THREATWATCH EUROPE

GROUPS

JANE'S TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY CENTRE (JTIC), IHS MARKIT REPORT ON THE MAIN GROUPS POSING A THREAT ACROSS THE CONTINENT

PKK

The PKK is a Kurdish militant organisation operating primarily in South-East Turkey. Initially espousing outright separatism for Turkey's substantial Kurdish minority, the group's goal later evolved into greater constitutional protection and socio-political participation for Kurds. The imprisonment of the PKK's founder and leader, Abdullah Öcalan, means that operational command is currently assumed by a three-man executive committee, while Öcalan still holds influence over the group's strategic direction. The PKK is operational across Turkey, orchestrating IED attacks in major cities against security personnel as political statements, in addition to more widespread insurgent violence in the South-East. Rolling ceasefires have staunched violence in the PKK's heartland in South-East Turkey; the most recent ceasefire broke down in 2015 and conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state escalated steadily thereafter.

DONETSK PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

The DPR declared its formation on 7 April 2014 when a group of pro-Russia separatist militants occupied Government buildings in the city of Donetsk in Ukraine's Donetsk Oblast following the removal of pro-Russia President Viktor Yanukovych on 22 February 2014.

PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan still has influence over the group despite being in prison (left)

An armed pro-Russian separatist from the Donetsk People's Republic (above)

Greek riot police clash with Greek anarchists (above right)

As the DPR's supporters occupied further buildings across Donetsk Oblast in April and May, the Ukrainian Government proscribed the DPR as a terrorist group on 16 May 2014. Through heavy backing by the Russian Government, especially militarily, the DPR established itself as a potent fighting force against Ukrainian Government forces with access to heavy weapons, artillery and surface-to-air missiles (SAM). Following the downing of several military aircraft between May and July 2014, the DPR was alleged to have operated the SAM launcher that shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 on 17 July 2014, killing all 298 on board.

After a period of intense fighting with Ukrainian forces throughout 2014 and into early 2015, including the capture of Donetsk International Airport by the DPR, the conflict became stalemated along the line of contact following the Minsk II agreement in February 2015, with engagements largely taking the form of sporadic clashes and firing on fixed positions. The ceasefire broke down, though, leading to intensified clashes through mid-to-late 2016, and open fighting around Avdiivka in January 2017.

WILAYAT AL-QAWQAZ

In a statement released on 23 June 2015, the Islamic State's then spokesperson Abu Mohammad al-Adnani announced the formation of Wilayat al-Qawqaz (Caucasus province) in Russia's North Caucasus region. The formation of the wilaya followed a series of defections to the Islamic State by several senior commanders from the ostensibly pro-al-Qaeda group Imarat Kavkaz.

Although the Wilayat al-Qawqaz has usurped Imarat Kavkaz as the most active militant group in the North Caucasus, the group's capabilities are relatively low. The group claimed to have conducted its first operation – an attack on a military base in Dagestan – on 2 September 2015. Since then, Wilayat al-Qawqaz has claimed responsibility for sporadic low-level attacks predominantly targeting security forces, but also religious targets. A significant number of these attacks appear to have been lone-actor attacks claimed by the group as opposed to being centrally directed.

ROUVIKONAS

Rouvikonas (Rubicon) is a Greek anarchist group that is active in the capital Athens and surrounding Attica region. The group was formed in response to economic austerity in Greece and particularly in response to the signing of a second bailout agreement with the European Union and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2012. According to an article by Foreign Policy on 26 January, the group has approximately 60 members.

Rouvikonas has a relatively high operational tempo in comparison with other Greek anarchist groups such as the Synomosia Pyrinon tis Fotias (SPF), but its tactics focus more on vandalism and direct action as opposed to the use of IEDs and other more violent means utilised by the SPF and others. The group regularly conducts raids of its target buildings where attackers throw pamphlets, vandalise the interior or threaten its occupants. The assets that are targeted are diverse and motivated by specific political or local grievances. They have included attacks on Greek Government assets, vandalism of foreign embassies, private embassies and the intimidation of local doctors in response to alleged bribes.

REGIONS

KIT NICHOLL, COUNTRY RISK ANALYST, IHS MARKIT

POST-CALIPHATE THREATS

The collapse of the Islamic State governance project in Iraq and Syria means that a large number of European and non-European foreign fighters are likely to enter Europe's Southern borders, potentially undetected. More than 5,000 European nationals have travelled to fight for Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq, of whom only approximately 30 percent are so far known to have returned. Islamist militants intent on engaging in terrorist activity are likely to seek to return without being detected via late-night landings in remote areas or by taking convoluted routes and changing their identity on the way.

Another potential method involves masquerading as refugees, although the improvement of screening procedures at the European Union's external borders since 2016, following the refugee crisis, reduces the likelihood that militants will attempt to arrive using this tactic because of the complexity of deceiving authorities with cover stories. Once inside the Schengen passport-free area, crossing borders in continental Europe is a simple affair. Crossing the UK border undetected, on the other hand, will likely prove extremely difficult, minimising the likely impact on the United Kingdom from returnees seeking to go unnoticed. Islamic State fighters returning with the express purpose of carrying

out attacks will likely seek to embed themselves in existing Islamist militant networks across Europe. These are likely to be individuals primed for European attacks, with specific skillsets developed either through battleground experience or by receiving training geared towards the preparation of operations abroad. These militants will substantially increase the capability of European cells, injecting a high level of planning and operational expertise. They will also likely be capable of transferring knowledge on matters such as security awareness, or the construction of reliable IEDs.

Networks including foreign fighters will therefore likely be intent on staging sophisticated, multi-site attacks such as those witnessed in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016. Both of those

TOP TARGETS INCLUDE SHOPPING MALLS, TRANSPORT HUBS OR MAJOR EVENTS

attacks involved militants who had received training abroad. France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany are at highest risk of attacks, owing to their active role in fighting the Islamic State and because of the presence of large Muslim communities in which militants have a better chance of blending. However, the preponderance of Islamist networks in these countries would be the main driver behind their prioritisation.

Top targets would include shopping malls, transport hubs such as main train stations or airports, or major events taking place at large arenas, stadiums or concert halls. Reports of counter-terrorism raids uncovering large quantities of stable explosives, assembled with a high level of skill, will be a potential indicator of returnees planning attacks on a larger scale than those seen in recent years, potentially involving vehicle-borne IEDs in combination with other forms of weaponry, such as military-grade firearms.

WORLD CUP IN RUSSIA
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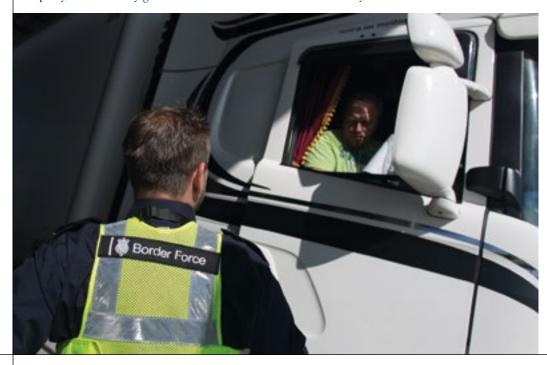
The primary terrorism threat comes from Sunni Islamist militants, including returning Russian jihadists, motivated by their opposition to the military involvement of Russia and other World Cup participants in the Middle East, and towards Iran and Saudi Arabia. A more locally driven threat comes from Islamist militants in the North Caucasus, who have fought against Russia's domination of their republics, driven by ethnic separatist as well as jihadist motivation. The main militant groups in Russia – the Islamic State's affiliate Wilayat al-Qawqaz and the al-Qaeda-aligned Imarat Kavkaz – are confined to the North Caucasus region. Security forces have put in place a range of measures to attempt to mitigate the threats posed.

Security services are already at a heightened posture following the 18 March Presidential election, and will use experiences gained during this period to inform their approach to World Cup security.

In Moscow, authorities implemented facial-recognition technology on 5,000 cameras in the city's CCTV network in September 2017 to cross-match footage with 'wanted' images from databases and the social media website VKontakte. Elsewhere, authorities in Volgograd have installed 131 additional CCTV cameras ahead of the tournament and other host cities are likely to follow suit. Such measures are likely to assist in the timely detection and arrest of wanted individuals before they can commit an attack.

Authorities will also probably have measures to counter any CBRN attack, although the specific nature of such measures is yet to be publicised.

Outside of the host cities, and particularly in Chechnya and Dagestan, counter-terrorism operations are likely to be intensified in an attempt to mitigate threats originating from there. Similar pre-emptive security operations were conducted in the North Caucasus ahead of the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014, and probably contributed to the absence of any attacks ●

Crossing the UK border is likely to prove difficult for fighters posing as refugees