



ICT
International Institute
for Counter-Terrorism
With the Support of Keren Daniel

ICT Incident and Activists Database

PERIODIC REVIEW

Summary of Terrorist Incidents and Counter-Terrorist Operations Worldwide January 2015

Highlights

- On January 3, a large number of Boko Haram militants captured the town of Baga and overran the police headquarters and army base in town. Following this attack, on January 8, additional Boko Haram militants raided the town of Baga for a second time. It was reported that up to 2,000 people were killed.
- On January 6, a female suicide bomber detonated her explosive vest inside a police station in Istanbul's central Sultanahmet district, injuring two officers, one of whom later succumbed to his wounds. The target location was significant as the Sultanahmet district consists of world-famous attractions, including the Blue Mosque and Aya Sophia museum. No group claimed responsibility for the attack but Turkish authorities suspect the bomber had ties to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS).
- On January 7-9, AQAP militants carried out two coordinated attacks in Paris, France, killing 16 people in total. The first attack targeted the offices of satirical journal, Charlie Hebdo, and the second targeted a kosher supermarket in Paris. All three attackers were killed by police after a massive manhunt and shootout with the attackers. AQAP claimed responsibility for the incidents on January 11.
- On January 9, radical cleric Abu Hamza, 56, was sentenced in New York, USA, to life imprisonment.
- On January 10, police in Shanghai, China, arrested 10 Turkish nationals and charged them with supplying false passports to ethnic Uighurs from China's far-western region of Xinjiang.
- On January 15, Belgium authorities carried out pre-emptive counter-terrorist raids in the city of Verviers against a suspected IS cell that was accused of preparing a large-scale attack.
- On January 15, five men were arrested in Afghanistan accused of involvement in a large-scale Taliban attack that targeted a Pakistani military school in Peshawar in December 16, 2014.
- On January 18, seven Israeli Arabs were indicted by the Haifa District Attorney's Office for their alleged role in attempting to set up a branch of the IS in Israel.
- On January 18, an alleged Israeli airstrike near Syria's Quneitra border crossing with Israel killed six members of Hezbollah, including Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of slain Hezbollah

military leader, Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in Damascus in 2008. Six Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) commanders were also killed in the strike, including General Mohammad Ali Allahdadi. Following the incident, Hezbollah militants retaliated with an ambush on an IDF patrol on January 28, killing IDF Captain Yohai Kalangel and Sergeant Dor Nini, and wounding seven other IDF soldiers near Har Dov and Shebaa Farms, a disputed tract of land where the borders of Israel, Lebanon and Syria meet.

- On January 25, 44 members of the elite Special Action Force (SAF) police unit were killed in a 12-hour firefight during an attempt to capture Malaysian bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir (alias Marwan) and Jemaah Islamiyah militant Abdul Basit Usman in Mindao, Philippines.
- On January 26, the People's Protection Units (YP) claimed full control of the town of Kobani, gaining an important symbolic victory over the IS militants who had besieged the Syrian-Kurdish city since September 2014.
- On January 28, four armed men detonated a car bomb directly in front of the Corinthia Hotel, in Tripoli, Libya, killing 11 people. One gunman was arrested. The hotel housed Omar al-Hassi, Prime Minister of Tripoli's self-proclaimed government, and the makeshift offices of an unknown number of foreign companies. The Libyan branch of the IS claimed responsibility for the attacks.
- On January 29, a series of attacks using car bombs and mortars targeted army and police bases in more than six different locations in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, killed 32 people, including many security forces, and wounded 50 others. The State of Sinai claimed responsibility for the attacks.
- On January 30, IS militants' beheaded journalist Kenji Goto, 47, a Japanese hostage, after the failure of international efforts to secure his release through a prisoner swap.

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Europe

Belgium

On January 15, Belgian authorities carried out pre-emptive counter-terrorist raids in the city of Verviers against a suspected Islamic State (IS) cell that was accused of preparing a large-scale attack. During the incident, the police fatally shot two of the gunmen and wounded another.¹ Authorities said the militants were all Belgian nationals and had recently returned from fighting in Syria. In total, 13 people were arrested in connection with the investigation, five of whom were charged with “participating in the activities of a terrorist group”.² Authorities became aware of the cell two weeks before the raids were carried out. The police bugged the homes and cars of the men, and the investigation concluded that a large-scale attack was imminent and was intended to target police stations in Belgium.³ Witnesses in Verviers reported hearing heavy gunfire for several minutes and at least three explosions. Parallel to this incident, special police units carried out at least a dozen raids in and around Brussels, where militants were armed with AK47s. Authorities seized explosives, four Kalashnikovs, bomb-making equipment and police clothing.⁴ It was reported in the Belgian media, that the ringleader of this cell - a man named Abdelhamid Abaaoud, 27, a Brussels resident of Moroccan origin - was believed to be in hiding in Greece. At the time of this report, he remained at large.⁵ Belgium's Federal Prosecutor stated, however, that the suspects arrested during a counter-terrorist raid in Greece on January 17 were not among those suspected of being implicated in the Belgian terror plot. For more details on the raids in Greece, see below.⁶

France

On January 7, at 11:30 local time, two armed militants later identified as Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, French Muslim brothers of Algerian descent,⁷ stormed the offices of the French satirical newspaper,

¹ Guardian, “Two dead in Belgium as police foil 'grand scale' terrorist plot”, January 15, 2015

² Guardian, “Belgian ‘jihadi leader’ remains free despite two arrests in Greece”, January 18, 2015

³ Guardian *ibid.*

⁴ CNN, Source: Belgium terror cell has links to ISIS, some members still at large”, January 17, 2015

⁵ Guardian, “Belgian ‘jihadi leader’ remains free despite two arrests in Greece”, January 18, 2015

⁶ BBC, “Greece arrests over Belgian 'jihadist terror plot’”, January 17, 2015

⁷ For a full profile see: BBC, “Paris attacks: Suspects' profiles”, January 12, 2015 also New York Times, “From Amateur to Ruthless Jihadist in France”, January 17, 2015 and New York Times, “The Links Among the Paris Terror Suspects and Their Connections to Jihad”, January 11 2015

Charlie Hebdo, in Paris. The attackers were masked with black balaclavas and armed with assault rifles and guns. They killed 11 people, including the publisher and some of France's most famous cartoonists, and injured 11 others in the building. During the attack, the gunmen shouted "Allahu akbar" ("God is great" in Arabic). The first victim was a caretaker working outside the building. The attackers then killed eight members of the staff who were identified as: Stephanie Charbonier (Charb), Jean Cabut (Cabu), Georges Wolinski, Bernard Verlhac, Philippe Honore, Bernard Maris, Elsa Cayat and Mustapha Ourrad, a visitor and the bodyguard of Charb Frank Brinsolaro.⁸ Fleeing the scene, the brothers evaded several police cars and managed to kill one officer at point-blank range during a shootout with police outside the building. The militants escaped and police launched a massive manhunt for them.⁹ The brothers left behind Molotov cocktails, a GoPro camera and the national identity card of Said Kouachi in an abandoned getaway car. The identity card led investigators to Kouachi's brother, Chérif, who had been convicted in 2008 for belonging to a terrorist group, namely AQAP. Chérif Kouachi is believed to have traveled to Yemen in 2011.¹⁰ On January 8, municipal police officer Clarissa Jean-Philippe was fatally shot by an armed gunman at the junction of Avenue Pierre Brossolette and Avenue de la Paix in Montrouge, a suburb of Paris, as she attended to a traffic accident. Another person who tried to stop the attacker was also shot and seriously wounded. The gunman escaped but police believe Coulibaly carried out the attack.¹¹ Following this attack, on January 9, French police located Cherif and Said Kouachi at a printing shop in the industrial section of Dammartin en Goele, a small town 20 kilometers north of Paris. The brothers came out of the building firing at police and but police fatally shot them. Two police officers were injured. One hostage had been released earlier and a second employee, who was hiding in the building's cafeteria, was freed by police after the shooting ended. The suspects had been unaware that another employee was hiding in the building and was supplying information to the police through his phone.¹²

⁸ BBC, "French terror attacks: Victim obituaries", January 13, 2015

⁹ ABC News, "Paris Terror Attack: Inside the Manhunt for Charlie Hebdo Attackers", January 8, 2015

¹⁰ WSJ, "Deadly Raids End Terror Spree in Paris", January 9, 2015

¹¹ Mailonline, " Pictured: Female police officer killed in second Paris shooting was '27-year-old rookie who dreamed of serving her country'", January 8, 2015

¹² Independent, "Paris attacks: Graphic designer trapped by Kouachi brothers describes ordeal at print factory in Dammartin", January 13, 2015

In a separate but related incident, also on January 9, another gunman, later identified Amedy Coulibaly, a French national of Malian descent, took 15 people hostage in the kosher supermarket, 'Hyper Cache' of Portes de Vincennes.¹³ Authorities said that Coulibaly entered the shop at 13:00, armed with guns and assault rifles while many people were present. Two people were reportedly killed immediately when they tried to oppose the gunman who shot them and took the other hostages.¹⁴ The gunman threatened to kill the hostages if the Kouachi brothers, who were surrounded at the same time by the police in Dammartin en Goele, were arrested (he was unaware that they had been killed by police following a shootout).¹⁵ At 17:00 French elite intervention police launched an assault against the grocery. Coulibaly fired upon the intervention forces yelling, "You know who I am" but was shot by the police.¹⁶ The four victims were identified as: Yohan Cohen, Yoav Hattab, Phillipe Barham, and Francois-Michel Saada.¹⁷ It was reported that during the siege Coulibaly had claimed to have ties to the IS and that he carried out the attack in coordination with the Kouachi brothers; however, they had been trained in Yemen and were tied to AQAP. Authorities said both Kouachi brothers had travelled to Yemen via Oman in 2011 and had weapons training in the deserts of Marib.¹⁸

Police claimed that Coulibaly, his partner¹⁹ Hayat Boumeddiene, 20, and the Kouachi brothers had carefully planned the attacks.²¹ Much remains unclear about Boumeddiene's role in the Paris attacks. However, she was wanted by authorities for her role in the attacks and police said she fled France days before the attacks were carried out. According to reports, she fled to Turkey on January 2 from Madrid. Turkish authorities believe she stayed at a hotel in Kadikoy, Istanbul, and was

¹³ The Guardian, "Paris gunman Amedy Coulibaly declared allegiance to ISIS", January 12, 2015

¹⁴ Independent, "Paris shooting: Female police officer dead following assault rifle attack the morning after Charlie Hebdo killings", January 9, 2015

¹⁵ BBC, "Charlie Hebdo hunt: Bloody end to sieges", January 10, 2015

¹⁶ AFP, "Paris nightmare ends with deaths of three gunmen, four hostages", January 10, 2015

¹⁷ Times of Israel, "Heartbreak, defiance and anger as French Jewish terror victims laid to rest in Jerusalem", January 13, 2015

¹⁸ Reuters, "Both brothers behind Paris attack had weapons training in Yemen", January 12, 2015

¹⁹ The couple actually married in an Islamic ceremony but it was not recognized by French Law. See Journal.ie., "Profile: Hayat Boumeddiene, France's most-wanted woman", January 10, 2015

²⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/30760975>

²¹ Guardian, "Charlie Hebdo: officials establish link between gunmen in both attacks — as it happened", January 11, 2015

accompanied by another person. She is then believed to have crossed into Syria on January 8.²² She is suspected of playing a key role passing messages between the three attackers. Police said records showed more than 500 calls in 2014 between her phone and that of Chérif Kouachi's wife.²³ It was reported in the media that Coulibaly was known to the French police prior to this incident for several robberies and drug trafficking. He had previously served a sentence in the Fleury Merogis Prison where he allegedly met Cherif Kouachi. In 2010, he was arrested for his plot to free Djamel Beghal, an Algerian jihadist imprisoned in France since 2001. The Kouachi brothers were also suspected to be part of this plot.²⁴

On January 11, AQAP claimed responsibility for the attacks.²⁵ According to their spokesman, in a video posted on the internet on January 11 2014, the attack had been planned by AQAP against Charlie Hebdo in "vengeance for the prophet", referring to the satirical cartoons previously published by the newspaper.²⁶ Moreover, a senior member of AQAP, Sheikh Harith Al-Nadhari, praised the attacks on his Twitter account and called the attackers "mujahedeen heroes".²⁷ French authorities said they were searching for a man seen on security camera video with Boumeddiene as she arrived at Istanbul Airport and a Frenchman, Fritz-Joly Joachin, who was arrested in Bulgaria and is facing extradition to France. Joachin, 29, is a Muslim convert who reportedly had multiple contacts with one of the Kouachi brothers before leaving for Bulgaria on December 30, 2014.

Germany

On January 16, German police carried out counter-terrorist raids on 11 residential properties in Berlin, resulting in the arrest of two Turkish men suspected of funding the IS. They were also charged with recruiting would-be militants and procuring equipment for the group. The group's leader was identified only as 41-year-old Ismet D. in accordance with German privacy laws. The

²²AFP, "Turkey confirms woman wanted over Paris attack crossed into Syria", January 12, 2015

²³ Washington Post, "Hayat Boumeddiene, wife of Paris attacker, becomes France's most-wanted woman", February 2, 2015

²⁴ Washington Post, "Djamel Beghal, the charming and chilling mentor of Paris jihadist attackers", February 6, 2015

²⁵ CBS, "Al-Qaeda officially lays claim to Paris carnage", January 14, 2015

²⁶ Associated Press, "Al-Qaida member in Yemen says group directed Paris attack", January 9, 2015

²⁷ Al Jazeera, "Kouachi brothers had weapons training in Yemen", January 11, 2015

other militant arrested was identified as Emin F., 43. He was accused of being responsible for raising finances for the IS.^{28 29}

Also on January 16, police in Wolfsburg arrested a German-Tunisian dual national, 22, on suspicion that he had fought in Syria with the IS in 2014.³⁰ The suspect was identified Ayoub B, and authorities claimed that he had undergone “combat training for the militant jihad” and “recruited more fighters for the association” during a nearly three-month stay in Syria between late May and mid-August 2014. Authorities said they had no evidence that he was planning an imminent attack.³¹

Greece

On January 17, Greek police arrested several people over alleged links to a suspected terrorist plot in Belgium (see Belgium section above). Authorities alleged one of the men allegedly contacted the cell in Verviers, Belgium, where a shootout with police resulted in the death of two militants. Belgian counterterrorism authorities said a Belgian man living in Greece is believed to be the terror cell’s key link to the IS in Syria and has links to other IS cells throughout Europe. As of January 2015, the man remained at large.³² As part of a coordinated counter-terrorism investigation into this case, 20 people have been arrested in Belgium, France and Germany.³³

Kosovo

On January 26, five people were indicted on terrorism charges for fighting with Al-Qaeda-linked militants in Syria, trying to buy assault rifles and assaulting two Christian missionaries from the United States in 2013. The five suspects were arrested in Pristina while attempting to purchase weapons.³⁴ The indictment was filed following a 14-month investigation. The indictment included

²⁸ CBS, “Al-Qaeda officially lays claim to Paris carnage”, January 14 , 2015

²⁹ The Local, “Suspected Isis terrorists arrested in Berlin”, January 16, 2015

³⁰ RT, “Germany arrests suspected ISIS fighter amid investigation into wider group”, January 16, 2015

³¹ DW, “Terror suspect arrested in Wolfsburg, flats searched in southern Germany”, January 16, 2015

³² CNN, “Source: Belgium terror cell has links to ISIS, some members still at large”, January 17, 2015

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³⁴ <http://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/?page=2,10,3>

charges related to the production of explosives, unlawful possession of weapons, aggravated assault and the "commission of terrorism" in Syria.³⁵

Spain

On January 12, 16 people with alleged ties to ETA were arrested in simultaneous raids in Madrid, Navarre and the Basque provinces of Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia. The raids were part of an investigation into the group's financing network and was ordered by the High Court, Spain's central criminal court. The detainees were suspected of fraud, money laundering and tax crimes, and included 12 lawyers who regularly work as defense attorneys for the Basque organization, as well as four former treasurers for Herrera, a support group for ETA convicts.³⁶

On January 24, Spanish authorities arrested two Moroccans and two Spaniards in Ceuta, accused of planning a terrorist attack in Spain. Moroccan and Spanish police raided two residential properties and found a gun, combat uniforms, Spanish car license plates and machetes when they made the arrests. The militants were two sets of brothers who were highly radicalized and had received weapons training.³⁷ Authorities said the suspects were part of a network that had carried out aggressive campaigns on Internet forums using IS slogans to recruit people to fight in Syria and Iraq and carry out attacks in Western countries.³⁸

United Kingdom

On January 17, a woman, 18, was arrested at Stansted Airport in London on suspicion of preparing acts of terrorism and membership in a banned organization. She was connected to a prior investigation that had already resulted in the arrest of a man, 21, in October 2014.³⁹

On January 20, during a court hearing at the Old Bailey in London, Imran Khawaja, a British jihadist with to the IS who spent six months in Syria in early 2014, admitted to four charges of terrorism offences under the British Terrorism Act 2000. Khawaja admitted that he had taken part in terrorist

³⁵ Reuters, "Five indicted in Kosovo on terrorism charges", January 26, 2015

³⁶ El Pais, "16 held in raid against ETA network", January 15, 2015

³⁷ Reuters, "Spain arrests 4 terror cell suspects in North African enclave of Ceuta", January 24, 2015

³⁸ BBC, "Ceuta: Suspected jihadists held in Spanish territory", January 24, 2015

³⁹ Reuters, "British police arrest woman on suspicion of terrorism", January 17, 2015

training camps, received training, planned terrorist attacks and possessed firearms. Police say that his group were involved in major propaganda drives to attract other recruits and were also involved in serious violence. Khawaja was seen in several propaganda images, including one on which he held a severed head taken out of a bag - although he masked his face to try to avoid detection. In May 2014, the IS claimed on social media that Khawaja had been killed and posted an image of two masked men holding a flag associated with the IS.⁴⁰ Police believe Khawaja was attempting to return to the UK without being detected in order to possibly carry out an attack. His cousin, Tahir Bhatti, 44, helped Khawaja return to the UK by driving him from Bulgaria in June 2014 but the pair were arrested by police officers waiting for them at Dover. Bhatti, a taxi driver, pleaded guilty to assisting an offender. He previously pleaded not guilty to preparing a terrorist act by helping Khawaja, having information about terrorism, and assisting an offender. Another man, Asim Ali, pleaded guilty to entering into a funding arrangement for the purposes of terrorism.⁴¹ The three men were sentenced in February 2015.⁴²

Africa

Algeria

On January 15, 12 militants who authorities claimed were plotting a series of attacks in Algeria were arrested in three locations: Ghardaia, Laghouat and In Amenas. Algerian authorities made a statement to the media indicating that the cell had been “preparing to carry out terrorist acts in the country with the complicity of other terrorist groups operating on the other side of the country’s southern border,” without specifying whether it was Mali or Niger. No further details were made public.⁴³

⁴⁰ Guardian, “British jihadi who faked his own death faces jail over terrorism offences”, January 17, 2015

⁴¹ On February 6, Imran Khawaja was jailed for 12 years. His cousin, Tahir Bhatti, was jailed for 21 months. He will serve half of his sentence. Asim Ali, who provided his friend Khawaja with funds was sentenced to 21 months in prison. For further details see: BBC, “British jihadist Imran Khawaja jailed for 12 years”, February 6, 2015

⁴² BBC, “British Jihadist who faked death admits terror offences”, January 20, 2015

⁴³ Xinhua, “Algerian troops arrest 12 militants in southern region”, January 14, 2015

Cameroon

On January 2, armed militants opened fire on a bus in Waza, a region bordering northeast Nigeria, killing 11 people and injuring six others.⁴⁴ The bus was en-route from Kousseri to Maroua when the attack occurred. No group claimed responsibility but authorities blamed Boko Haram.⁴⁵

On January 3, Boko Haram militants ambushed a military base in Achigashia, forcing Cameroonian soldiers to retreat and then use airstrikes against the insurgents for the first time. Attacks on military installations marked a big shift in Boko Haram operations in Cameroon. Initially, authorities said Boko Haram would carry out cross border attacks, either to steal food or kidnap nationals and expatriates in exchange for ransoms.⁴⁶

On January 18, suspected Boko Haram militants kidnapped 80 people in the villages of Mabass and Makxy in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division in northern Cameroon. Authorities said three civilians were killed.⁴⁷ It was reported that 30 adults, most of them herders, and 50 young girls and boys aged between 10 and 15 years, were kidnapped in what was an early morning attack. Soldiers intervened and exchanged fire with the militants for approximately two hours.⁴⁸ No group claimed responsibility but authorities blamed Boko Haram, whose leader Abubakar Shekau appeared in a video posted on January 7, threatening to increase violence in Cameroon unless it embraces Islam.⁴⁹

On January 30, 123 Boko Haram militants were killed when they ambushed a Chadian army contingent in northern Cameroon. Three soldiers were killed and 12 others were wounded in the incident, which took place near the border town of Fotokol. Authorities said the soldiers managed to repel the militants, but three soldiers were killed by improvised explosive devices detonated by the militants.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ CNN, "Boko Haram attack on bus in Cameroon kills at least 11", January 2, 2015

⁴⁵ Reuters, "At least 15 killed in 'Boko Haram' attack on Cameroon bus: sources", January 3, 2015

⁴⁶ CNN, "Boko Haram strikes in Cameroon as foreign troops arrive from Chad", January 18, 2015

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Reuters, "Suspected Boko Haram fighters kidnap around 80 in Cameroon", January 18, 2015

⁴⁹ Reuters, "Boko Haram threatens Cameroon with violence in video", January 7, 2015

⁵⁰ AFP, "3 Chad soldiers, 123 Boko Haram militants killed in Cameroon", January 30, 2015

Libya

On January 3, 15 armed and masked attackers in Sirte kidnapped 13 Coptic Christians after seven others had been abducted days earlier. Witnesses claimed the militant abductors went room to room in the workers' residence and asked for identification papers to separate Muslims from Christians. The attackers then handcuffed the Christians and drove away with them. On January 12, IS militants in Libya posted pictures of 21 Coptic Christian workers to online jihadist forums, claiming responsibility for their kidnapping. The comment was released along with three pictures featuring several men. The statement did not specify the nationalities of the hostages; it only stated that they were abducted in several locations over recent weeks. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said that 20 Egyptians had been abducted in recent weeks in two separate instances in Libya.⁵¹

On January 17, IS militants threw explosives at Algeria's Embassy in Tripoli, wounding three people and causing damage to the building.⁵² The IS Libya branch posted a message on Twitter according to which "soldiers of the caliphate" had attacked the empty mission, and it posted a photograph of a tree-lined street with a fire in the background.⁵³

On January 28, four armed men detonated a car bomb directly in front of the Corinthia Hotel⁵⁴ in Tripoli, killing at least one guard and injuring others before storming the building where the gunmen then killed ten people, including five foreigners – among them a US citizen.⁵⁵ One gunman was arrested.⁵⁶ The hotel housed Omar al-Hassi, Prime Minister of Tripoli's self-proclaimed government, and the makeshift offices of an unknown number of foreign companies. The Libyan branch of the IS claimed responsibility for the attacks and released photos of the two gunmen that it said had carried out the attacks. They were identified as: Abu Ibraheem al-Tunsi and Abu Sulaiman al-Sudani, of Tunisian and Sudanese origin, respectively. The attack was allegedly carried out as retribution for the death of Al-Qaeda militant, Abu Anas al-Libi, who was accused of

⁵¹ Al-Jazeera, "Egyptian Christians kidnapped in Libya", January 3, 2015

⁵² AFP, "IS group claims bomb attack on Algerian embassy in Libya", January 17, 2015

⁵³ Libya Herald, "Algerian embassy in Tripoli in bomb attack; jihadists claim responsibility", January 17, 2015

⁵⁴ DW, "'Islamic State' attacks Libya hotel", January 28, 2015.

⁵⁵ BBC, "Libya hotel attack: Five foreigners among nine killed", January 28, 2015

⁵⁶ Ibid.

involvement in the bombing of US embassies in Africa. He was captured by US Special Forces in Libya and died in the hospital in early January 2015.⁵⁷

Mali

On January 4, six Nigerien UN peacekeepers were wounded after their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in the Ansongo-Menaka axis region near Gao. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the attack. A roadside bomb also exploded next to a United Nations convoy of Niger troops between the northern communities of Asongo and Meneka, injuring six UN soldiers, three seriously.⁵⁸

On January 5, gunmen killed at least seven Malian soldiers in a dawn ambush in the town of Nampala near the Mauritanian border. Authorities said the militants, some of whom were travelling on motorbikes and some were on foot, killed seven soldiers before they were chased out of the town by a military reinforcement unit. No group claimed responsibility for the incident but authorities blamed Al-Qaeda linked militants.⁵⁹

Morocco

On January 26, Moroccan police arrested an Algerian national, whose identity was not made public, in eastern Morocco, between Beni Drar and Ahfir. He was accused of belonging to Jund Al Khilafa (Soldiers of the Caliphate), a group with ties to the IS.⁶⁰ It was reported that he was in possession of large quantities of dangerous substances, wireless communication tools and firearms at the time of his arrest. Authorities said the suspect was accompanied by another individual whose identity was not made public.⁶¹

Nigeria

⁵⁷ CNN, “Gunmen attack Corinthia Hotel in Libya; at least 10 die”, January 28, 2015

⁵⁸ AP, “Al-Qaida Militants Claim Responsibility for Attack in Mali”, January 6, 2015

⁵⁹ Reuters, “Islamist militants kill seven Malian soldiers in dawn attack”, January 5, 2015

⁶⁰ AFP, “Morocco Arrests Alleged Algerian Jihadist”, January 26, 2015

⁶¹ Morocco World News, “Algerian national arrested in eastern Morocco for belonging to terrorist group”, January 26, 2015

On January 1, a male suicide bomber on a motorcycle drove up to the gates of a Christian church in Gombe and detonated his explosive belt outside the church as worshippers were inside at a New Year's mass. Witnesses said the attacker engaged in an argument with church volunteers who had set up a barricade some distance from the church to screen people and prevent an attack. The bomber detonated his device after he was prevented from getting closer to the church.⁶² Eight people were injured in the attack.⁶³ No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed Boko Haram.⁶⁴

On January 2, it was reported that 40 young boys, aged 10 to 23, were kidnapped by suspected Boko Haram militants in Malari in northeast Nigeria.⁶⁵ Witnesses said militants in pick-up trucks armed with guns gathered all the men in the village outside the home of the village chief and started preaching to them about Boko Haram ideology. They then proceeded to kidnap the boys, forcing them to become Boko Haram recruits.⁶⁶ Authorities believed the militants travelled in the direction of the Sambisa forest, which is a Boko Haram stronghold.⁶⁷

On January 3, a large number of Boko Haram militants captured the town of Baga, and overran the police headquarters and army base in town.⁶⁸ Scores of men, women and children were killed but the exact number of casualties remains unknown, with reports in the media varying from 150 up to 2,000 people killed.⁶⁹ Witnesses said the first raid started at about 05:45 local time, just before dawn, when they heard gunshots. A group of young men attempted to defend the town and managed, together with the soldiers, to force the Boko Haram militants to retreat into the bush. However, after several hours the militants returned and stormed the town, armed with vehicles and weapons. The militants fired indiscriminately at civilians in the village. Boko Haram militant, Abi

⁶² CNN, "2 suicide bombers attempt New Year attacks in Nigerian city of Gombe, witnesses say", January 1, 2015

⁶³ Al-Jazeera, "Suicide attack hits Nigeria's Gombe", January 1, 2015

⁶⁴ Reuters, "Suicide bomber hits church in Nigeria's Gombe, wounding eight", January 1, 2015

⁶⁵ AP, "Extremists kidnap 40 males in northern Nigeria", January 3, 2015. It should be noted that the incident took place on December 31, 2014 but was only reported in January 2015 due to poor communication as a result of the destruction of cell phone towers in previous Boko Haram attacks.

⁶⁶ CNN, "Villagers: Boko Haram abducts 40 boys, young men in northeastern Nigeria", January 4, 2015

⁶⁷ Mail Online, "Boko Haram gunmen abduct 40 boys and young men from remote village in Nigeria", January 3, 2015

⁶⁸ Wall Street Journal, "Boko Haram Extends Its Grip in Nigeria", January 5, 2015

⁶⁹ NBC, "Boko Haram Militants in Nigeria Storm Key Base in Baga", January 8, 2015

Mos'aab Albernawi, claimed that the militants attacked Baga because it was "important in terms of commercial and military value to the Nigerian government". Authorities said Baga was most likely targeted because of the nearby military headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force that includes Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Together with Doron Baga, it is also a commercial and fishing hub for Borno State and important for international trade as it located on the border with Chad.⁷⁰ Following this attack, on January 8, additional Boko Haram militants raided the town of Baga for a second time. The militants destroyed many buildings and homes, shooting civilians as they tried to flee.⁷¹ The town was almost completely destroyed.⁷² On January 21, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for the attack.⁷³

On January 10, a young girl, 10, was stopped for a security check in the main market in Maiduguri when her explosive vest detonated, killing 19 people and injuring 18 others.⁷⁴ The attack took place at approximately 12:40 when the market was packed with shoppers and traders. Authorities said they believe the girl was unknowingly forced to strap the explosives to her body. The guards searched her at the entrance of the market and the metal detector indicated that she was carrying something but the bomb detonated before she was isolated.⁷⁵ No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed Boko Haram.⁷⁶

On January 11, three people were killed and 26 others were wounded when two child female suicide bombers detonated the explosive vests strapped to their bodies at a crowded market in Yobe in Borno State.⁷⁷ One witness said the girls looked as young as 10 years old. The explosives on one girl detonated, causing the majority of the casualties, while the other girl ran away and her

⁷⁰ BBC, "Boko Haram attack: What happened in Baga?", February 2, 2015

⁷¹ BBC, "Boko Haram crisis: Nigeria's Baga town hit by new assault", January 8, 2015

⁷² IBT, "Nigeria Boko Haram: '2,000 feared killed' after Baga attacked for second time in days", January 8, 2015

⁷³ ABC, "Nigerian Boko Haram 'leader' claims responsibility for deadly Baga attack in new video", January 21, 2015

⁷⁴ AlArabiya, "Girl suicide bomber kills 19 in Nigeria", January 10, 2015

⁷⁵ Guardian, "Nigeria: bomb blast kills at least 19 at crowded market in Maiduguri", January 10, 2015

⁷⁶ BBC, "Nigeria: 'Girl bomber' kills 19 people in Maiduguri market", January 10, 2015

⁷⁷ Guardian, "Nigeria: two suspected child suicide bombers attack market", January 10, 2015

explosives detonated in the middle of the road.⁷⁸ No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed Boko Haram.⁷⁹

On January 14, a suicide bomber killed two people and wounded 14 others at a mosque in Gombe.⁸⁰ No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed Boko Haram.⁸¹

On January 23, Boko Haram militants attacked the village of Kambari, which is less than five kilometers from Maiduguri, at approximately 05:00. The gunmen killed 15 people, including the village leader. The buildings in the village were set alight. No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed Boko Haram.⁸²

Somalia

On January 2, Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen militants attacked an army base on the outskirts of Baidoa, killing seven soldiers. Somali authorities said three militants were also killed during the incident.⁸³ A spokesman for Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen claimed responsibility for the attack but said that the militants had killed 10 soldiers.⁸⁴

On January 4, a suicide car bomber killed four people in Mogadishu. According to Interior Ministry spokesman, Mohamed Yusuf, security forces had received a warning that a car bomb was in Mogadishu. The vehicle in question was located by security forces but it exploded near the Aden Adde International Airport before the bomb could be neutralized. Authorities believe the target of the attack was a convoy carrying soldiers of the Alpha Group intelligence unit. Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen spokesman, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Abu Musab, claimed responsibility for the incident.⁸⁵

On January 22, five people were killed when a suicide car bomber exploded outside the SYL Hotel, located in the heavily secured area near the presidential palace in Mogadishu.⁸⁶ According to a

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Reuters, "Two suspected child suicide bombers hit north Nigeria town", January 11, 2015

⁸⁰ Nigerian Nation, "Suicide Blast At Nigerian Mosque In Gombe", January 11, 2015

⁸¹ IBT, "Nigeria Boko Haram: Gombe mosque suicide attack kills two people", January 11, 2015

⁸² Guardian, "Boko Haram gunmen kill 15 in Kambari, Maiduguri", January 24, 2015

⁸³ Reuters, "At least 7 killed after Al-Shabaab's attack on Somali military base", January 3, 2015

⁸⁴ ABC, "Al Shabaab attacks Somali army base, killing at least seven soldiers: military official", January 22, 2015

⁸⁵ BBC, "Somalia violence: Deadly car bomb near Mogadishu airport", January 4, 2015

⁸⁶ RFI, "Five dead after al-Shabab bombs Mogadishu hotel ahead of Erdogan visit", January 24, 2015

Somali intelligence official, a 70-member Turkish delegation was staying at the hotel at the time of the attack. They were unharmed but two policemen were killed in the attack. Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen claimed responsibility for the attack.⁸⁷

Tunisia

On January 3, suspected Islamist militants captured and killed a Tunisian police officer, stabbing him and slashing his throat as he traveled home off-duty, south of the capital. Nine people were arrested near El Fahes in the Zaghuan region in connection with the attack but their identities were not made public.⁸⁸ No group claimed responsibility for the attack.⁸⁹

Middle East

Egypt

On January 12, State of Sinai (Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis) gunmen ambushed a bus near the town of Rafah. Militants kidnapped Police Captain, Ayman El-Desouki, who was on the bus at the time of the attack, and took him to an unknown location. The police and military launched a large manhunt throughout the northern Sinai Peninsula, particularly focusing on the towns of Sheikh Zuweid, Rafah and Al-Arish, during which they killed 10 militants and arrested two others. Authorities also said they seized explosives and weapons.⁹⁰ The following day, on January 13, El-Desouki's body was discovered with a bullet to the head. Authorities did not make public the exact location where he was discovered.⁹¹ On January 26, State of Sinai published a video online claiming responsibility for the kidnapping and execution of El-Desouki.⁹²

On January 29, a series of attacks using car bombs and mortars targeted army and police bases in more than six different locations in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, killed 32 people, including many security forces, and wounded 50 others.⁹³ Security officials said rockets were first fired at police

⁸⁷ BBC, "Somali car bomb explodes outside Mogadishu hotel", January 4, 2015

⁸⁸ Al-Akbar, "Tunisia: Islamic jihadists slash throat, murder police officer", January 4, 2015

⁸⁹ Reuters, "Suspected militants stab Tunisian policeman to death", January 4, 2015

⁹⁰ Reuters, "Body of kidnapped Egyptian police officer found in Sinai: army", January 13, 2015

⁹¹ Ahram online, "Kidnapped police captain in Sinai found dead: Army", January 13, 2015

⁹² Ahram Online, "Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis releases video of policeman's execution", January 26, 2015

⁹³ Ynet, "Simultaneous attacks in Egypt's Sinai kill 27", January 29, 2015

offices, a military base and a military hotel in El-Arish before a car bomb exploded at the rear gate of the military base. Several army checkpoints in the city were also targeted. Four soldiers were wounded in an attack at a checkpoint outside El-Arish and an army major was later shot dead at a checkpoint in Rafah. The majority of the attacks occurred in El-Arish.⁹⁴ The State of Sinai claimed responsibility for the attacks.⁹⁵

Iraq

On January 1, the fight for northern Iraq intensified, especially in areas of northern Iraq.⁹⁶ On January 2, it was reported that 15 IS militants were killed in Mosul. Following this, on January 6, IS militants launched a major assault on pro-government tribal forces stationed at the Ain Al-Assad base in western Anbar, killing at least 23 Iraqi troops and pro-government fighters.⁹⁷ In addition, a suicide bomber at a mosque in Al-Jubba, close to Ain Al-Assad, killed 10 people. Militants subsequently attacked police and army positions in the region, killing at least 13 others.⁹⁸ On January 8, a suicide bomber targeted a police checkpoint in the town of Youssifiyah, killing seven people, including three soldiers, and wounded 21 others. Following this incident, a suicide truck bomber exploded at a checkpoint manned by police and Shi'ite militiamen near the city of Samarra, killing eight people and wounding 23 others. After noon prayers, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives belt among Shi'ite worshippers who were leaving a mosque in western Baghdad, killing eight worshippers and wounding 16 others. No group claimed responsibility for either attack but authorities blamed the IS.⁹⁹ On January 12, IS militants killed 30 Kurdish fighters in the town of Gwer. The incident demonstrated the IS's ability to launch large offensives in Iraq, despite a month-long airstrike campaign led by US coalition forces.¹⁰⁰ Also on January 12, a suicide car bomber killed 12 Shi'ite militiamen and soldiers north of Baghdad. Police officials said the suicide bomber

⁹⁴ BBC, "Egypt military targeted in deadly Sinai attacks", January 30, 2015

⁹⁵ Guardian, "At least 32 killed in Egypt as militants attack army and police targets in Sinai", January 27, 2015

⁹⁶ <http://www.understandingwar.org/background/iraq-situation-report-january-1-2-2015>

⁹⁷ BBC, "Militant clashes in Iraq's Anbar kill 23 troops", January 6, 2015

⁹⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat., "PM pledges to liberate Iraq as ISIS launch major Anbar assault", January 7, 2015

⁹⁹ AP, "Iraq suicide blast kills 23", January 8, 2015

¹⁰⁰ Daily Star, "Official: ISIS kills 30 Kurds in northern Iraq battle", January 12, 2015

rammed his explosive-laden car into a gathering of soldiers and Shi'ite fighters in the town of Abasiyat. No group claimed responsibility but authorities blamed the IS.¹⁰¹

On January 18, the IS released nearly 200 elderly hostages of the Yazidi religious community in northern Iraq. It was not immediately clear why the IS released the captives rather than killing them. It was the first time a group of elderly were released from captivity, though many were spared death during the initial onslaught, often reporting that they came face to face with the militants but were allowed to flee.¹⁰²

On January 21, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, assisted by US-led coalition airstrikes, began an operation to liberate Mosul and disrupt essential IS supply routes between Mosul, Tel Afar and Syria.¹⁰³ The airstrikes targeted the towns of Sinjar, Kirkuk and Ramadi, destroying IS heavy weaponry and killing an unknown number of militants.¹⁰⁴ On January 23, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters fired 20 Grad missiles into Mosul upon receiving intelligence that IS militants were gathering to meet near the city's Zuhour neighborhood. It was reported that the targets were hit.¹⁰⁵ By January 29, the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters claimed they had advanced from five directions and re-taken a commanding position above a critical crossroads at Kiske, 40 km west of Mosul. It was reported that approximately 200 IS militants were killed during the offensive. The Kurdish Peshmerga fighters said the IS had sent 14 car bombs to the front lines for attacks but they were destroyed en-route by the US-led coalition air strikes or anti-tank missiles. Also on January 29, 19 people were killed in and around Baghdad. Police said two suicide bombers detonated their explosive belts inside a Shi'ite militia headquarters in the town of Mishada, killing seven Shi'ite militiamen and wounding 20 others. In a separate attack, gunmen in a speeding car opened fire on soldiers manning a checkpoint in Baghdad's western suburb of Abu Ghraib, killing three soldiers and wounding eight others, police officials said. A bomb exploded at an outdoor market killing four people and wounding 12 others in the town of Youssifiyah. Another bomb exploded on a commercial street in the nearby town of Mahmoudiya, killing two people and wounding 10 others.

¹⁰¹ AP, "Officials say suicide car bomb kills 12 Shiite militiamen and Iraqi soldiers north of Baghdad", January 12, 2015

¹⁰² BBC, "Elderly Yazidis released by IS militants in Iraq", January 18, 2015

¹⁰³ Reuters, "Kurdish forces squeeze Islamic State supply line in northern Iraq", January 21, 2015

¹⁰⁴ Al-Jazeera, "Iraqi Kurds in major offensive against ISIL", January 21, 2015

¹⁰⁵ Reuters, "Kurdish forces squeeze Islamic State supply line in northern Iraq", January 29, 2015

In the town of Tarmiyah, north of Baghdad, a suicide bomber drove his explosives-laden car into an army checkpoint, killing three soldiers and wounding nine others.¹⁰⁶

On January 30, IS state fighters launched a surprise attack against Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in Kirkuk, using heavy weapons and suicide bombings. Kurdish commander, Brigadier General Shirko Rauf, and five other Peshmerga soldiers were killed and 46 others were injured in the incident. Authorities' said the IS's assault on areas south and west of the city began at approximately midnight.¹⁰⁷

Israel and the West Bank

On January 4, Israel Security Services (Shin Bet) lifted a gag order on an IS-affiliated cell that it apprehended in Hebron, West Bank in November 2014. The cell members were identified as: Ahmad Shehadeh, 22, Muhammad Zaru, 21, and Qusai Masawdeh, 23. The Shin Bet described them as "identifying with" the IS but did not stipulate that they had made direct contact with the group.¹⁰⁸ This case is the first known Palestinian cell linked to the IS. The Shin Bet said that during his interrogation, Ahmad Shehadeh confessed to planning to establish an armed IS cell and that together with Qusai Masawdeh, they produced several explosive devices, one of which they threw unsuccessfully at an IDF force in the Hebron area. Shehadeh and Masawdeh also planned to murder an IDF soldier and use his weapon and uniform to commit a shooting attack against Israelis. The two attempted but failed to carry out the planned attack. Both Zaru and Masawdeh admitted to the allegations attributed to them, while Masawdeh also confessed to planning to kill a settler in Hebron and take his weapon.¹⁰⁹ The suspects were indicted at the Judea military court.¹¹⁰

On January 6, Hossam Kawasmeh, 40, a Palestinian militant who confessed to planning the kidnapping and murder of Gil-Ad Shaer, Naftali Fraenkel and Eyal Yifrah,¹¹¹ was sentenced by an

¹⁰⁶ AP, "Attacks Kill 19 People in Iraq", December 30, 2014

¹⁰⁷ IBT Times, "Isis launch large-scale attack on Iraq's oil-rich Kirkuk", January 30, 2015

¹⁰⁸ WSJ, "Israel Ties Palestinians Arrested to Islamic State", January 4, 2015

¹⁰⁹ Ynet, "Shin Bet arrests Islamic State-linked terror cell in Hebron", January 4, 2015

¹¹⁰ Jpost, "Cleared for publication: Shin Bet arrested ISIS-influenced terror cell from Hebron", January 4, 2015

¹¹¹ See June 2014 ICT database report for details of incident

Israeli military court to three life sentences.¹¹² Kawasmeh was also ordered to pay \$63,000 in compensation to the families of three teenagers. Kawasmeh was convicted in December 2014 of three counts of accessory to premeditated manslaughter. He was also convicted of: membership in a group that committed intentional manslaughter, two counts of bringing enemy funds into the country, and one count of carrying out activities for Hamas, one count of arms dealing, two counts of obstruction of justice, and one count of sheltering wanted individuals.¹¹³ Hussam Kawasmeh was arrested in July 2014 while attempting to cross into Jordan. In August 2014, documents were submitted to the Israeli Supreme Court by the Israeli government that alleged he had confessed during interrogation to organizing the abduction of the teenagers by obtaining \$50,500 in funding from Hamas and purchasing weapons.¹¹⁴

On January 18, seven Israeli Arabs were indicted by the Haifa District Attorney's Office for their alleged role in attempting to set up a branch of the IS in Israel. The suspects were arrested by the Shin Bet in late 2014 but their arrests only became public in January 2015 due to a gag order that was lifted when the indictment was made.¹¹⁵ The defendants were named as: Adnan Aladin, 40, a lawyer in Nazareth; Hasam Marisat, 30, a former security prisoner from Deir Hanna; Karim Abu-Tzalah, 22; Alaa Abu-Tzalah, 27; Halad Abu Tzahalh, 30; Sarif Khaled Abu-Tzalah, 29; and Muhammad Abu Tazalah, 27. All seven are from Sakhnin. According to the Shin Bet, all seven men confessed to forming a "Salafi jihadist" cell in June 2014 and they all pledged their allegiance to the IS. According to the indictment, Karim Abu-Tzalah attempted to travel to Syria via Turkey on July 30 with NIS 40,000 to contribute to IS goals, and he coordinated with an IS agent to meet him in Syria. He was arrested at Ben-Gurion Airport when he tried to leave the country despite an Interior Ministry order banning him from traveling abroad. The Shin Bet said that the defendants met on a number of occasions with a well-known extremist Salafist preacher in northern Israel who called on

¹¹² IBT, "Palestinian Hussam Kawasmeh jailed for life for Israel teen killings which triggered Gaza war", January 6, 2015

¹¹³ Haaretz, "Palestinian behind kidnap, murder of 3 Israeli teens gets 3 life sentences", January 6, 2015

¹¹⁴ For further details see August ICT database reports. <http://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICT-DB-August-2014.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Jpost, "'ISIS in Palestine' cell members indicted in Haifa", January

them to recruit more men to their cause.¹¹⁶ The suspects were caught practicing beheading animals in an effort to learn how to behead people.¹¹⁷

On January 21, a Palestinian militant armed with a knife stabbed a bus driver and injured 11 other passengers, four seriously, in central Tel Aviv. The attack began at approximately 07:30 as the bus was approaching the Ma'ariv junction, a busy junction in central Tel Aviv. Witnesses said the attacker began stabbing the bus driver repeatedly in the upper body. The bus began swerving in its lane as the driver, Herzl Biton, fought with the terrorist. The swerving bus caught the attention of officers from the Prisons Service's Nahshon Unit who were driving behind the bus on their way to the Tel Aviv courthouse to pick up detainees. When the officers saw the bus come to a stop and passengers begin fleeing, they chased after the terrorist as he attempted to flee. The Prisons Service officers shot the attacker in the leg and placed him under arrest. The Shin Bet identified the perpetrator as Hamza Muhammad Hassan Matruch from Tulkarm. He had no history of criminal or militant activity. During initial questioning, Matruch admitted to purchasing the knife in Tulkarm and carrying out the stabbing attack after entering Israel illegally.¹¹⁸ Hamas welcomed the attack as a "heroic and courageous act" but did not claim responsibility for the attack.¹¹⁹

On January 27, two rockets exploded in open areas in the northern Golan Heights but there were no injuries or damages. The IDF quickly returned fire, directing artillery fire at the sources of rocket fire in Syria. Mount Hermon was evacuated of all tourists in the minutes following the attacks. Authorities blamed Hezbollah for the incident.¹²⁰ Following this incident, on January 28, IDF Captain Yohai Kalangel and Sergeant Dor Nini were killed and seven others wounded when Hezbollah fighters fired anti-tank missile at an IDF military convoy near Har Dov and Shebaa Farms, a disputed tract of land where the borders of Israel, Lebanon and Syria meet.¹²¹ Israel first responded by firing at least 25 artillery shells into Lebanon. Hezbollah then appears to have launched a second attack,

¹¹⁶ Mailonline, "ISIS cell members caught beheading animals to practice decapitating people ahead of an attack in Israel", January 18, 2015

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Jpost, "Palestinian terrorist stabs 12 aboard crowded Tel Aviv bus", January 21, 2015

¹¹⁹ Haaretz, "12 Israelis wounded in stabbing attack on Tel Aviv bus", January 21, 2015

¹²⁰ Jpost, "Ya'alon: IAF strike on Syria sent 'clear message' Israel won't tolerate violations of sovereignty", January 28, 2015

¹²¹ Jpost, "2 IDF soldiers killed in anti-tank missile attack on Lebanon border; Hezbollah takes credit", January 28, 2015

firing mortar bombs at Israeli military positions on Mount Hermon, an area popular with tourists. In response, the IDF launched combined aerial and ground strikes on targets in Lebanon. A Spanish member of a United Nations peacekeeping force was also killed during the IDF return of fire in the border town of Ghajar, which joins the frontier between Israel and Lebanon.¹²² Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack, which it said was in retribution for an Israeli assault in Syria that saw a group of its fighters killed. (See Syria section below for details.)¹²³ The incident is the most serious escalation on Israel's northern border since the war in Lebanon in 2006.

On January 29, Amin Ahmed Salah Snobar, 24, an Israeli Arab from Kfar Yasif in northern Israel, was arrested by Shin Bet and Israeli Police after attempting to return to Israel from Syria in early January.¹²⁴ He is accused of receiving weapons and explosives training with the Al-Nusra Front.¹²⁵ The Shin Bet said that during questioning, Snobar admitted to interrogators that he traveled to Syria via Turkey in 2014 and fought with Al-Qaeda linked militants. The Shin Bet said Snobar received weapons and bomb-making training and underwent physical fitness programs before coordinating logistical missions for the Al-Nusra Front. He was indicted in the Haifa District Court on charges of joining an illegal organization, conspiracy to commit a crimes, illegally leaving the country and obstruction of justice.¹²⁶

Lebanon

On January 10, two suicide bombers detonated their explosive belts at a cafe in the predominately Alawite district of Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli.¹²⁷ Seven people were killed and 36 others were wounded. A Lebanese army statement said a single suicide bomber attacked the cafe at around 19:30 when the café was filled with people. The second bomber then attacked as people gathered to help the victims. The Al-Nusra Front claimed responsibility for the incident.¹²⁸ The attackers were

¹²² Telegraph, "Israel on brink of new conflict with Hizbollah after two soldiers killed", January 28,2015

¹²³ Ynet, "IDF soldiers killed in Hezbollah Mt. Dov attack named", January 28, 2015

¹²⁴ Jpost, "Israeli who joined Syria al-Qaida group was urged to return and carry out attacks on Jewish state", January 29, 2015

¹²⁵ Times of Israel, "Israeli Arab indicted for joining al-Qaeda jihadists in Syria", January 29,2015

¹²⁶ Times of Israel *ibid*.

¹²⁷ AP, "Seven killed in suicide bombing at Lebanese café", January 10, 2015

¹²⁸ Reuters, "Suicide attack at Lebanese cafe kills at least seven", January 10, 2015

identified as Taha Samir al-Khalil and Bilal Mohammad al-Maraiyan. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.¹²⁹

On January 15, Lebanese authorities claimed to have foiled a series of plots intended to attack military and residential areas. Three militants, identified as Bassam Houssam al-Naboush, Elie Tony al-Warraq and Mohannad Ali Abdel-Kader, were arrested on suspicion of plotting suicide attacks. The suspects, two Lebanese and a Syrian, had trained with Al-Qaeda linked militant groups in Syria.¹³⁰ The three suspects, who had been using fake Syrian and Palestinian IDs, were linked to Shadi Mawlawi and Osama Mansour, two of the most-wanted Islamist fugitives in Lebanon. The military also said that it had safely dismantled a car bomb after an Army Intelligence patrol spotted it in the area of Ain al-Shaab, on the outskirts of the northeastern town of Aarsal.¹³¹

On January 24, two Lebanese soldiers were killed, four others wounded and five remain missing during heavy clashes with IS militants in the northeastern Lebanese village of Ras Baalbek.¹³² Authorities said that approximately 200 gunmen launched a large-scale attack on the military outpost. No group claimed responsibility but authorities blamed Al-Qaeda linked militants.¹³³

Saudi Arabia

On January 5, a border patrol at al-Suwaif, near the city of Arar, was fired on by armed militants who killed two guards and injured another. The ministry said in a statement that border guards returned fire and killed two of four attackers.¹³⁴ However, during attempts to persuade another two of the attackers to surrender, one detonated an explosive belt and killed himself as well as three of the border guards, one of whom was the commander of northern border forces. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.¹³⁵

Syria

¹²⁹ AFP, "Lebanon army identifies Tripoli suicide bombers", January 11, 2015

¹³⁰ Reuters, "Lebanon says three arrested for planning suicide attacks", January 15, 2015

¹³¹ Arabamericannews.com, "Lebanese army thwarts series of terrorist plots", January 15, 2015

¹³² AP, "Official says 8 Lebanese troops killed fighting militants", January 24, 2015

¹³³ Al-Akhbar, "Clashes Ongoing Between Lebanon's Army, Nusra Front in Ras Baalbek", January 23 2015

¹³⁴ Al-Jazeera, "Saudi border guards killed in attack", January 15, 2015

¹³⁵ Guardian, "Saudi Arabia suicide bombing puts country on alert for jihadi attacks", January 5, 2015

On January 5, Kurdish fighters seized the security and government district of Syria's Kobani from the IS and now control 80 percent of the border town. Kobani is strategically important due to its location on the border with Turkey.¹³⁶ According to authorities, the People's Protection Units (YPG) captured the governmental and security district, and the al-Refia, al-Sena'a, al-Tharura, and al-Banat schools in Kobani. YPG also advanced in the Mishtenur neighborhood south of the town.¹³⁷ During the offensive, IS militants attempted a car bombing attack but it was thwarted as YPG fighters detonated the car with many militants inside. The targeted region was entirely cleansed of the IS as result of the offensive. Authorities said that large quantities of ammunition were also seized. It was reported that 14 militants were killed in the incident, 11 in the car bombing and three others during the clashes.¹³⁸ Following this offensive, on January 16, IS militants targeted the YPG in four different locations in Kobani. In the fighting that followed, 23 militants were killed and eight members of the YPG were also killed. US authorities also reported that six US-led airstrikes were carried out near Kobani, destroying two IS staging positions and nine IS fighting positions.¹³⁹ On January 19, the YPG captured the strategic Mishtenur hill, killing 11 IS militants.¹⁴⁰ US authorities said that it had carried out 17 air strikes in the 24 hours that began on the morning of January 25, targeting IS "tactical units" and "fighting positions" in Kobani well as vehicle and staging areas. Finally, on January 26, the YPG claimed full control of Kobani, gaining an important symbolic victory over the IS militants who had besieged the Syrian-Kurdish city since September 2014.¹⁴¹ It should be noted that heavy fighting continued between the YPG fighters and IS militants to the southeast and southwest of Kobani, with the YPG fighters managing to take control of the villages around Kobani.¹⁴²

On January 18, an alleged Israeli airstrike near Syria's Quneitra border crossing with Israel killed six members of Hezbollah, including Jihad Mughniyeh,¹⁴³ the son of slain Hezbollah military leader,

¹³⁶ CNN, "Kurdish fighters say they'd advanced in Kobani, Syria", January 5, 2015

¹³⁷ AFP, "Kurds push back ISIS in Syria's Kobani: activists", January 5, 2015

¹³⁸ <http://ekurd.net/syrian-kurdistan-news-in-brief-january-5-2015-2015-01-05>

¹³⁹ AFP, "IS in fierce new attack on Kobani, Syria: activists", January 16, 2015

¹⁴⁰ Guardian, "Kurdish forces take control of Syrian town of Kobani", January 26, 2015

¹⁴¹ BBC, "Syrian Kurds 'drive Islamic State out of Kobane'", January 26, 2015

¹⁴² Reuters, "Battles continue outside Syria's Kobani after Kurds claim victory", January 29, 2015

¹⁴³ Haaretz, "Israeli strike in Syria kills late Hezbollah leader's son, sources say", January 18, 2015

Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in Damascus in 2008.¹⁴⁴ Six Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) commanders were also killed in the strike, including General Mohammad Ali Allahdadi.¹⁴⁵ Iran confirmed his death.¹⁴⁶ Authorities said that a unit headed by Jihad Mughniyeh was targeted after intelligence showed that the group was plotting to attack Israel with rockets, anti-tank missiles and bombs, and planned to send terror operatives into Israeli territory. These attacks were meant to target Israeli troops and civilians in the Golan.¹⁴⁷ Following the incident, Hezbollah militants retaliated in an ambush on an IDF patrol on January 28. (See Israel and West Bank section above).

On January 28, the Turkish Air Force carried out an airstrike on Syrian territory and destroyed a pickup truck and a bus belonging to an IS convoy. The Turkish army said the attack came after two Turkish military vehicles had been fired upon at the Çobanbey border post in the southern Kilis Province.¹⁴⁸

On January 20, the IS released a short video titled, “A Message to the Government and People of Japan,” showing a jihadist who appears to be the infamous “Jihadi John” standing before two kneeling Japanese prisoners.¹⁴⁹ The hostages were identified as Kenji Goto and Huruna Yukawa.¹⁵⁰ The jihadist calls on Japan to pay \$100 million for each captive within three days.¹⁵¹ It should be noted that the ultimatum came several days after Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, pledged \$2.5 billion in non-military aid for the Middle East, including \$200 million for those fighting the IS. This is acknowledged in the IS video by saying, “You have proudly donated 100 million to kill our women and children, to destroy the homes of the Muslims.” In October 2014, Goto was captured and held hostage by IS militants after entering Syria in the hopes of rescuing Yukawa, who was

¹⁴⁴ It is widely assumed that Israel planted the car bomb that killed him; Israel neither confirmed nor denied this.

¹⁴⁵ Times of Israel, “Six Iranians, including a general, killed in Israeli strike”, January 18, 2015

¹⁴⁶ New York Times, “Iran Confirms Israeli Airstrike in Southern Syria Killed One of Its Generals”, January 19, 2015

¹⁴⁷ Reuters, “Israel kills 6 Hezbollah fighters in southern Syria: TV”, January 18, 2015

¹⁴⁸ AFP, “Turkish army strikes al-Qaeda-linked group’s convoy in Syria”, January 30, 2015

¹⁴⁹ LA Times, “Japanese hostages took different routes to Syrian war zone”, January 20, 2015

¹⁵⁰ New York Times, “Two Japanese Hostages, as Different as Can Be, Linked by Fate in Syria”, January 25, 2015

¹⁵¹ Long War Journal, “Islamic State gives ultimatum to Japan”, January 20, 2015

captured in August 2014.¹⁵² On January 24, the IS released a picture of Goto holding a photo of a decapitated Yukawa. In an audiotape accompanying the picture, Goto read a message in English blaming the Japanese government for the death of his "cellmate" and claiming that the IS would spare Goto's life and exchange him for Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi, an attempted suicide bomber who participated in the 2005 Amman bombings. Another 67-minute video was then released online showing the decapitated body of Goto, after an English-language speech is given by masked IS militant "Jihadi John" to the people of Japan. The video opened with a black slate that read "A Message to Japan." The video then shows a Goto wearing an orange outfit, kneeling with "Jihadi John" standing behind him, armed with a knife. On January 30, the IS claimed that they beheaded Kenji Goto, 47, after the failure of international efforts to secure his release through a prisoner swap.¹⁵³

Turkey

On January 1, police arrested a man who threw grenades and fired a weapon at officers outside Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul. There were no casualties in the attack. The banned Marxist DHKP-C group claimed responsibility for the attack.¹⁵⁴ Following this attack, on January 6, a female suicide bomber dressed in a niqab entered a police station in Istanbul's central Sultanahmet district, claiming to officers that she had lost her wallet. She then detonated an explosive vest, injuring two officers, one of whom later succumbed to his wounds. Authorities said the attacker spoke English with "a thick accent".¹⁵⁵ The attacker was identified as a Russian citizen from Dagestan named Diana Ramazova, who was married with children and was pregnant.¹⁵⁶ Police said the bomber was also carrying two other bombs, which were safely defused. The target location was significant as the Sultanahmet district consists of world famous attractions including the Blue Mosque and Aga Sophia museum, and is visited by thousands of Turkish and foreign tourists daily. The area was cordoned off and the city tram line that goes through the district was halted.¹⁵⁷ No group claimed

¹⁵² CNN, "ISIS: Japanese hostage beheaded", February 3, 2015

¹⁵³ Al-Jazeera, "Japan says ISIL beheading video likely authentic", January 31, 2015

¹⁵⁴ AFP, "DHKP-C claims Istanbul palace attack bid", January 2, 2015

¹⁵⁵ BBC, "Turkey bombing: Female suicide attacker hits Istanbul police station", January 6, 2015

¹⁵⁶ Hurriyet, "Russian citizen revealed to be suicide bomber who attacked Istanbul police", January 6, 2015

¹⁵⁷ Al-Jazeera, "Policeman killed in Istanbul suicide attack", January 7, 2015

responsibility for the attack but Turkish authorities suspect Ramazova's had ties to Al-Qaeda or the IS.¹⁵⁸

Yemen

On January 5, an explosion hit a Houthi headquarters in Dhormar Province, killing six Houthi rebels and injuring 31 civilians. The explosion left a hole in the wall of the building, which was used as a base by the Houthis. No group claimed responsibility.¹⁵⁹

On January 7, a car bomb detonated in front of a police academy in Sanaa, killing 38 people and injuring 66 others.¹⁶⁰ Witnesses said two men were seen getting out of a minibus and walking away shortly before it exploded beside dozens of people who were lining up to enroll at the academy. No group claimed responsibility but authorities blamed Al-Qaeda linked militants.¹⁶¹

On January 17, two French citizens were arrested in Saana suspected of being members of AQAP. Authorities said the arrests were not connected to the Charlie Hebdo attack on January 7, 2015 in France that was carried out by AQAP militants (see French section above). No further details about the arrests were made public.¹⁶² Also, in a separate incident on January 17, Shi'ite Houthi rebels kidnapped Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, the Chief of Staff to Yemen's President and his two guards, in central Sanaa. In a statement, they said they abducted him to disrupt a meeting scheduled for the same day that was intended to work on a new constitution and the reorganization of the country into federally organized regions. No group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping.¹⁶³

On January 20, militants stormed Yemen's Presidential Palace and besieged the leader's residence following two days of violent clashes.¹⁶⁴ According to witnesses, the shelling lasted half an hour and killed two people in the house but President Hadi was unhurt.¹⁶⁵ Information Minister Nadia Sakaff

¹⁵⁸ Hurriyet ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Reuters, "Blast targets Houthi base in Yemen capital", January 5, 2015

¹⁶⁰ BBC, "Yemen bomb blast kills dozens near Sanaa police academy", January 7, 2015

¹⁶¹ Albawaba news, "Dozens of Yemenis killed in college car bomb attack", January 7, 2015

¹⁶² AFP, "Yemen arrests 2 French Qaeda suspects: top official", January 17, 2015

¹⁶³ IBT, "Gunmen Kidnap Yemeni President's Chief Of Staff Ahmed Awad Bin Mubarak, 2 Security Guards", January 17, 2015

¹⁶⁴ CNN, "Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace", January 20, 2015

¹⁶⁵ BBC, "Yemen crisis: Houthi rebels shell presidential home", January 20, 2015

said that the president's home in Sanaa had come under "heavy shelling since 15:00 by armed forces positioned over rooftops facing his house." The shelling was directed by armed forces stationed on rooftops nearby. The head of the Presidential Protection Force claimed that the shelling, combined with the storming of the palace, was a coup by the rebels who might have been helped by insiders.¹⁶⁶ On January 22, President Hadi announced his resignation following the incident.¹⁶⁷ Also on January 22, unknown gunmen attacked two military armored vehicles in the southern Yemeni port city of Aden. Three explosions were reported during the attack, which was followed by the clashes.¹⁶⁸

North America

On January 9, radical cleric Mustafa Kamel Mustafa (alias Abu Hamza), 56, was sentenced in New York to life imprisonment.¹⁶⁹ He was given two consecutive life sentences and five to 15 years on nine other counts.¹⁷⁰ Hamza was convicted in May 2014 of 11 terrorism-related charges, including involvement in the 1998 kidnapping of 16 tourists in Yemen and providing material support to terrorists, and he was also convicted of sending two followers to Oregon to establish a militant training camp, and dispatching an associate to Afghanistan to aid Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Hamza, who was the former imam at the Finsbury Park Mosque in London, was extradited from the UK to the US in 2012.¹⁷¹

On January 14, Christopher Cornell, 20, also known as Raheel Mahrus Ubaydah, was arrested in Cincinnati, Ohio, and charged with the attempted killing of a US government officer and for possession of a firearm. Authorities said he was planning to carry out an attack at US Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.¹⁷² Authorities said Cornell was planning to construct, place and detonate pipe bombs in the Capitol and follow up the bombing with rifle fire. He entered the Point Blank Range and Gun Shop in Ohio and, after purchasing firearms and 600 rounds of ammunition, he was

¹⁶⁶ DW, "Houthi fighters attack Yemen presidential residence", January 20, 2015

¹⁶⁷ Reuters, "Yemen president quits, throwing country deeper into chaos", January 22, 2015

¹⁶⁸ Reuters, "Gunmen attack army vehicles in Yemen's port of Aden: officials", January 22, 2015

¹⁶⁹ Telegraph, "Abu Hamza sentenced in New York: live", January 9, 2015

¹⁷⁰ Reuters, "London cleric Abu Hamza sentenced to life in U.S. prison", January 9, 2015

¹⁷¹ BBC, "Abu Hamza profile", January 9, 2015

¹⁷² CBS News, "Ohio man arrested for alleged plot to attack U.S. Capitol", January 14, 2015

arrested by FBI agents in the shop's car park.¹⁷³ FBI agents said that Cornell had met with an informant in Cincinnati over two days in October 2014 and another two days in November 2014, and that during the second encounter Cornell had told the informant he was planning to bomb the US Capitol building in Washington, DC. During this time, Cornell also established and used Twitter accounts under the alias Raheel Mahrus Ubaydah. He posted videos, statements and other content expressing support for the IS. On August 29, 2014 Cornell allegedly told an FBI informant via an instant messaging platform that he wanted to commit violent jihad. Cornell allegedly revealed that he considered members of Congress enemies and wanted to attack the Capitol.¹⁷⁴

On January 20, two Yemeni nationals were charged with conspiring to murder Americans abroad and providing material support to Al-Qaeda. Saddiq al-Abbadi and Ali Alvi were arrested in Saudi Arabia and extradited to the US. Alvi appeared in a federal court in Brooklyn and al-Abbadi was scheduled for a later date.¹⁷⁵ Prosecutors alleged that the pair had been involved in attacks against US military forces in Afghanistan in the summer of 2008 and had traveled to Pakistan in March 2008 to train and fight with Al-Qaeda. They also allegedly helped an American citizen join Al-Qaeda so that he could fight against US troops in Afghanistan and US citizens in the homeland.¹⁷⁶ US authorities said that in late spring and summer 2008, al-Abbadi and Alvi traveled from Pakistan to Afghanistan to conduct attacks against US military personnel stationed there. Al-Abbadi led a battle against US forces in Paktya Province in May 2008 during which one US Army Ranger was killed and several others were seriously wounded. Each defendant faced a maximum sentence of life imprisonment if convicted.¹⁷⁷

South America

Uruguay

¹⁷³ Independent, "Christopher Cornell profile: The Ohio man who tried to 'wage jihad' and allegedly plotted to bomb Washington DC", January 14, 2015

¹⁷⁴ Guardian, "Ohio man, 20, charged with plotting to kill federal officials", January 14, 2015

¹⁷⁵ Reuters, "Yemeni Nationals Charged in US Over Alleged Al-Qaida Plot", January 20, 2015

¹⁷⁶ Washington Post, "2 Yemenis linked to al Qaeda to stand trial in U.S. court", January 20, 2015

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-yemeni-nationals-charged-conspiring-murder-united-states-nationals-abroad-and-providing>

On January 8, security staff at the Israeli Embassy in Montevideo discovered a small explosive device hidden in a supermarket bag during a routine security check, thwarting a potential terrorist attack. The head of security at the embassy in Montevideo contacted local police who alerted sappers to safely detonate the bomb. Local media reported that "wires and cables" could be seen protruding from the package.¹⁷⁸ Authorities said the bomb actually posed no threat as it was a fake device, although it was complete with fuse, detonator and other elements found in a real bomb. It was detected 70 meters from the building by bomb-sniffing dogs. After destroying the device, bomb brigade Lieutenant Colonel, Alfredo Larramendi, suggested that the fake device may have been planted by militants to check Israeli response time or to assess the quality of the security of Israel's embassy.¹⁷⁹ No group claimed responsibility for the incident.¹⁸⁰

Asia

Afghanistan

On January 5, one Afghan civilian was killed and five others were injured when a suicide car bomber detonated at the headquarters of EUPOL Afghanistan, a European police-training organization, on the eastern outskirts of Kabul.¹⁸¹ The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.¹⁸²

On January 15, five men were arrested in Afghanistan, accused of involvement in a large-scale Taliban attack that targeted a Pakistani military school in December 16, 2014. Approximately 150 people, most of them children, were killed in the incident.¹⁸³ Security officials said the men arrested were being interrogated by Afghan officials before they were deported to Pakistan. It was reported that the suspects were not the main attackers but had assisted in the attack.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Ynet, "Suspected terror attack on Israeli embassy in Uruguay thwarted", January 8, 2015

¹⁷⁹ AFP, "Uruguay expels Iran diplomat over bomb scare: Israel media", February 6, 2015

¹⁸⁰ It should be noted, that following the incident in February 6, 2015, an Iranian diplomat was expelled from Uruguay after being spotted close to a dummy bomb found near the Israeli embassy in Montevideo. see i24, "Uruguay expels Iranian diplomat suspected of helping place bomb near Israeli embassy", February 6, 2015

¹⁸¹ AP, "Suicide bomber hits European police in Kabul; 1 dead", January 5, 2015

¹⁸² ABC News, ""Suicide Bomber Hits European Police in Kabul; 1 Dead", January 5, 2015

¹⁸³ See ICT database report December 2014

<http://www.ict.org.il/Article/1378/Summary-of-Terrorist-Incidents-and-CT-Operations-December-2014>

¹⁸⁴ ABC, "Five men arrested in Afghanistan over involvement in Pakistan school massacre", January 15, 2015

On January 29, a suicide bomber at an Afghan funeral for Taliban victims killed 16 people and wounded 39 others. The bomber targeted a funeral for a police commander and three other people killed earlier in the day in a roadside bombing in Mihtarlam. Witnesses said the bomber mingled with the mourners and then detonated himself. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the Mihtarlam attack.¹⁸⁵ Also on January 29, 11 Afghan policemen were killed in an attack on a checkpoint in the Andar District of Ghazni Province. Seven Taliban fighters were also killed in the attack. No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed the Taliban.¹⁸⁶

China

On January 10, police in Shanghai arrested 10 Turkish nationals and charged them with supplying false passports to ethnic Uighurs from China's far-western region of Xinjiang. It added that the nine Uighurs were planning to go to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria after leaving China. Audio and video materials with terrorism-related content were found on those trying to leave. Those involved in providing the forged passports were charged with smuggling terrorists and altering legal documents. Authorities said an additional 11 suspects were detained in November 2014.¹⁸⁷

On January 12, police killed six suspected Uighur militants in Shule, Xinjiang Province, when the militants, armed with an axe and an explosive device, attacked the officers. Initially, one attacker charged at police but the officers killed him.¹⁸⁸ Then, as police attempted to dispose the explosive device, five additional attackers charged at them and attempted to detonate the explosives but the police fatally shot all of the attackers. No police officers were injured or killed in the attack and no group claimed responsibility for carrying out the incident.¹⁸⁹

India

On January 1, Indian Coast Guard intercepted a suspicious fishing boat loaded with explosives from Pakistan in the Arabian Sea near the Indo-Pak maritime boundary. The suspicious boat, carrying

¹⁸⁵ AP, "Suicide bomb at Afghan funeral for Taliban victims kills 16", January 29, 2015

¹⁸⁶ Al-Jazeera, "Afghan policemen killed in Taliban attack", January 29, 2015

¹⁸⁷ Zaman, "Report: China arrests 10 Turks for supplying fake passports to ethnic Uighurs", January 10, 2015

¹⁸⁸ Al-Jazeera, "Chinese police kill six in alleged bombing attempt", January 12, 2015

¹⁸⁹ AFP, "Police kill six attackers in China's Xinjiang: govt", January 12, 2015

four people on board, was chased by the Coast Guard for more than an hour, during which exchange of fire was reported between the two sides. The four occupants on board set the vessel alight and exploded it before it sank with them.¹⁹⁰

Malaysia

On January 16, a Malaysian man, 29, whose identity was not made public, was charged with heading an IS terrorist cell in Australia and is suspected of recruiting Malaysian militants to be sent via Australia to join the fight for the IS in Syria.¹⁹¹ Authorities claimed that he was using Australia as a transit point. So far, at least five Malaysian fighters were believed to have used the designated route. Police said the cell offered advice to fellow fighters on routes to take to evade detection and connect them with contacts in Syria. It also provided financial assistance for Syria-bound jihadists from Australia.¹⁹² The suspect was arrested in Kuala Lumpur Airport, after landing from Australia, where he was deported after authorities became aware of his activities. An Australian-based Malaysian couple who, on January 7, were also been deported and arrested by authorities on return to Malaysia, were also suspected of being part of the cell.¹⁹³

Pakistan

On January 4, a Pakistani air strike targeted militant hideouts in the Koki Khel area of Tirah Valley, killing 31 Taliban militants.¹⁹⁴ Tirah is part of Pakistan's restive Khyber tribal region where a number of air strikes have been launched against militant hideouts in recent months. Authorities said four hideouts and a suicide bomber training center were destroyed. Among the casualties were several would-be suicide bombers.¹⁹⁵ Also, a US air strike launched several hours after the Pakistani air strikes, killed at least six militants and wounded four others in the Datta Khel area of North

¹⁹⁰ Times of India, "Coast Guard intercepts Pak 'terror' boat off Gujarat coast, occupants blow themselves up", January 20, 2015

¹⁹¹ AAP, "Aust-based terror suspect caught in KL", January 16, 2015

¹⁹² The Star, "Leader of Aussie terror cell nabbed", January 16, 2015

¹⁹³ Guardian, "Malaysian suspected of Isis ties arrested after being deported from Australia", January 2015

¹⁹⁴ Guardian, "Pakistani air strikes and suspected US drone attack 'kill dozens of militants'", January 4, 2015

¹⁹⁵ IANS, "31 militants killed in Pakistan air strikes", January 4, 2015

Waziristan.¹⁹⁶ Authorities said that the compound was targeted because it was used by fighters loyal to the Pakistani Taliban commander, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, as well as by Uzbek militants.¹⁹⁷ Also on January 4, in a separate incident, four civilians were killed when a bomb targeting Shi'ite Muslims at a volleyball match detonated at the Hussaini ground, owned by the local Shi'ite community in the Kalaya neighborhood of the Orakzai tribal district. Eight people were injured, two critically. No group claimed responsibility but authorities blamed the Taliban.¹⁹⁸

On January 9, eight people, including a policeman, were killed and at least 18 others were injured by a powerful bomb that exploded outside an Imambargah (prayer hall) in Rawalpindi.¹⁹⁹ A group of over 100 Shia pilgrims were attending a function held to mark the birth of the Holy Prophet when the explosion took place.²⁰⁰ Authorities believe that the bomber was stopped by guards as he attempted to enter the Imambargah. It was then that he detonated his explosive vest.²⁰¹ Tehreek-e-Taliban Jamaat-ur-Ahrar, a faction of the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack.²⁰²

On January 30, a suicide bomber killed at least 40 people and injured 50 others in a bombing at a Shi'ite mosque in the Shikarpur District of Pakistan's Sindh Province.²⁰³ Authorities said the suicide bomber approached the Imambargah, in Shikarpur, Sindh, shortly after Friday prayers, and complained that he was sick. Shortly after he was given medicine from a dispensary inside the mosque he detonated an explosive belt.²⁰⁴ Authorities said that approximately 250 worshippers had gathered in the mosque for Friday prayers at the time of the attack. The explosion caused the roof of the mosque to fall, which caused many of the casualties. Jundullah, which recently announced its affiliation with the IS,²⁰⁵ claimed responsibility for the attack saying that they targeted the building because the Shias "are our enemies".²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁶ BBC, "Pakistan Taliban: US drone 'kills militants' in tribal region", January 4, 2015

¹⁹⁷ DW, "US drone kills 'militants' in Pakistan", January 4, 2015

¹⁹⁸ AFP, "Bomb at volleyball match kills four Shiites in NW Pakistan", January 4, 2015

¹⁹⁹ Pak Tribune, "Bomb attack at Imambargah in Rawalpindi kills seven people", January 9, 2015

²⁰⁰ AFP, "Bomb blast at Rawalpindi imambargah kills 8, injures 16", January 10, 2015

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Al-Jazeera, "Suicide bomber targets Pakistan mosque", January 10, 2015

²⁰³ BBC, "Pakistan Shia mosque blast in Shikarpur kills dozens", January 30, 2015

²⁰⁴ AP, "Anger, mourning in Pakistan after mosque bombing kills 59", January 31, 2015

²⁰⁵ Telegraph, "Isil-linked terrorists bomb Pakistan mosque, killing at least 60", January 30, 2015

²⁰⁶ Straits times, "Explosion Kills Dozens at Shiite Mosque in Pakistan", January 30, 2015

Philippines

On January 1, a homemade bomb packed with nails to create greater impact killed two people and wounded 30 others in a public market in Mlang town in North Cotabato Province.²⁰⁷ No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement, (BIFM) a Moro Islamic Liberation Front splinter group.²⁰⁸

On January 23, a car bomb exploded outside a bus terminal in Zamboanga, killing one person and wounding 48 others. The explosion also caused damage to nearby buildings, while a car and a tricycle sustained damaged. No group claimed responsibility for the attack but authorities blamed Abu Sayaf militant group.²⁰⁹ City Mayor, Maria Isabelle Climaco, said the attack may have been part of a larger plot by the Abu Sayyaf to set free 57 of their comrades out of the Zamboanga city jail. Local authorities had received an intelligence tip and were investigating the claims.²¹⁰

On January 25, 44 members of the elite Special Action Force (SAF) police unit were killed in a 12-hour firefight during an attempt to capture two high ranking militants in the southern province of Maguindanao: Malaysian bomb maker, Zulkifli bin Hir (alias Marwan), and Jemaah Islamiyah militant, Abdul Basit Usman.²¹¹ Authorities said five Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and 18 Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) militants were killed during the clashes. Authorities said 392 police officers from the elite Special Action Force, which is trained in the use of high-powered weapons and special tactics, conducted a surprise raid in the small town of Tukanalipao, on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Authorities said that as the commandos were retreating from their assault, they came under fire from a group of militants believed to be from both the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).²¹² The MILF claimed they had not been informed of the police operation, which triggered a series of firefights between government forces and rebels. The attack resulted in the largest single loss of life by Philippine police officers in recent history and was the first breach of a more than

²⁰⁷ Ap, "Bomb blast in Philippines kills 2, wounds 30", January 1, 2015

²⁰⁸ New York Times, "Bomb Blast in Philippines Kills 2, Wounds 30", January 1, 2015

²⁰⁹ AFP, "One dead, 48 injured in Philippines blast", January 23, 2015

²¹⁰ Straits Times, "One dead, 37 injured in Philippines in suspected bomb attack by Abu Sayyaf", January 23, 2015

²¹¹ BBC, "Philippine police killed in clashes with militants", January 26, 2015

²¹² DPA, "Philippine pursuit ends in shootout", January 25, 2015

yearlong cease-fire with Muslim rebels under a fragile peace deal with the government.²¹³ Philippine officials said they believed Marwan was killed in the operation, based on photographs of the bodies at the scene and the statements of operatives in the area. DNA samples were taken from the body in order to verify that he was killed.²¹⁴

Oceania

Australia

On January 9, police in southwest Sydney carried out a series of anti-terrorism raids as part of Operation Duntulm, which targeted the distribution of financial assistance to Australian jihadists.²¹⁵ Police said that they seized illegal drugs and documents related to terrorism during the operation. Two men, identified as Omar Ammouche, 33, and Jibryl Almaouie, 21, were arrested but police said there was no specific threat, but rather the arrest warrants were carried out as part of a long-running investigation.²¹⁶ The men were refused bail and faced a court hearing in Parramatta Bail Court on January 10.²¹⁷ However, neither of the suspects appeared in court. According to the court indictment, Omar Ammouche faced ammunition possession offences, subject to a prohibition order and without having a permit. He denied the charges and said the weapons that police discovered in his home belonged to a friend. Jibryl Almaouie was charged with the unauthorized possession of a firearm following a counter-terrorist raid in December 2014 where police allegedly found guns and ammunition.²¹⁸

²¹³ New York Times, “Scores of Philippine Police Officers Killed in Firefight With Rebels”, January 26, 2015

²¹⁴ On February 5, authorities did confirm that DNA evidence proved Marwan was killed in the incident. See: CNN, “Man killed in Philippines raid was wanted terror suspect Marwan, DNA indicates”, February 5, 2015

²¹⁵ Guardian, “Counter-terrorism police conduct Sydney raids”, January 9, 2015

²¹⁶ Mail Online, “Two men arrested after separate anti-terror raids in Sydney set to remain behind bars until next week... when they are expected to apply for bail”, January 9, 2015

²¹⁷ <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2015/january/media-release-operation-duntulm-two-men-charged-with-firearm-and-drug-offences.aspx>

²¹⁸ ABC News, “Men arrested after counter-terror raids in Sydney to apply for bail”, January 10, 2015

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