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A Report on Suicide Bombings in 2013

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Between the start of suicide bombings in the recent past, carried out by Hizbollah in Lebanon in the early 1980s, and the beginning of the twenty-first century, some 200 suicide attacks took place around the world. A dramatic increase in suicide terrorism around the world began in early 2000, and overall some 3,500 suicide attacks have taken place over the last three decades. The reverberations of the September 11 attacks led to a significant increase in the role played by terrorist organizations identified with al-Qaeda and global jihad in the planning and execution of suicide attacks. Since their establishment in the 1980s, these organizations have carried out more than 85 percent of the suicide bombings around the world, and in 2013, they perpetrated almost 95 percent. Although suicide bombings account for fewer attacks compared with other methods used by terrorist organizations, they make more of an impact on the public due to the greater number of fatalities and their effect on morale.

In 2013, eighteen countries suffered the lethal results of suicide terrorism. Some 291 suicide bombings were carried out, causing approximately 3,100 deaths. This figure represents a 25 percent increase in the number of attacks over the same period the previous year (230).

Prominent statistics indicate a significant increase in attacks in Middle East countries, particularly Iraq; a large number of suicide bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which for about a decade have suffered from a high level of attacks; a continued phenomenon in central Africa; and a trend toward declining involvement of women in suicide terror. In addition, despite the common assumption that suicide bombings are usually carried out in occupied countries and primarily against the occupying power, only 32 percent of the

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attacks were perpetrated in countries where a foreign army is present. Most of the attacks were carried out against the local population as part of an internal struggle, particularly in countries in which the regime lacks legitimacy.

The absence of political stability in much of the Middle East as a result of the Arab Spring has led to a considerable increase in suicide bombings.

In 2013, the Middle East saw 148 suicide attacks, which constituted some 50 percent of all attacks in the world. The most prominent trend in the region is the increase in the number of attacks in Iraq. The 98 attacks there constituted one-third of all suicide bombings in the world, an increase of 280 percent over the previous year (35). Iraq, which began to suffer from suicide bombings only after the entry of Western forces in 2003, has thus far experienced some 1,500 attacks, most a result of religious and ethnic tensions. Nearly one-half of the suicide bombings in Iraq (45 percent) were directed against the civilian population, primarily in restaurants, markets, and mosques, and at funerals and in funeral tents, while the rest (48 percent) were aimed at security forces and police. A considerable portion of the attacks directed against the civilian population were carried out in areas in which there is a dominant Shiite presence, while bombings against military and governmental targets took place mainly in Sunni-dominated regions.

Additional factors beyond religious and ethnic tension account for the increase in the number of attacks in Iraq. The intelligence and operational vacuum that US forces left behind has weakened the security forces' intelligence capabilities and ability to thwart attacks. In addition, the heightened presence of global jihadi elements because of the civil war in Syria has increased the supply of volunteers for suicide bombings in Iraq. Furthermore, corrupt behavior by the Shiite-majority government and the harsh discrimination against the Sunni minority have aroused much resentment against the government, and in turn, many are reluctant to assist Iraqi security forces to act against Sunni terrorist organizations. The organization behind most of the suicide bombings is the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), which this year announced that it was expanding its activities from Iraq to Syria, and accordingly, changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

The internal fighting in Iraq is clearly associated with the civil war in Syria. This year, some 27 suicide bombings that killed some 400 people were carried out in Syria.¹ The civil war in Syria, like the situation in neighboring Iraq, is marked by sectarian and ethnic tensions, with the focus on the Sunni-Shiite divide and the struggle between nationalist

¹ There are media reports about a larger number of suicide bombers in general and in Syria in particular, but they lack a detailed description of their location and the number of casualties. We have included in our report only attacks whose details could be verified.

secular forces and Islamist foreign forces. Support by Iran and Hizbollah for the Assad regime has exacerbated the conflict. The groups that were mainly responsible for suicide terror in Syria this year are Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, both affiliated with al-Qaeda.

Suicide terrorism also spilled over into Lebanon, which for years was free of this phenomenon. In late 2013 Lebanon suffered three suicide bombings; the most noteworthy attack occurred at the Iranian embassy. The announcement claiming responsibility asserted that these attacks were intended to deter Hizbollah following its dispatch of hundreds of operatives to Syria, with the approval of its patron, Iran, to fight alongside Assad.

In Egypt too the prolonged governmental instability led to a rise in terrorist activity in the country, particularly after the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi by the military. Increased activity by terrorist organizations occurred especially in the Sinai Peninsula (including four out of Egypt's six suicide bombings). Conversely, in Yemen, which also suffers from prolonged governmental instability, ten suicide bombings took place this year, a decline of more than 50 percent over last year. In Libya and Tunisia, where there is serious governmental instability, there was one suicide attack.

Not only was there escalation in the Middle East in 2013; Afghanistan and Pakistan continued to figure prominently among countries that suffered heavily from suicide bombings. Since the start of the twenty-first century, there were some 700 suicide bombings in Afghanistan and some 450 in Pakistan. In 2013, 65 attacks were carried out in Afghanistan and 35 in Pakistan, figures similar to last year's numbers. The violence in the two countries is affected, inter alia, by the expected withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan in 2014. In Afghanistan, the Taliban changed the focus of its attacks from civilian targets to local military and police targets (32 percent of the attacks), and governmental figures who are viewed as collaborators (27 percent). The organization has also continued to attack foreign forces in the country (35 percent). Terrorist organizations in Pakistan have perpetrated attacks on the civilian population (31 percent), along with security targets (34 percent) and governmental targets (25 percent).

The level of suicide terror in Africa has remained stable relative to the previous year, with 34 attacks in African countries, one more than in 2012. The most prominent terrorist organization in Somalia is the Shabab, which frequently operates against foreign government officials and army troops present in the country, and this year, carried out fourteen suicide attacks. In Mali, where French troops joined African Union forces this past year to help block the country's takeover by global jihadist forces, there were fifteen suicide attacks, most of them carried out by the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA). In Nigeria, where the Boko Haram organization is dominant, there were three attacks, a significant decrease from the number of suicide bombings there (21) the previous year.

In conclusion, the increase in the number of suicide bombings in 2013 stemmed from a lack of stability in Middle East countries, and particularly from the escalation of the civil wars in Iraq and Syria, with the latter turning from a local into a regional conflict. Given the increasing political instability in the Middle East, it appears that suicide terror can be expected to continue and even to escalate because it is an effective tool available to the warring parties. For Israel, this escalation, and especially the increase in suicide bombings, is a warning of sorts to increase security vigilance lest some involved in the conflicts along its borders attempt to export suicide terror to Israel. This might likewise encourage Palestinian opposition factions to attempt to reactivate this deadly method of operation against Israeli civilians and soldiers.

