cars, hammers, knives and other blunt objects are more and more intensively used for terrorist attacks. This no longer requires groups, their preparation, transportation, internal communication and so on – things that made their discovery more probable in the past. Today, using the new tactics, a terrorist attack can be carried out by a single person which makes it more difficult to get information about it and prevent it in advance.

In addition, the Jihadists are given a high level of autonomy. Oftentimes, they choose places, dates and weapons for carrying out an attack themselves and no longer need to exchange information about it. This also prevents the information from leaking.

Additionally, several reasons are revealed which will make the process of monitoring even more difficult in the future. Technologies are being developed rapidly, creating new opportunities for the Jihadists.

Among new technologies, drones need to be mentioned separately as they are used for both intelligence operations as well as for attacks.<sup>7</sup> Today, drones have become cheaper and easier to access. Moreover, individuals can build them by themselves.<sup>8</sup> Daesh actively uses unmanned aerial vehicles for carrying out its attacks. For example, in 2017 Daesh carried out from 60 to 100 aerial attacks in Iraq and Syria using drones.<sup>9</sup> Hence, it is natural that the Jihadists have started mass producing them. In June 2017, the Iraqi security forces discovered a drone factory belonging to Daesh where partially constructed unmanned aerial vehicles were found.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Unmanned Systems Integrated Roadmap (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2013), <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/DOD-USRM-2013.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Don Ressler, "The Islamic State and Drones: Supply, Scale, and Future Threats," West Point, NY: Combatting Terrorist Center at West Point, United States Military Academy, July 2018.

<sup>10</sup> "Inside the ISIS drone factory: Seized Mosul warehouse reveals the Jihadis' crude reconnaissance planes and deadly four-wheeled robot bombs," *Daily Mail*, June 30, 2017.



Completely new opportunities arise with the use of 3D printing technologies. The study conducted at the University of Sheffield proved that ten drones can be printed in 24 hours using this technology which measures up to 300 drones a month.<sup>11</sup>

A drone boat deserves a separate mention, having been used only once in January 2017 to attack an adversary in the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> However, this tactic could also be refined in the future.

To serve their purpose of advertising themselves, boosting motivation among supporters and attracting additional funding and followers, the Jihadists are actively using social media, including Twitter, Telegram, Facebook, etc. However, these platforms are actively combatting Jihadist propaganda. For example, Twitter suspended 360,000 accounts for their connections to terrorism in 2015-2016.<sup>13</sup> In response, the Jihadists are trying to move to alternative channels and applications of communication.

Yet another field of possible use for Jihadists is the artificial intelligence. Despite the fact that most Jihadist groups do not currently possess the resources to do this, the Director of US National

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<sup>11</sup> Natasha Bajema and Diane DiEullis, "Peril and Promise: Emerging Technologies and WMD," National Defense University, October 12, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher P. Cavas, "New Houthi weapon emerges: a drone boat," *Defense News*, February 19, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Katie Benner, "twitter Suspends 235,000 More Accounts Over Extremism," *New York Times*, August 18, 2016.

Intelligence, Daniel Coats, pointed out in the 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment that artificial intelligence could create new challenges in the field of security.<sup>14</sup>

Lately, the Jihadist organizations have been using encrypted communication applications more and more often which makes it more difficult for the government structures to control their connections.<sup>15</sup>

Virtual currencies are a topic of separate discussion as they no longer require banks for transactions to be made. This excludes the possibility of tracing their origins or controlling their movement.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from this, the so-called Dark Web that is not visible in conventional search engines (www – World Wide Web) is also used for illegal business (drugs, weapons, user databases and other illegal activities). Back in 2015, after its attack in Paris, Daesh stated that it would be actively using the Dark Web for its purposes.<sup>17</sup> In this way, they have the ability to provide money and weapons to their supporters.<sup>18</sup>

The United Cyber Caliphate, created by Daesh in 2016, also deserves a special mention as its goal was to carry out cyber-attacks. This unit managed to hack numerous websites as well as hundreds of Facebook and Twitter profiles.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel R. Coats, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, March 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, pp. 35-37.

<sup>16</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, pp. 37-39.

<sup>17</sup> "IS Shifts Propaganda Archive to the Dark Web," SITE, November 18, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Seth G. Jones and others, "The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat," CSIS, November 2018, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Ken Wolf, "Cyber Jihadis Dabble in DDoS: Assessing the Threat," Flashpoint, July 2017.



Yet another threat is the possibility of the Jihadists using weapons of mass destruction, especially given the fact that Daesh and Al-Qaeda have already used chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq.<sup>20</sup>

### **Georgia Facing the Transformation of Jihadist Threats**

After the size of the territories controlled by the Jihadists reduced, yet the number of their fighters remained the same, they started looking for refuge in order to survey the situation, rest, spend the winter, heal from injuries and for other reasons as well. They first move towards the direction where they believe the access, movement and residence will be easier.

It is exactly in this light that we have to consider the incident with Chataev and his group that took place at the end of 2017 in Georgia when the Jihadists who had crossed from Syria to Turkey managed to then enter Georgia.

Given the fact that the Jihadists are altering their tactics all over the world, using new technologies to achieve their goals, it is probable that they will use the same methods with regard to Georgia as well.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel R. Coast, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, March 2018.



It is less likely that the cutting-edge technological achievements will be used here for the first time; however, there are certain preconditions for them trying to transform their methods of fighting in Georgia as well:

- 1) The case of Chataev and his group showed that in the case of using traditional fighting methods (shootings), the Jihadists have small chances of success in Georgia. Georgian special forces managed to deal with the danger created by Chataev's group adequately;
- 2) Jihadists have already tested new means of fighting with regard to Georgia:
  - There was a case of a Jihadist organization (Daesh) conducting a cyber-attack against Georgian websites;<sup>21</sup>
  - From time to time pages (groups) are created on social media that are favorably disposed towards the Jihadist groups;<sup>22</sup>
  - Georgian special forces are periodically arresting people who have necessary materials for building weapons of mass destruction. The most recent of such cases was observed on April 28, 2017, when the State Security Service of Georgia arrested five people in Kobuleti for the illegal sales of a radioactive substance, Uranium 238. Before that, in January of 2017, the State Security Service of Georgia was stating about the arrest of three people attempting to sell radioactive Cesium. Law enforcement structures and experts fear that the radioactive materials can be used to build the so-called "dirty bomb." This means a conventional explosive system which would spread radiation over a large territory.<sup>23</sup>

The abovementioned indicators show that the transformation of terrorist threats is quite realistic in Georgia and respective preparations are necessary for their prevention.

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<sup>21</sup><http://cyc.ge/%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%9A%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98-%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A1%E1%83%9E%E1%83%94%E1%83%AA%E1%83%94%E1%83%A4%E1%83%98%E1%83%99%E1%83%90/>

<sup>22</sup><http://cyc.ge/%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%9A%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98-%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A1%E1%83%9E%E1%83%94%E1%83%AA%E1%83%94%E1%83%A4%E1%83%98%E1%83%99%E1%83%90/>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/27704241.html>