

CLAWS Newsletter



Terror Index | Volume I | Issue No. 01

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Terror Index: Issues in May 2026

Terrorism in May 2026 is not a problem in retreat, it is a problem in migration. Global fatalities have declined from their 2023 peak, but the geographic spread of violence is at its widest since 2018, with 66 countries recording at least one terrorist incident in 2024 and 45 countries worsening year-on-year. The Sahel has become the world's primary terrorism theatre, accounting for over half of all global terrorism deaths. IS-Khorasan Province continues to project external operations into Europe and Central Asia despite reduced activity in Afghanistan. Terror financing has evolved faster than the institutions designed to contain it, with cryptocurrency, stablecoins, and decentralised finance platforms now serving as primary funding conduits for groups ranging from IS to Khalistan networks. In South Asia, Pakistan leads the Global Terrorism Index 2026 for the first time, recording 1,139 deaths and 1,045 incidents in 2025 — its worst year since 2013 — while simultaneously receiving a \$1.32 billion IMF disbursement over Indian objections citing terror financing concerns. This newsletter surveys the most consequential terrorism developments across regions, financing mechanisms, and threat typologies as of May 2026.

Terror Financing

[\[Kroll\]: Terror Financing: The Digital Turn, 8 May \[FATF Comprehensive Update\] \[FATF Virtual Assets\]](#)

The FATF's Comprehensive Update on Terrorist Financing Risks — drawing on contributions from over 80 jurisdictions and 840 private sector submissions — found that 69 per cent of assessed jurisdictions have major or structural deficiencies in investigating, prosecuting, and convicting terror financing cases. The report identified a marked shift toward mixed-method financing: groups increasingly combine hawala, cash couriers, cryptocurrency, and e-commerce platforms within single financing operations, adding layers of jurisdictional complexity that fragment investigative responsibility across multiple national authorities. The India-specific dimension is notable: the FATF case studies include the Gorakhnath attack, whose perpetrator used PayPal and VPNs to fund IS-linked operations, and the Pulwama bombing, whose perpetrator procured aluminum powder via Amazon — demonstrating that e-commerce platforms are now operational logistics infrastructure, not merely communication

channels. Separately, the FATF's June 2025 targeted update on virtual assets found that IS-K has increasingly used virtual assets for organisational transfers and international donation collection, while North Korea conducted the largest single cryptocurrency theft in history — \$1.46 billion from exchange By Bit in February 2025 — with only 3.8 per cent of stolen funds recovered. Crypto-linked illicit flows reached an estimated \$158 billion globally in 2025, more than tripling 2024 totals, against a backdrop of declining enforcement capacity in several major jurisdictions.

The IMF's Pakistan Problem, May 9 [\[Business Today\]](#) [\[News on AIR\]](#) [\[ORF\]](#)

The International Monetary Fund's Executive Board approved a disbursement of \$1.32 billion to Pakistan on 9 May 2026 — \$1.1 billion under the Extended Fund Facility and \$220 million from the Resilience and Sustainability Facility — bringing total disbursements under the two programmes to \$4.8 billion. India abstained from the vote, presenting a formal statement to the Board arguing that rewarding continued state sponsorship of cross-border terrorism sends a dangerous signal to the global community, exposes funding agencies to reputational risk, and makes a mockery of global values. India further raised the structural concern that Pakistan's military — assessed by a 2021 UN report as the country's largest commercial conglomerate — retains decisive influence over economic policy, raising serious questions about whether IMF-mandated reforms can be implemented without military consent and whether disbursed funds remain insulated from military appropriation. The IMF Board prioritised Pakistan's technical compliance with economic benchmarks over these concerns. This is not a new tension. Pakistan has entered IMF programmes 24 times and completed the conditions of only one, a track record India raised directly at the Board meeting. The broader institutional question — whether the IMF's exclusively economic conditionality framework is adequate for a state whose military simultaneously runs commercial enterprises, directs proxy terrorist groups, and controls foreign policy — remains structurally unresolved and increasingly urgent.

South Asia

Pakistan Leads the Global Terrorism Index for the First Time, May 4 [\[GTI 2026\]](#) [\[IIEP\]](#) [\[GTI 2025\]](#)

For the first time since the Global Terrorism Index's inception, Pakistan leads the index as the country most impacted by terrorism — recording 1,139 deaths and 1,045 incidents in 2025, its highest level since 2013. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan emerged as the fastest-growing

terrorist group globally, with a 90 per cent increase in attributed deaths, while violence in Balochistan from the BLA continued in parallel. The simultaneity of TTP and BLA operational tempo reflects two structurally distinct threats: TTP, driven by ideological grievance and Afghan Taliban sanctuary, and BLA, driven by ethno-nationalist grievance against Islamabad and its China-linked CPEC infrastructure projects. For India, this dual insurgency matters less for what it does to Pakistani state capacity — though that matters — than for what it signals about the durability of the Afghan Taliban's sanctuary provision and IS-K's continued ability to recruit from TTP defectors dissatisfied with the Taliban's governance. The UN Security Council Sanctions Monitoring Team assessed approximately 2,000 IS-K fighters operating in Afghanistan in 2025, with 600 additional recruits drawn predominantly from Central Asia.

India, May 6: The Terror Calendar Intensifies [\[Organiser\]](#) [\[SL Guardian\]](#) [\[The Tribune\]](#)
[\[News on Air\]](#)

May 2026 has been the most active month for terrorist violence in India since the post-Pahalgam surge of May 2025, with attacks concentrated in Punjab and timed with deliberate precision to coincide with the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor. The pattern across the month reflects not opportunistic violence but a directed operational tempo — ISI-backed modules executing symbolic strikes against military and political targets, calibrated to signal that India's cross-border response of May 2025 has not disrupted the proxy campaign's infrastructure or intent.

The sharpest escalation came on 5 May 2026, when twin explosions struck Punjab within hours of each other. The first detonated near the gate of the BSF Headquarters in Jalandhar at approximately 8 pm, when a scooter parked in a busy commercial area exploded as a delivery worker returned from a nearby parcel delivery — preliminary investigations suggesting the explosive had been concealed in a dustbin beside the vehicle. Approximately three hours later, a second explosion struck near the boundary wall of the Army cantonment on Khasa Road in Amritsar, with CCTV footage capturing the moment of detonation and forensic teams dispatched to determine the explosive composition. The Khalistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the Jalandhar blast via social media under the banner of "Operation Nawa Savair," describing it explicitly as retaliation for the police killing of a Khalistani operative in Gurdaspur in February 2026 — and timed, DGP Gaurav Yadav confirmed, to coincide with the Sindoor anniversary. Investigators simultaneously probed a possible link to Pakistan-based

gangster Shahzad Bhatti, a handler with documented connections to multiple Punjab modules. The NIA stepped in to assist local authorities within hours of both blasts.

Six days later, on 11 May 2026, approximately twenty masked men attacked the BJP's district headquarters near the Tarn Taran bypass, entering the premises, vandalising property, shattering windows, and assaulting party leaders present inside — an attack that fell below the threshold of an explosive incident but followed immediately after the Jalandhar and Amritsar blasts, extending the operational signal from military targets to political ones. Police registered a case, deployed heavy forces, and examined CCTV footage, with no arrests confirmed at the time of writing.

These May incidents follow directly from the April 2026 escalation. On 27 April, an explosion on a railway track near Bothonia village in Patiala district killed a suspected militant, Jagroop Singh, while he was attempting to plant a device — with the Khalistan Tiger Force claiming responsibility the following day through Germany-based operative Jaswinder Singh Multani. Patiala police arrested four ISI-backed operatives — Pardeep Singh Khalsa, Kulwinder Singh, Satnam Singh, and Gurpreet Singh — on 28 April, recovering from Tarn Taran district an RPG, RDX, a metallic IED, detonators, grenades, pistols, cartridges, and timer devices, with initial investigations tracing the module to a Malaysia-based handler operating under the alias Jujhar Singh.

India's diplomatic response to this month's escalation has run in parallel with the security operations. At the 5th India-Singapore Joint Working Group on Combating Terrorism and Transnational Crime, held in New Delhi on 9 May 2026, both countries jointly condemned the Pahalgam attack and the Red Fort blast, renewed commitment to strengthening multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation through the UN, ASEAN, and FATF, and agreed to strengthen information-sharing mechanisms under the UNSC 1267 Sanctions Committee. The discussions explicitly addressed terrorist recruitment, cross-border movement, radicalisation, abuse of technology for terrorist activities, and the nexus between transnational organised crime and terrorism — the precise architecture of the Punjab franchise model.

Three things stand out about May 2026's violence as distinct from the prior months. First, the shift from police stations — the dominant target category since September 2024 — to military installations: BSF headquarters and an Army cantonment boundary wall represent a deliberate escalatory signal, testing whether strikes on central security forces provoke a different political and military response than strikes on state police infrastructure. Second, the simultaneity of the

5 May blasts — two cities, two hours apart — indicates coordinated operational command, not isolated local modules acting independently. Third, the anniversary timing is not coincidental: the handlers are communicating directly to India's security establishment that Operation Sindoor produced a ceasefire, not a deterrent. That message is the most consequential terrorism development in India this month, and the one that will most directly shape counterterrorism doctrine in the months ahead.

Europe

Lone Wolves and Youth Radicalisation: The West's Structural Vulnerability, May 1

[\[GTI 2026\]](#) [\[IEP\]](#) [\[Euronews\]](#)

The GTI 2026 — released in March 2026 by the Institute for Economics and Peace — records a 28 per cent fall in global terrorism deaths and a 22 per cent decline in incidents in 2025, but frames this aggregate improvement against a sharply worsening picture in Western democracies. Lone-wolf actors carried out 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West over the last five years and are three times more likely to successfully execute an attack than groups of two or more individuals. Youth and minors accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025 — a threefold increase since 2021 — with the radicalisation process now measurably compressed: what historically took months or years now occurs within days, driven by short-form propaganda, algorithmic amplification, and the exploitation of developmental vulnerabilities in adolescents. Recruitment and ideological indoctrination have been documented in children as young as eight. In the United Kingdom, under-18s accounted for 42 per cent of 219 terror arrests in 2024. Germany was Europe's worst-performing nation on the GTI 2025, placing 27th globally following the Magdeburg Christmas market attack. The structural driver is the absence of any effective regulatory architecture for algorithmic content distribution: counterterrorism agencies built around organisational penetration, leadership decapitation, and material support prosecutions are institutionally mismatched to a threat generated by recommendation systems optimising for engagement rather than safety — a policy gap that neither PRAHAAR in India nor any equivalent Western counterterrorism doctrine has yet closed.

The United Kingdom Raises Terror Threat to Severe: The Antisemitism Emergency, May 1

[\[UK Government\]](#) [\[MI5\]](#) [\[CBC News\]](#) [\[NBC News\]](#) [\[Times of Israel\]](#)

On 30 April 2026, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre raised the United Kingdom's national terrorism threat level from Substantial to Severe — meaning an attack is "highly likely in the next six months" — following a stabbing attack the previous day in Golders Green, North London, in which two Jewish men aged 76 and 34 were seriously wounded. The Metropolitan Police declared the incident a terrorist attack, with the suspect — a 45-year-old British national born in Somalia — assessed as having gone out with the intent to stab "visibly Jewish" people. He had previously been referred to the government's Prevent counterterrorism programme in 2020, a referral closed the same year without disclosed reason. That detail has sharpened already significant debate about Prevent's ability to catch individuals who radicalise through fragmented, non-organisational pathways. The Golders Green attack did not occur in isolation. It followed an arson attack on 23 March 2026 targeting Hatzolah ambulances in the same area, a pattern of attacks on Jewish institutions across March and April, and the October 2025 killing of two worshippers in an antisemitic attack at the Heaton Park Synagogue. MI5's public statement made clear that the threat level increase reflects not one incident but a sustained convergence of Islamist and Extreme Right-Wing terrorist threats, with an explicitly elevated threat to Jewish and Israeli individuals and institutions. The British government declared an antisemitism "emergency" the day after the attack and pledged £25 million for security around synagogues, schools, and community centres. Prime Minister Starmer opened the question of whether a foreign state is behind some of the incidents — a line of inquiry that UK shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp tied directly to Iran, citing documented IRGC-linked attacks in Australia in 2024. Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch described the situation as a "national emergency." Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's public criticism that "words are not enough" reflects a broader frustration that the architecture of prevention has repeatedly failed at the individual case level even as threat assessments have nominally tracked the problem.

IS-Khorasan: The Most Dangerous Affiliate Europe Has Not Contained, May 6 [\[ICG\]](#)
[\[ICCT\]](#) [\[DIIS\]](#) [\[Soufan Center\]](#)

IS-Khorasan Province, assessed by the UN Security Council in as the Islamic State affiliate posing the greatest extraterritorial terrorist threat globally, maintains an estimated force of 4,000 to 6,000 fighters and family members in Afghanistan. Despite a reduction in the frequency of large-scale attacks in 2025, IS-K has accelerated its use of artificial intelligence to expand the reach and resonance of multilingual propaganda — producing content in English,

Russian, Tajik, Uzbek, and Pashto simultaneously — and has demonstrated a consistent capacity for remotely directed plots in Europe, relying predominantly on Central Asian and North Caucasian diaspora networks rather than Afghanistan-based operatives crossing physical borders. The Danish Institute for International Studies' 2025 analysis of seven IS-K-linked plots in Europe between 2020 and 2024 found that every single one involved remote handler guidance via encrypted platforms, with no requirement for the directing principal to leave Afghanistan or Pakistan. Azerbaijan's State Security Service arrested three IS-K-affiliated militants in January 2026 planning an attack on the Israeli embassy in Baku — confirming the group's continued projection into the South Caucasus. IS-K's leadership voiced explicit support for attacks on United States soil in 2025. The ICG's July 2025 briefing on IS-K assessed that while the group's strikes have fallen in number, its offensive could resurge — and that more robust law enforcement cooperation between Afghanistan's neighbours remains the critical gap in containment.

Russia's Shadow War: Sabotage, GPS Jamming, and the Threshold Problem, May 12
[\[CSIS\]](#) [\[GLOBSEC\]](#) [\[ECFR\]](#) [\[Eurasia Review\]](#)

Russia's hybrid warfare campaign against Europe has escalated from a pattern of deniable sabotage into a systematic, multi-domain operation that NATO described at "record high" threat levels in 2025. IISS documented over 50 sabotage events in Europe from 2022 to mid-2025 linked to Russia, with the pace fourfold-increasing in 2024, and over 150 suspected hybrid incidents recorded across EU and NATO member states by early 2026 — 321 suspected cases in Germany alone. CSIS's March 2025 analysis of Russian destructive attacks and plots documents arson attacks on commercial infrastructure, railway sabotage in Poland, foiled letter-bomb plots routing incendiary packages through EU aviation hubs, and a foiled assassination attempt on Rheinmetall's CEO — all part of what GLOBSEC describes as a deliberate threshold management strategy: each individual incident designed to fall below the level that would trigger a unified alliance response, while the cumulative effect — infrastructure vulnerability, political anxiety, social polarisation — constitutes the actual strategic objective. GPS jamming illustrates the scale: Lithuania recorded over 1,000 interference cases in June 2025 alone. Poland recorded 2,732 GPS jamming incidents in January 2025. Russian-launched drones entered Polish airspace 19–21 times in September and October 2025, triggering NATO Article 4 consultations and forcing airport closures, their subsequent disinformation amplification documented by threat consultancy Alto Intelligence in a January 2026 ECFR-published study of 50,000 digital signals. Russia's recruitment model

has adapted following mass intelligence officer expulsions since 2022: the GRU now recruits third-country petty criminals via Telegram for small-payment acts of vandalism, arson, and infrastructure disruption, maintaining operational capability while insulating Russian state personnel from direct attribution. French intelligence assesses Russia as likely behind the desecration of a Holocaust memorial in May 2024 and the placement of pig heads around mosques in September 2025 — physical provocations immediately weaponised through Russian propaganda networks to simultaneously inflame Jewish and Muslim communities. Europe's response — FIMI sanctions against six Russian individuals in January 2026 — remains, as the ECFR and Eurasia Review analyses both note, categorically reactive against a threat that is structurally offensive.

West Asia

Iran's Axis of Resistance: A Proxy Network in Structural Degradation, May 1 [\[Belfer Center\]](#) [\[House of Commons Library\]](#) [\[Wilson Center\]](#) [\[IEP GTI 2026\]](#)

The joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran beginning 28 February 2026 — targeting nuclear sites, IRGC infrastructure, and ballistic missile programmes over twelve days before a Qatar-brokered ceasefire on 8 April — have materially altered the threat calculus of Iran's proxy network, though not in the direction of de-escalation. The Belfer Center's April 2026 analysis of Iran's proxy model describes Hezbollah entering 2026 in a state of structural degradation: militarily defeated by Israel in 2024, deprived of its Syrian strategic depth following Assad's fall in December 2024, unable to reward its constituents at pre-war levels, and further financially constrained as Iran's economy deteriorated under sanctions and mass protests in 2025–26. Iran's capacity to fund Hezbollah — historically approximating \$700 million per year — was additionally squeezed by the US capture of Venezuelan President Maduro and intensified counternarcotics operations that disrupted Iran-Hezbollah oil and drug trafficking revenue streams in Latin America. Despite these constraints, Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel in March 2026 in support of Iran, an ill-fated intervention that the Lebanese government used to formally prohibit all the group's military activities. The Houthis in Yemen, who had paused Red Sea attacks following the Gaza ceasefire of October 2025, resumed hostilities in response to the February 2026 Iran strikes, threatening Strait of Hormuz closure and attacking US naval vessels — a direct threat to Indian trade and energy supply lines. Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces, securing approximately 119 parliamentary seats in the November 2025

elections with Nouri al-Maliki nominated as prime minister in January 2026, provide Iran-aligned political cover that complicates any containment of the proxy network domestically. For India, the most consequential dimension is the IRGC's likely pivot — with conventional capacity degraded — toward intensified irregular warfare through proxies, cyber-kinetic operations, and terrorism financing networks that have already demonstrated India-facing capability in documented NIA cases.

Istanbul Consulate Attack: Iran's Proxy Shadow Over Turkey, May 5 [[CBS News](#)] [[The Times](#)]

On 7 April 2026, three gunmen attacked the Consulate General of Israel in Istanbul, Turkey, in a midday assault that left one attacker dead, two attackers wounded, and two Turkish police officers injured. Both Turkey and Israel formally designated the attack as an act of terrorism. The attack occurred at the height of the Iran-US-Israel conflict — one week before the Qatar-brokered ceasefire of 8 April — and its ideological lineage, while not formally attributed to a specific organisation by Turkish authorities at the time of writing, fits the pattern of Iranian-proxy-inspired opportunistic strikes against Israeli diplomatic targets documented across Europe, the Caucasus, and South Asia since the February 2026 US-Israeli strikes began. The incident is analytically significant for two reasons. First, Turkey — a NATO member with a complex relationship with both Iran and Israel — has historically maintained operational intelligence cooperation with Israeli security services while simultaneously hosting Hamas political figures and tolerating a degree of pro-Palestinian militant activity that Western allies have found frustrating. A successful attack on Israeli diplomatic infrastructure on Turkish soil tests that balance in ways Ankara would have preferred to avoid. Second, the Istanbul attack follows the Azerbaijan State Security Service's arrest in January 2026 of three IS-K-affiliated militants planning an attack on the Israeli embassy in Baku — confirming that Israeli diplomatic installations across the broader Middle East and Eurasian periphery have become a primary target category for multiple non-state actors simultaneously inspired by the Iran conflict. The convergence of IS-K targeting, Hezbollah-inspired lone actors, and Iranian proxy networks around Israeli diplomatic targets represents a qualitatively new threat environment for Israeli foreign missions globally — and, given India's deepening strategic relationship with Israel, a threat environment India's own diplomatic security architecture cannot treat as geographically remote.

Hezbollah Reaches Michigan: The Iran War's Domestic Blowback, May 6 [\[CNN\]](#) [\[Reuters\]](#)
[\[BBC\]](#) [\[CBS News\]](#) [\[Time\]](#)

On 12 March 2026, Ayman Mohamed Ghazali — a 41-year-old naturalised US citizen born in Lebanon — drove an explosive-laden pickup truck into Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan, the largest Jewish temple in the state, as over 100 children attended school inside. Armed with an AR-style rifle and a truck loaded with gasoline and fireworks, Ghazali exchanged gunfire with security officers before shooting himself inside the vehicle, which became wedged in a hallway. Sixty-four people were injured, including one security officer. On 30 March 2026, the FBI formally designated the attack as a Hezbollah-inspired act of terrorism — the first time a domestic attack on US soil had been officially attributed to Hezbollah's ideological influence. FBI Special Agent in Charge Jennifer Runyan confirmed that Ghazali had been radicalising for months, consuming pro-Hezbollah and Iranian news content since at least January 2026, conducting surveillance of Jewish institutions across Michigan, and searching explicitly for "the largest gathering of Israelis in the state of Michigan." The immediate trigger appears to have been the killing of Ghazali's family members in Lebanon — including a brother the Israeli military identified as a Hezbollah commander — during the US-Israeli strikes of February 2026. Ten minutes before the attack, he sent a video to his sister in Lebanon announcing his intent to carry out a mass terrorist attack. The US Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan stated that had Ghazali survived, his office would have prosecuted him for providing material support to a designated foreign terrorist organisation. The attack carries implications that extend well beyond Michigan. It demonstrates that the Iran-Israel-US conflict — now in a ceasefire phase following the April 2026 Qatar-brokered agreement — has generated a transnational ideological blowback that neither the ceasefire nor the elimination of Iran's conventional military capacity has neutralised. Individuals with familial ties to the conflict zone, exposed to Hezbollah's ideological content through social media, and radicalised by the death of relatives in airstrikes represent a threat profile that Western counterterrorism agencies are not institutionally equipped to detect before the attack rather than after. The FBI confirmed no broader Hezbollah-directed plot exists in Michigan — but the architecture of inspiration-based lone actor terrorism means the absence of a directed plot is not the absence of a threat.

Latin America

Colombia's Election Season Terror Wave, May 2 . [\[France24\]](#) [\[ACLED\]](#) [\[InSight Crime\]](#) [\[CBS News\]](#)

Colombia's approaching presidential election — scheduled for May 2026 — has triggered a sharp surge in coordinated terrorist violence by FARC dissidents and the ELN, reflecting a consistent pattern in which armed groups treat electoral cycles as strategic opportunities to demonstrate state incapacity. On 25 April 2026, a bomb detonated on the Pan-American Highway in Cajibío, killing 20 people and injuring 36. CBS News separately reported 26 coordinated attacks on civilian and military targets across a single weekend, attributed to FARC dissident commander "Marlon," who has explicitly threatened to disrupt the election. The structural context is the collapse of President Petro's "Total Peace" initiative, which broke down definitively when the ELN launched its military offensive in the Catatumbo region in January 2025, killing over 103 people and displacing 20,000 — revealing that the group calculated territorial dominance as more strategically advantageous than a negotiated agreement. InSight Crime's profile of the ELN documents the group's consolidation of dominance along the Colombia-Venezuela border, where ties with segments of Venezuelan authorities provide operational freedom and criminal revenue streams that make demobilisation structurally unattractive. The US Foreign Terrorist Organisation designation of several cartels under the Trump administration added a bilateral dimension: FARC dissident leader Iván Mordisco, Gulf Clan commander Chiquito Malo, and ELN leader Pablito were jointly named targets in the US-Colombia military cooperation agreement of February 2026, making them simultaneously subject to US-backed kinetic pressure and motivated to escalate pre-election violence. The convergence of electoral timing, narco-terror financing, and US direct military involvement has created a threat environment whose consequences for regional stability the ACLED conflict tracker describes as the most acute civilian targeting situation Colombia has faced since the peak of the Medellín era.

Africa

Drone Terrorism: The Next Frontier, May 2 [\[Soufan Center\]](#) [\[IEP GTI 2026\]](#) [\[Eurasia Review\]](#)

The weaponisation of drone technology by non-state actors is moving faster than the counterterrorism doctrine designed to contain it. Terrorist groups across Africa — ISWAP and

JNIM — have been using unmanned aerial systems for reconnaissance and propaganda since at least 2020 and have begun integrating commercial UAS with improvised explosive delivery mechanisms for direct attack purposes. The Soufan Center's January 2026 threat assessment identifies 2026 as potentially the year when drone expertise migrates to a Western terrorist context, with actors deploying UAS for surveillance, target identification, or direct attack against densely populated venues. The Ukraine-Russia battlefield has functioned as an open-source training manual: footage of drone deployment tactics, countermeasure evasion, and target prioritisation circulates freely on Telegram channels monitored by non-state actors across conflict theatres. The GTI 2026 confirms ISWAP has been honing drone attack capabilities in West Africa, while the Soufan Center separately flags the possibility that newly FTO-designated cartels under the Trump administration could deploy drones against US civilian infrastructure in retaliation for military strikes — a tactic that would represent a qualitative escalation in narco-terrorism. Most Western counterterrorism legal frameworks contain no specific drone terrorism offence, no mandatory registration covering sub-250 gram UAS categories most easily weaponised, and no attribution doctrine for state-sponsored drone attacks delivered through non-state proxies. India's own drone exposure — 125 BSF interceptions carrying narcotics and weapons along Punjab's Pakistan border in 2024 — sits at the less sophisticated end of this threat spectrum today. The trajectory, given the pace of technology diffusion from professional conflict zones to criminal and terrorist networks, suggests that will not remain the case.

The Sahel: JNIM Closes in on Bamako, May 10 [\[UN Security Council\]](#) [\[Africa Center\]](#) [\[NPR\]](#) [\[UN Press\]](#)

The Sahel now accounts for over half of all global terrorism-related deaths — a tenfold increase since 2019 — and the situation deteriorated sharply in the first quarter of 2026. On 25 April 2026, JNIM and Tuareg rebel alliance FLA launched one of the largest coordinated attacks seen in West Africa in years, simultaneously targeting Kati near Bamako, the Bamako international airport, Mopti, Sevare, and Gao — a multi-city assault that exposed the structural limitations of Mali's military junta in defending even its core urban infrastructure. This followed months of JNIM economic siege tactics: since September 2025, the group attacked over 100 fuel tankers on the Bamako-Segou transit corridor and sealed off major highways from Senegal and Ivory Coast, bringing Bamako's fuel supply to near-collapse for weeks and demonstrating a

sophisticated understanding of how to weaponise economic interdependence. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies documented JNIM's geographic expansion into western and southern Mali in July 2025 — a dramatic departure from its historical concentration in north and central Mali — with fatalities in western areas doubling over the preceding year. According to UN-verified data presented to the Security Council, at least 5,519 people were killed and 2,608 injured across the Sahel between March 2025 and January 2026 alone. Russia's replacement of French security partnerships with Wagner Group and successor contractor deployments has not improved population security — the operational mandate of these forces is regime protection, not counterterrorism — and the structural permissiveness enabling JNIM's expansion has deepened since the 2022 and 2023 coups.

Mali's Capital Under Siege: JNIM's Strategic Leap, May 14 [\[NPR\]](#) [\[Africa Center\]](#) [\[Just Security\]](#) [\[Security Council Report\]](#)

The coordinated JNIM and FLA assault on 25 April 2026 — simultaneously striking Kati near Bamako, Bamako's international airport, Mopti, Sevare, and Gao — was the most significant multi-city attack in West Africa in years. What makes it analytically significant beyond its immediate casualty toll is what preceded it: a months-long economic siege in which JNIM fighters attacked over 100 fuel tankers and sealed off major highways from Senegal and Ivory Coast, bringing Bamako's fuel supply to near-collapse and demonstrating a level of logistical strategic planning not previously attributed to a Sahelian jihadist group. Just Security's 8 May 2026 digest confirmed that JNIM killed approximately 50 people in a separate central Mali attack on 7 May — within two weeks of the Bamako assault — reflecting an operational tempo that Malian Armed Forces, operating alongside Russian contractors whose mandate is regime protection rather than counterterrorism, cannot sustain against. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies' September 2025 analysis documented JNIM's geographic expansion into western and southern Mali — previously less than 8 per cent of JNIM activity — as a conscious strategic effort to cut off Bamako's economic lifelines rather than merely hold territory in the north. The broader scale is staggering. The UN Secretary-General told the Security Council in November 2025 that the Sahel accounts for over half of global terrorism casualties, with at least 5,519 killed and 2,608 injured between March 2025 and January 2026 alone — figures that have produced no response commensurate with their gravity.

Nigeria: ISWAP's Resurgence and the US-Nigeria Joint Offensive, May 19 [[The Guardian](#)] [[Al Jazeera](#)] [[Britannica](#)] [[Global Centre for R2P](#)] [[Soufan Center](#)]

Nigeria has experienced its most intense period of jihadist violence in years across 2026, with Boko Haram and its Islamic State-affiliated splinter ISWAP simultaneously escalating attacks in the northeast, expanding geographically into previously unaffected states, and drawing the United States into direct military involvement for the first time since the peak of the Lake Chad Basin crisis. The convergence of three distinct attack campaigns — mass casualty bombings in Maiduguri, massacres in Kwara State, and a coordinated multi-base assault across Borno — has overstretched Nigerian armed forces deployed across two-thirds of the country's states and produced a security crisis that Abuja can no longer manage without external military support.

The violence escalated sharply in the opening months of 2026. On 3 February, hundreds of militants attacked the villages of Woro and Nuku in Kwara State — geographically far south of the traditional Lake Chad Basin insurgency zone — killing at least 162 residents, torching buildings, and abducting dozens after villagers rejected demands to adopt the attackers' interpretation of sharia law. Nigerian President Bola Tinubu attributed the massacre to Boko Haram, while a local House of Representatives member blamed the Lakurawa group — an Islamic State Sahel Province-linked network that originated in Mali and Niger, was designated a terrorist organisation by Abuja in 2024, and represents exactly the kind of militant spillover across porous borders that the Soufan Center's May 2025 analysis of ISWAP's tactical evolution warned was accelerating. Six weeks later, on 16 March, three near-simultaneous suicide bombings struck Maiduguri — the historic birthplace of Boko Haram — killing at least 27 people and injuring 146 in what was the city's deadliest attack since 2021, ending a year-long period of relative calm. Between 4 and 6 March, suspected militants separately attacked Ngoshe in Borno State, abducting over 300 civilians including women and children.

The most consequential development of May 2026 has been the launch of joint US-Nigeria military operations on 17 May, following President Trump's announcement on 16 May that an Islamic State leader had been killed in a joint US-Nigerian mission. By 19 May, Nigeria's Defence Headquarters confirmed that 175 Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters had been eliminated in the North East since operations began, including Abu-Bilal al-Minuki — described by the Defence Headquarters as one of the most significant ISIS operatives in the world, who played a central role in ISIS external operations, coordinating terrorist financing, recruitment, logistics, and attack planning. AFRICOM confirmed additional air strikes against

ISWAP fighters in northeastern Nigeria on 18 May in coordination with the Nigerian government, stating that no US or Nigerian forces were harmed. Al-Minuki's elimination is analytically significant beyond his individual operational role: the Soufan Center's profiling of ISWAP documents how the group hosts the Islamic State's Maktab al-Furqan — IS's West Africa office — meaning ISWAP is not merely a regional affiliate but a node in the IS global logistics and financing network. Degrading that node disrupts IS's Africa-wide operational coordination

Three structural observations define Nigeria's terrorism picture beyond the immediate operational news. First, ISWAP's geographic expansion southward — documented by the Soufan Center as a deliberate strategic objective, given that southern Nigeria is the country's economic powerhouse — represents a qualitative escalation in ambition that the current military response, however effective in the northeast, does not structurally address. Second, the simultaneous emergence of the Lakurawa group in northwest Nigeria confirms that the Sahel's militant spillover problem has crossed into Nigeria's non-traditional terrorism zones, fragmenting the security challenge across a country whose armed forces are already overstretched. Third, US direct military involvement — the first significant AFRICOM kinetic engagement in Nigeria — signals Washington's assessment that ISWAP's hosting of IS global infrastructure makes it a threat that transcends the Lake Chad Basin and requires extraterritorial suppression rather than capacity-building support alone. Whether the joint operations produce structural degradation of ISWAP or merely tactical disruption that the group reconstitutes — as it has done repeatedly since Abubakar Shekau's death in 2021 — will determine whether May 2026 represents a turning point or a temporary setback for an organisation that has survived fifteen years of "technical defeats."

About the Author

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