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## Islamist Terrorist Activity in 2000–2020: A Scoring Methodology

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**Abstract.** The relevance of the study of Islamist terrorism is due to its destructive impact on national and global security, as well as on the dialogue between Western and Eastern, particularly Muslim, nations since the early 2000s. Islamist terrorism reinforces entrenched prejudices against Islam and Muslims, leading to their demonization and the subsequent prevention of constructive interaction between communities professing different religions, thus hindering the establishment of relations based on mutual trust. This study examines the number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamist groups and their victims between 2000 and 2020, and tests the methodology for scoring their terrorist activities. Based on the Global Terrorism Database and the author's sample of 155 groups broadcasting Islamist ideology, three stages of the development of Islamist terrorism were identified, a direct proportional relationship between the number of terrorist attacks and the number of victims was proven, and the geography of Islamist terrorist activity was analyzed. Methodologically, this study combines the analysis of terrorism as both a political phenomenon and a religious manifestation, and Islamist terrorist groups themselves are seen as political projects masquerading as religiously motivated communities. In contrast to the destabilization of Iraq, which along with Afghanistan became another platform for training terrorists, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, had little impact on Islamist terrorism. Quantitative analysis revealed that the Middle East and North Africa was mistakenly perceived as the “epicenter” of Islamist terrorism in 2000–2020, as Southeast Asia was the leader in terrorist attacks in 2000, while South Asia occupied 1st place in 2003, 2005–2013, and 2018–2020. It has been confirmed that instability at the local and national levels serves as a fertile ground for Islamist terrorism. The possibilities and limitations of the proposed methodology are outlined, and the prospects for its further application in scientific studies of Islamist terrorism are described.

**Key words:** jihadism, international terrorism, Global Terrorism Database, quantitative methods, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, 9/11 attacks

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## Методика балльной оценки террористической активности исламистских группировок в 2000–2020 гг.

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**Аннотация.** Актуальность изучения исламистского терроризма обусловлена его не снижающимся с начала 2000-х гг. деструктивным влиянием на национальную и глобальную безопасность, а также на диалог между западными и восточными, в частности мусульманскими, обществами. Исламистский терроризм закрепляет укоренившиеся предрассудки в отношении ислама и мусульман, демонизирует их, препятствуя конструктивному взаимодействию сообществ, исповедующих разные религии, и установлению отношений, основанных на взаимном доверии. Цель исследования состоит в апробации методики балльной оценки террористической активности исламистских групп с привлечением эмпирических данных о количестве терактов, совершенных исламистами в 2000–2020 гг., и жертв этих атак. На основе Глобальной базы данных о терроризме и авторской выборки из 155 группировок, транслирующих исламистскую идеологию, выделено три этапа развития исламистского терроризма, подтверждено наличие прямой пропорциональной связи между количеством терактов и числом жертв в них, а также проанализирована география террористической деятельности исламистов. Методологически исследование опирается на сочетание двух подходов — изучения терроризма как политического явления и как формы религиозной манифестации, а сами исламистские террористические группировки рассматриваются как политические проекты, только маскирующиеся под сообщества, преследующие религиозные цели. Установлено, что теракты 11 сентября 2001 г. не оказали существенного влияния на активизацию терроризма исламистов в отличие от дестабилизации Ирака, который стал еще одной площадкой для подготовки террористов наряду с Афганистаном. Количественный анализ позволил установить, что Ближний Восток и Северная Африка ошибочно воспринимались как «эпицентр» исламистского терроризма в 2000–2020 гг., поскольку в 2000 г. первое место по числу терактов занимала Юго-Восточная Азия, а в 2003, 2005–2013 и 2018–2020 гг. лидером по этому показателю была Южная Азия. Обозначены возможности и ограничения предлагаемой методики, описаны перспективы ее дальнейшего применения в научных исследованиях исламистского терроризма.

**Ключевые слова:** джихадизм, международный терроризм, Глобальная база данных по терроризму, количественные методы, Ближний Восток и Северная Африка, Южная Азия, Юго-Восточная Азия, Африка южнее Сахары, теракты 11 сентября

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### Introduction

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on civilian and military targets in the United States, the news feeds and pages of scientific publications were filled with publications about the growing terrorist threat from Islamist groups. Indeed, this series of terrorist attacks demonstrated, on the one hand, the gaps in the US national security system and, on the other, the power of the impact of such acts not only on the domestic political situation in the United States but also on world

politics as a whole, justifying the interventions of coalition forces in Afghanistan (2001) and then in Iraq (2003). These countries became a kind of “a training grounds” (Hegghammer, 2006, p. 11) for terrorists from all over the world, and after the start of the Syrian conflict, Syria received the status of the main “school for terrorists” (Hemmingsen, 2013; Hamming, 2019, p. 1).

At the same time, the problem of “Islamist terrorism” has since been surrounded by many, in our view inadequately substantiated, but

widespread even in research circles, assertions about the global nature of the Islamist threat and that the events of 2001 “galvanized radical Islamists around the world” (Tan, 2024, p. 299).

The situation is further complicated by the absence of a consensus within academic discourse regarding the definition of the concepts of “Islamist terrorism” and “jihadism,” just as there is no single, universally accepted definition of “international terrorism” that would establish criteria common to all states by which one or another group would be classified as terrorist. This indicates that, in different countries, different groups are included in the lists of terrorist groups, and “international terrorism” itself becomes a convenient tool that allows individual states to persecute undesirable groups (e.g., those representing the interests of ethnic or religious minorities or separatists).

In this article, we do not set ourselves the task of offering our definitions of the above concepts, since this delicate issue requires an in-depth study and a series of special publications. Nevertheless, the presence of a scientific problem such as the inconsistency of concepts within the problems of international terrorism and Islamist terrorism determines the relevance of our study, which focuses on the empirical analysis of the terrorist activity of Islamist groups and the presentation of the author’s methodology for scoring this activity. In our opinion, the proposed methodology provides tools for the quantitative assessment of Islamist terrorist activities at the country, regional, or global level, which will allow us to make more empirically substantiated conclusions about the geography, nature, and features of Islamist terrorism. Subsequently, such conclusions can form the basis for a more scientifically substantiated, ideologically uncolored definition of the concept of “Islamist terrorism” and the identification of criteria according to which one or another group

can reasonably be classified as “Islamist terrorists.”

The chronological framework of the study was determined on the basis of the following considerations. To identify the impact of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamists, we began our calculations from 2000, the year preceding the tragedy in the United States. This will allow us to assess whether Islamist terrorist activity was “anomalous” in 2001 and whether the September 11 terrorist attacks caused a real surge in Islamist terrorism. The study ended in 2020 due to limited access to data on terrorist incidents posted in the *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD).<sup>1</sup> This database is one of the most complete and contains information on terrorist attacks worldwide since 1970. Most Western and Russian researchers rely on information from the GTD, particularly Russian experts on international terrorism E.A. Stepanova from IMEMO RAS (Stepanova, 2014; 2016; 2017), who participated in the development of the *Global Terrorism Index*.

At the time of this study, the GTD contained information on terrorist attacks for the full calendar year 2020. It should be noted that the GTD was chosen as a source of empirical data owing to the virtual absence of an alternative. Currently, there is no Russian database containing information on terrorist attacks worldwide. Similar databases do not exist for non-Western countries. Among the shortcomings of the GTD, it is worth highlighting the absence of information in this database on terrorist organizations and terrorism “used by states against their citizens” (Schmid & Jongman, 1988), as well as the specifics of the perception of terrorism in the United States, where the database was created: GTD was created on the basis of information

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<sup>1</sup> START (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism). (2022). *Global Terrorism Database 1970–2020* [data file]. URL: <https://www.start.umd.edu/data-tools/GTD> (accessed: 22.09.2024).

collected by the *Pinkerton Global Intelligence Services* (PGIS) during the Cold War, when the focus in terrorism research was on its “leftist” version, and in the 2000s, the most biased data from GTD may be considered to be information on terrorist attacks committed by Islamists, since, as already noted, after 9/11, Islamist terrorism was positioned by the American leadership as the main threat to US national security.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, it appears that, in the absence of a single global approach to defining terrorism agreed upon by all members of the international community, any database will suffer from the same shortcomings as those noted above for the GTD.

The article contains a description of the author’s approach to the study of Islamist terrorism and the methodology for scoring the terrorist activity of Islamist groups (see section “Methodology and Research Methods”); the results of applying this methodology, which should help answer questions about which events had the greatest impact on the spread of Islamist terrorism, how global the threat of Islamist terrorism is, and which regions are most susceptible to this threat (“Results”); the possibilities and limitations of the proposed methodology (“Discussion”) and conclusions (“Conclusion”).

### Methodology and Research Methods

A.P. Schmid, one of the leading Western experts on terrorism and co-editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*,<sup>2</sup> has identified five methodological frameworks for the study of terrorism, corresponding to five research disciplines that examine the phenomenon:

- 1) terrorism as a criminal act (criminology),
- 2) terrorism in the context of politics (political science),
- 3) terrorism in the context of wars (war and peace studies),

4) terrorist acts as a means of communication (communication studies),

5) terrorist act as a religious “crusade”/ jihad (religious studies) (Schmid, 2011, pp. 1–2).

Each of these approaches, as A.P. Schmid (2011, p. 2) notes that it allows us to examine one or another aspect of terrorism but is not the only correct one.

Since the objectives of our study do not include the examination of the compliance of individual terrorist acts included in the State Terrorist List with Russian legislation and the definition of a terrorist act established by it, we exclude the first methodological approach. The third and fourth approaches also do not correspond to the stated goal of the article, as they involve an analysis of the influence of military actions on terrorist attacks and the communication capabilities of terrorist attacks. In this regard, we rely on a methodology that combines the second and fifth approaches, by considering Islamist groups that use terrorist methods as political projects created by certain actors in international relations for political purposes (in particular, to justify the ‘demonization’ of the image of a collective enemy in the person of the Islamic religion). At the same time, in order to recruit supporters among Muslims and ‘sacralize’ the activities of such groups, their ideologists resort to distorting Islamic religious dogmas and the peace-loving essence of this religion (Ranjbar & Chikrizova, 2023), which allows such political projects to justify the violence carried out for religious motives.

A further feature of this study is the emphasis on the analysis of empirical data on the number of terrorist attacks and the number of victims from 2000 to 2020. This allows us to propose a methodology for scoring the terrorist activity of Islamist groups in each respective year as well as to study the regional level of Islamist terrorist activity. The methodological framework employed in this study encompasses the use of the method of positioning (constructing a scatter diagram

<sup>2</sup> *Perspectives on Terrorism Journal*. URL: <https://pt.icct.nl/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

that reveals the relationship between the number of terrorist attacks and the number of victims per year), the method of analyzing the relationships between variables, the method of grouping and systematization, and the method of ranking for assigning a point coefficient to respective years according to the level of terrorist activity of Islamists in that year.

The practice of using quantitative methods to analyze the phenomenon of terrorism is widespread and is already actively used to identify the link between the ideology broadcast by terrorists and the lethality of terrorist attacks (Carson & Suppenbach, 2018; Piazza & LaFree, 2019); between the structure and goals of groups and the mortality rate in terrorist attacks (Piazza, 2009); between types of ideologies, locations of operations, types of attacks, and types of targets (Davis, 2019); and to assess the level of activity of terrorist group militants in certain regions, such as Europe (Harrow, 2010). At the same time, researchers have rarely focused on identifying stages in the activities of Islamist terrorists or searching for evidence of the truly global nature of Islamist threats by establishing the proportion of groups that commit terrorist attacks in more than one region of the world or outside their country of origin.

Quantitative studies of terrorism are based on empirical data accumulated from various databases developed by government agencies in various countries, research centers, and laboratories based at universities, as well as private entities (consulting agencies, analytical centers, or big data processing centers). A comprehensive description of the features of 20 existing databases and the methodologies underlying the analysis of terrorism within individual projects can be found in a collective monograph edited by A.P. Schmid (2011, pp. 294–340). However, there is no single specialized database on Islamist terrorism.

As for indices and ratings for assessing the level of terrorist threat, it is necessary to mention the *Global Terrorism Index*, one of the most well-known indices for analyzing terrorist activity in individual countries of the world. The index website is composed of “incidents, fatalities, injuries and hostages. To measure the impact of terrorism, a five-year weighted average is applied.”<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to note that the index is calculated using data from the *Terrorism Tracker*,<sup>4</sup> which only contains information on terrorist attacks since 2007, and is only available to institutions that have paid a subscription (which limits the ability of researchers to access and verify the underlying data), and that it does not take into account the ideology of terrorist groups or isolate Islamist attacks.

In light of the aforementioned points, it is concluded that none of the existing methods for quantifying terrorism assessments focus on the research questions posed in this article, with each approach exhibiting its own strengths and limitations.

In this regard, we have focused on examining the dynamics of Islamist terrorist activity from 2000 to 2020, identifying years characterized by particularly high rates of terrorist attacks and/or casualties, and tracking the regions that were more exposed to the threat of Islamist terrorism during the study period.

For this purpose, based on the methodology described above and the information on terrorist incidents contained in the GTD (209,706 incidents since 1970, a total of 3,064 groups; of which 139,872 incidents since 2000, committed by 1,685 groups), the authors compiled a sample of Islamist groups. The sample was based on the groups that

<sup>3</sup> 2023 Global Terrorism Index // Vision of Humanity. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/> (accessed: 04.11.2024).

<sup>4</sup> TerrorismTracker // Dragonfly Intelligence. URL: <https://dragonflyintelligence.com/intelligence/terrorismtracker/> (accessed: 04.11.2024).

J.W. Carson and M. Suppenbach combined into the “global jihadist movement” (Carson & Suppenbach, 2018, pp. 24–26). However, the study by these authors is limited to 2014, so we expanded the sample by groups that committed terrorist attacks in 2015–2020, including Shi’a and Deobandi organizations.

It is important to note that the Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas ) and the Lebanese Hezbollah were excluded from the sample. This is explained by the fact that these structures, first, operate legally on the territory of their states and are therefore not included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation; second, their activities do not pose a threat to Russia. Thus, in “A Document of General Principles and Policies” of Hamas, adopted in 2017, the Islamic Resistance Movement positions itself as a “Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement.”<sup>5</sup> Hamas is an organization fighting for the creation of a Palestinian national state, using not only the concept of ‘jihad’ but also ‘secular’ political tools, such as participation in elections, interaction with trade unions, women’s and student organizations, and the creation of charitable organizations. As the authoritative Russian Orientalist and Arabist G.G. Kosach noted, “The appeal [of Hamas] to religion was justified by the search for a place in the established hierarchy of political structures: it used a niche ignored by its rivals” (Kosach, 2020, p. 82). At the same time, an analysis of the principles of Hamas, set out in the 2017 Document, allows us to assert that Hamas seeks to “acquire a national character” (Kosach, 2020, p. 91), getting rid of the ‘label’ of a radical Islamist group.

In turn, Hezbollah’s activities also do not pose a threat to the Russian Federation. Hezbollah participates in political processes in Lebanon on a legal basis, and actively

implements projects to provide social support to the residents of the most vulnerable (militarily and economically) areas of Lebanon. The legal status of Hezbollah in Lebanon allows us to follow the V.M. Morozov and A.B. Khachirova, to consider the Lebanese party, along with Hamas, as “subjects of regional politics outside the context of terrorism” (Morozov & Khachirova, 2018, p. 107). Groups that committed a single terrorist attack during the period under review were also excluded from the sample to balance the calculations by not considering one-day groups whose activities were not systematic. In addition, we did not consider “umbrella” organizations that unite groups of various persuasions, both Islamist and secular (for example, ethnic “militias” or separatist movements). In particular, the Iraqi organization “Al-Hashd al-Shaabi” (Popular Mobilization Forces), which comprises about 40 groups, mainly (but not only) Shi’a (Chikrizova, 2021, p. 79), was excluded from the sample, since it is impossible to separate terrorist attacks of an “Islamist” orientation committed by these (and similar) organizations from actions that have other, non-religious motives.

Thus, the final sample comprises 155 groups<sup>6</sup> that claimed responsibility for or were accused of organizing more than one terrorist attack during the period under review, as well as five “collective” groups (“Algerian Islamic Extremists,” “Algerian Moslem Fundamentalists,” “Islamist extremists,” “Muslim extremists,” and “Muslim fundamentalists”) that were blamed for terrorist attacks. The inclusion of the latter in the sample is explained by the significant number of terrorist attacks (1244 incidents in total) attributed to these groups, which does not allow us to ignore them in our calculations. Regarding the geography of the regions, we proceeded with the approach adopted

<sup>5</sup> A Document of General Principles and Policies // Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). May 1, 2017. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170510123932/http://hamas.ps/en/post/678/> (accessed: 15.11.2024).

<sup>6</sup> Chikrizova O. S. Islamist Terrorist Activity in 2000–2020: A Scoring Methodology (Raw Data). (In Russian). URL: <https://chikrizovarawdata.tilda.ws/> (accessed: 20.12.2024).

in the GTD. Türkiye and Iran belong to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and South Asia consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The remaining regions correspond to the geographical framework adopted in Russian science and coincide with the geographic scheme of the United Nations.

## Results

First, we analyzed the number of terrorist attacks carried out by Islamist groups from 2000 to 2020 (Table 1) to determine whether the 11 September attacks actually led to an increase in Islamist activity.

*Table 1. Number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamist groups in 2000–2020 and the number of victims of these attacks*

Year	Number of attacks	Number of victims
2000	249	679
2001	172	3,820
2002	202	1269
2003	284	1,158
2004	246	1,945
2005	382	1,936
2006	396	1,246
2007	526	2,875
2008	769	2,638
2009	733	3,336
2010	807	3,132
2011	862	3,396
2012	2,432	8,326
2013	2,538	10,132
2014	4,890	27,547
2015	4,900	26,480
2016	4,645	23,646
2017	4,177	19,459
2018	3,595	15,744
2019	3,192	14,009
2020	3,486	15,003
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,483</b>	<b>187,776</b>

*Source:* Calculated by O.S. Chikrizova on the basis of: Chikrizova O. S. Islamist Terrorist Activity in 2000–2020: A Scoring Methodology (Raw Data). (In Russian). URL: <https://chikrizovarawdata.tilda.ws/> (accessed: 20.12.2024).

From the data presented in Table 1, it becomes obvious that the events of September

11, 2001, did not have a serious impact on the number of terrorist attacks in the following three years. At the same time, 2001, due to the significant number of victims during the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, became a record year for this indicator in the first decade of the 21st century.

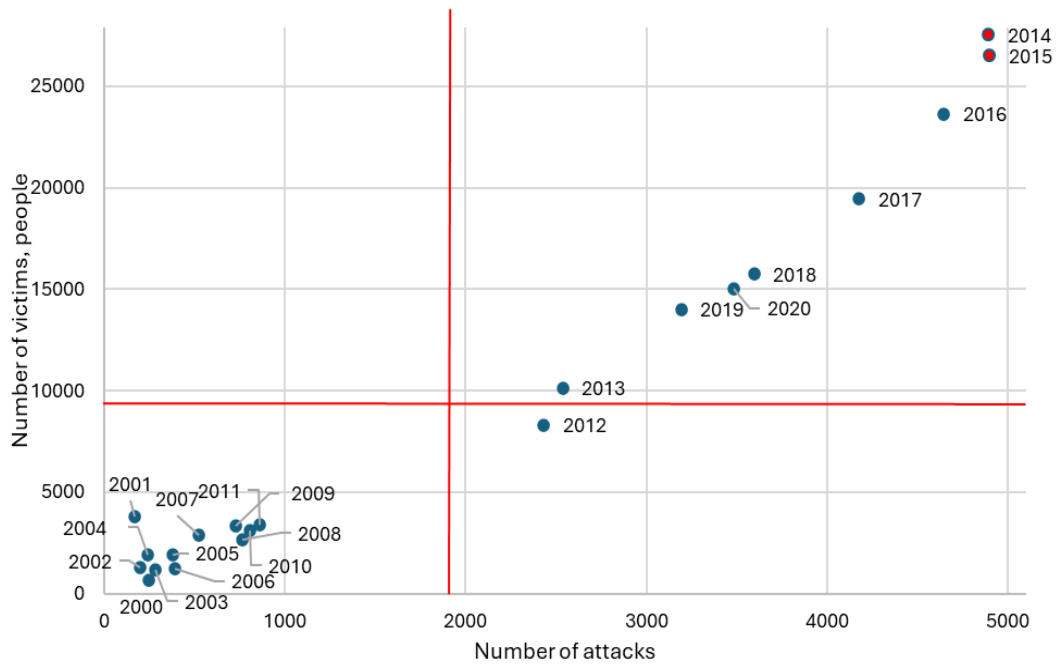
The number of Islamist attacks significantly increased in 2007 apparently linked to events in Iraq. Thus, after Saddam Hussein’s execution on December 30, 2006, the domestic political situation in the country deteriorated due to the resulting power vacuum, accumulated mistrust of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and dissatisfaction with the presence of Americans contingent on Iraqi territory. Against the backdrop of the escalation of the Sunni-Shi’a confrontation within Iraq, there was also an increase in terrorist activity, mainly as a result of the creation in 2006 of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the prototype of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, ISIS, IS)<sup>7</sup> (18 attacks in 2007, 20 in 2008). Also in 2007, such organizations as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb<sup>8</sup> (69 terrorist attacks in 2007, 43 terrorist attacks in 2008) and Al-Shabaab (20 terrorist attacks in 2007, 28 in 2008)<sup>9</sup> were created, but the latter would “heyday” later.

It is important to note that our conclusion on the impact of the Iraq War on the growth of Islamist terrorism confirms the findings of previous studies (Hegghammer, 2006; Harrow, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Hereinafter, an organization included in the Unified Federal List of Organizations, containing foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation is mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> Hereinafter, an organization included in the Unified Federal List of Organizations, containing foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation is mentioned.

<sup>9</sup> Chikrizova O. S. Islamist Terrorist Activity in 2000–2020: A Scoring Methodology (Raw Data). (In Russian). URL: <https://chikrizovarawdata.tilda.ws/> (accessed: 20.12.2024).



**Figure 1. Ratio between the number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamists and the number of victims in them in 2000–2020**

*Source:* compiled by O.S. Chikrizova.

The Arab Spring, or more precisely the civil wars in Syria and Libya that began as a result of these events, had a dramatic impact on the growth of Islamist terrorism, based on the data presented in Table 1. The upheavals caused by the Arab Spring affected the entire region of the Middle East, as well as sub-Saharan Africa. In 2012, the number of Islamist attacks increased by 2.8 times compared to that in 2011, and the number of victims increased by almost 2.5 times.

The next milestone was 2014, marked by the activities of the deadly ISIL group (banned in Russia). Thus, if in 2013, ISIL (banned in Russia) was held responsible for 377 attacks, then in 2014, it was already responsible for 1,250 terrorist attacks. Subsequently, when Islamist groups in a number of regions “pledged allegiance” to ISIL (banned in Russia), the total number of terrorist attacks committed under the flag of this organization amounted to 1,770 in 2015 and 2,045 in 2016.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Chikrizova O. S. *Islamist Terrorist Activity in 2000–2020: A Scoring Methodology (Raw Data)*. (In Russian). URL: <https://chikrizovarawdata.tilda.ws/> (accessed: 20.12.2024).

It is important to note that the slight decrease in the number of attacks observed in 2018 and 2019 occurred against the backdrop of the defeat of ISIL (banned in Russia) in Syria with the broad participation of the Russian Aerospace Forces. The COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to the expected decline in the activity of Islamist groups.

To conduct a score assessment of the terrorist activity of Islamists in each individual year, we use the positioning method, which allows us to simultaneously consider two variables: the number of terrorist attacks committed and the number of victims in them. In the first stage, we identify the “anomalous” years in which the maximum values of both variables were observed compared to the average value (the average of 1880 terrorist attacks, 8942 victims, are indicated by lines of a contrasting color) (Figure 1). In the future, we will call such years “outliers” (by analogy with statistical outliers), and as a result, the identified years will receive the maximum score for Islamist activities.



The diagram shows that 2014 and 2015 “stand out” from the overall picture with abnormally high values for both variables. In order to prevent these anomalies from influencing the assessment of Islamist activity in other years, we will construct a diagram without taking into account the “outliers” (Figure 2).

The contrasting colored lines represent the average values (1,563 terrorist attacks and 7,039 victims) and allow us to group all the years under study into four categories, or quadrants, based on the following logic:

— Quadrant 1 — the minimum observed values of both variables allow us to estimate Islamist terrorist activity at 1 point;

— Quadrants 2 and 3 — the maximum observed values for one of the variables—provide a basis to avoid the moral dilemma in which the researcher would have to attach greater importance to either the number of victims or the number of terrorist attacks, to estimate Islamist activity at two points.

— Quadrant 4, the minimum observed values of both variables, allows us to estimate

Islamist terrorist activity at three points. Years with abnormal values for both variables (“outliers”) will receive four points for Islamist terrorism.

Therefore, Figure 2 clearly shows that during the study period, there was no gradual transition from low to high levels of Islamist terrorist activity. In addition, it can be concluded that the number of victims of terrorist attacks increases proportionally with the number of attacks.

As a penultimate step, let us take a closer look at the Quadrant 1, which includes the years with the lowest observed values for both variables (Figure 3). As we can see, in the first quadrant, the year 2001 stands out, which, as noted earlier, was abnormal in the number of victims of Islamist attacks. In addition, confirming the previous conclusions, the diagram allows us to see that in 2007, there was a turning point, after which there was an increase in both the number of attacks and the number of human victims.

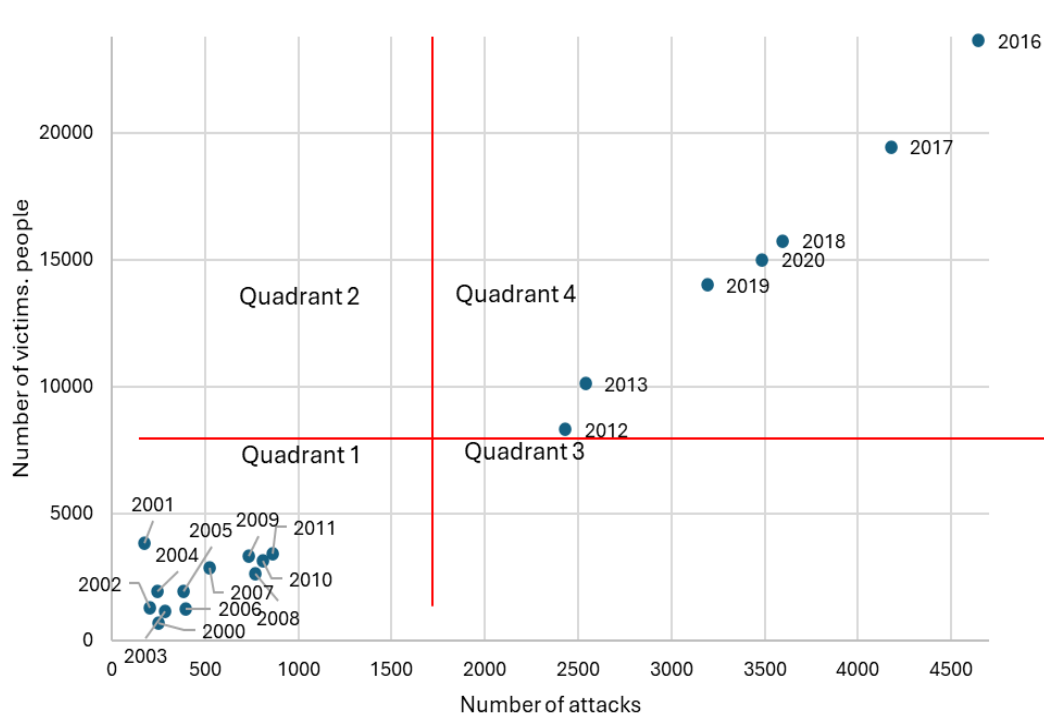
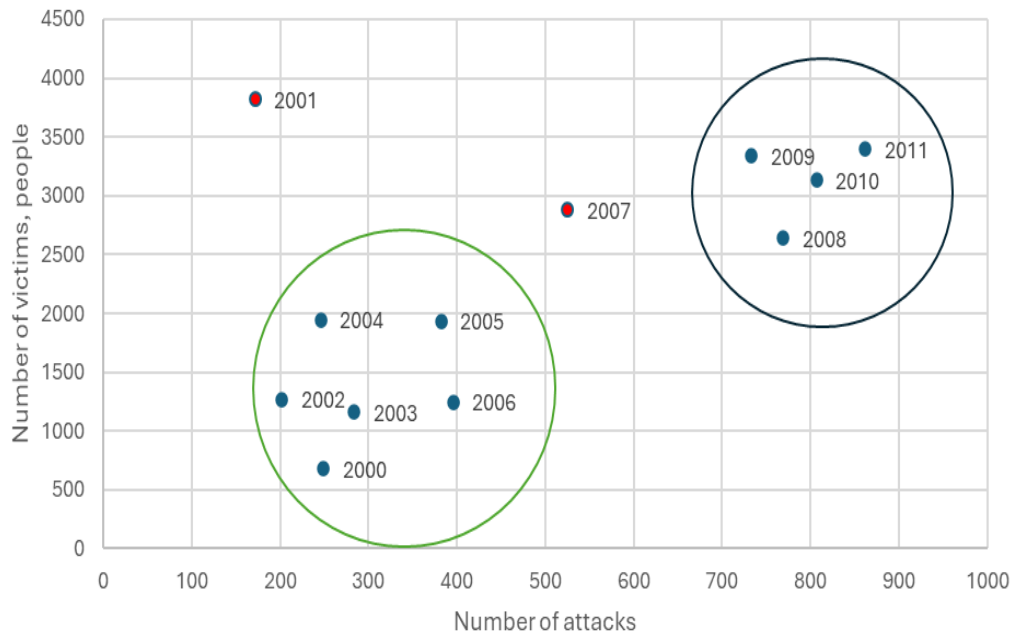


Figure 2. Ratio of the number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamists to the number of victims in them in 2000–2020, excluding “outliers”

Source: compiled by O.S. Chikrizova.



**Figure 3. Ratio of the number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamists and the number of victims in them in 2000–2020, Quadrant 1**

Source: compiled by O.S. Chikrizova.

Let us summarize the scoring of Islamist terrorist activities in each year (Table 2).

*Table 2. Score assessment of terrorist activity of Islamists, 2000–2020*

Year	Score	Year	Score
2000	1	2011	1
2001	1	2012	3
2002	1	2013	3
2003	1	2014	4
2004	1	2015	4
2005	1	2016	3
2006	1	2017	3
2007	1	2018	3
2008	1	2019	3
2009	1	2020	3
2010	1		

Source: compiled by O.S. Chikrizova.

Thus, based on the analysis conducted, three distinct stages in the development of Islamist terrorism can be identified:

1) 2000–2006, in which 2001 stood out as expected.

2) 2007–2011, where among the factors that determined the growth of Islamist activity, one can note the events in Iraq, as well as the

“Al-Qaeda<sup>11</sup> effect” associated with the “spread” of cells of this network terrorist structure across various regions of the world, including South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

3) 2012–2020: An unprecedented increase in Islamist terrorist activity caused by the growing number of “hot spots,” especially in the core of the “Islamic world” — the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as — again against the backdrop of the armed conflict in Syria — the creation of ISIS (banned in the Russian Federation), which in just two years will “grow” with numerous ‘vilayets,’ that is, affiliated organizations practically all over the world.

Next, it is advisable to identify the regions that suffered the most from Islamist terrorist attacks. To do this, we calculated the total number of terrorist attacks committed by the groups in the author’s sample for the years under study. Table 3 presents the results.

<sup>11</sup> Hereinafter, an organization included in the Unified Federal List of Organizations, containing foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation is mentioned.

Table 3. Geography of Islamist terrorist activity in 2000–2020

Year / Region	Number of attacks										Total number of attacks
	MENA	SA	SEA	SSA	WE	NAm	EE	CA	A&O	EA	
2000	80	27	140	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	249
2001	74	57	35	0	1	4	1	0	0	0	172
2002	109	56	33	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	202
2003	98	110	75	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	284
2004	134	88	10	1	6	0	4	3	0	0	246
2005	188	167	13	3	8	0	2	1	0	0	382
2006	173	208	11	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	396
2007	217	270	15	22	2	0	0	0	0	0	526
2008	192	436	89	36	0	0	14	0	0	2	769
2009	122	453	63	85	0	1	7	2	0	0	733
2010	151	512	23	111	1	1	7	1	0	0	807
2011	138	382	33	300	0	0	8	1	0	0	862
2012	575	1,105	67	671	6	1	7	0	0	0	2,432
2013	768	1,039	112	602	2	4	10	0	0	1	2,538
2014	1,965	1,350	158	1,402	1	0	10	1	0	3	4,890
2015	2,112	1,569	201	995	13	3	6	1	0	0	4,900
2016	2,214	1,368	146	893	8	1	13	2	0	0	4,645
2017	1,650	1,302	165	1,032	11	0	14	1	2	0	4,177
2018	876	1,641	134	927	5	0	8	4	0	0	3,595
2019	656	1,588	69	872	2	1	2	2	0	0	3,192
2020	549	2,019	51	857	6	0	3	1	0	0	3,486
<b>Total:</b>	<b>13,041</b>	<b>15,747</b>	<b>1,643</b>	<b>8,812</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>39,483</b>

Note. Abbreviations: MENA — Middle East and North Africa, SA — South Asia, SEA — Southeast Asia, SSA — Sub-Saharan Africa, WE — Western Europe, NAm — North America, EE — Eastern Europe, CA — Central Asia, A&O — Australia and Oceania, EA — East Asia.

Source: calculated by O.S. Chikrizova on the data of: START (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism). (2022). Global Terrorism Database 1970–2020 [data file]. URL: <https://www.start.umd.edu/data-tools/GTD> (accessed: 22.09.2024).

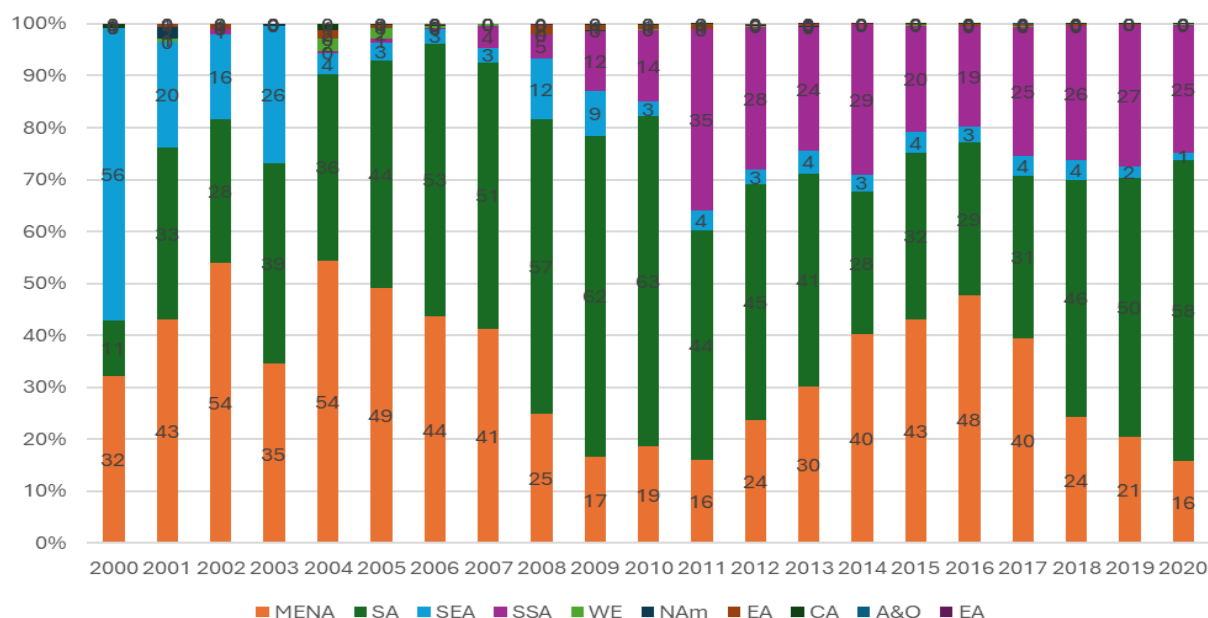


Figure 4. Geography of terrorist activity of Islamists in 2000–2020, %:

MENA — Middle East and North Africa, SA — South Asia, SEA — Southeast Asia, SSA — Sub-Saharan Africa, WE — Western Europe, NAm — North America, EE — Eastern Europe, CA — Central Asia, A&O — Australia and Oceania, EA — East Asia

Source: calculated by O.S. Chikrizova.

To identify trends in the changing geography of Islamist terrorism, we will construct a histogram that demonstrates the shares of individual regions in the terrorist activity of Islamists in the study years (Figure 4).

Based on calculations of the share of each region in the geography of Islamist terrorism, the following conclusions can be drawn.

First, before the events of September 11, 2001, the “leader” in the number of Islamist attacks was Southeast Asia, but this conclusion needs to be confirmed, which can be achieved by extending the geographical scope of the study with data up to 2000. In 2001–2002 and 2004, the “anti-rating” was headed by the MENA region, which was the main arena for Al-Qaeda (banned in Russia) and its affiliated groups. However, in 2003, and then from 2005 to 2013, the leader of the “anti-rating” was South Asia, which can be explained, based on the analysis of our sample, by the fact that during this period a significant number of terrorist attacks were committed both by the Taliban movement<sup>12</sup> (from 50 attacks in 2003 to 800 terrorist attacks in 2012) and by its affiliated groups in Pakistan (in particular, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, which began its activities in 2007 with two attacks, and in 2008 carried out 112 terrorist attacks, in 2009 — 156, in 2010 — 161, etc.). From 2014 to 2017, the MENA region regained its leading position in the number of Islamist terrorist attacks, which is explained by the activities of the ISIL (banned in Russia). In 2018–2020, after the defeat of this group in Syria and Iraq, South Asia again became the epicenter of Islamist terrorism, and sub-Saharan Africa firmly established itself in the second place. This is explained by the fact that several groups from South and Southeast Asian countries were active in the ranks of ISIL

(banned in Russia) from the very beginning (Bakhshi & Rousselle, 2024), and in sub-Saharan Africa, the ISIL (banned in Russia) “vilayets” were not only not destroyed, but also took root on the basis of numerous local and regional conflicts (Yashlavskii, 2024, p. 69).

Second, in terms of the number of Islamist terrorist attacks throughout the study period, regions such as MENA, South and Southeast Asia, which are part of the “world of Islam” and are also characterized by a high level of conflict on religious grounds (between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, between Hindus and Muslims (Choukhar, 2024), between Muslims and Christians), consistently stood out. It is important to note that in these regions, terrorist attacks are carried out mainly by “domestic” groups whose activities are limited to one country and sometimes even one province (for example, Jammu and Kashmir, a territory disputed by Pakistan from India, or Mindanao and Sulu, territories of the Philippines populated by the Moro people, who profess Islam, but later actively settled by Catholic Filipinos and Chinese). Thus, we can classify such groups as Islamists and separatists, but we do not consider them to be part of international terrorism.

Third, the analysis shows that, during the study period, regions such as Western Europe (73 attacks in 2000–2020) and North America (18 terrorist attacks) were affected by Islamist terrorism to a lesser extent, especially before 2015 (except for 2004 and 2005 for Western Europe). However, since 2015, when Western Europe experienced a crisis caused by the influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, there has been an increase in the number of Islamist attacks, especially in 2015 and 2017, which became record-breaking for Western Europe. It is also important to note that Islamist activity was higher in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe during 2008–2014 and 2016–2018. The vast majority of attacks were carried out in the territory of the Russian Federation (112 of 119). Identifying the reasons

<sup>12</sup> Hereinafter, an organization included in the Unified Federal List of Organizations, containing foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation is mentioned.

for the surge in the number of terrorist attacks in Eastern Europe in these years requires additional research in a separate study.

Finally, the safest regions in terms of the threat of Islamist attacks are Australia, Oceania, and East Asia. If, in the first case, everything is explained by geographical remoteness and, to some extent, the isolation of the region from the epicenters of Islamist terrorism, then in the case of East Asia, a separate study is required that would allow an assessment of the level of Islamist threat to China, as well as identifying the relationship between Islamism and separatism in the ideology of radical groups from among Uyghur Muslims.

### Discussion

The author's methodology for scoring the terrorist activity of Islamists proposed in this article, as well as the author's sample of the studied groups, in our opinion, allows us to bring the scientific understanding of the phenomenon of Islamist terrorism to a higher level. This is achieved by relying on empirical data and a fairly extensive chronological framework, which can be significantly expanded using the capabilities of the Global Terrorism Database, which has provided information on terrorist attacks since 1970. This determines not only the scientific but also the practical significance of this methodology, which can be used to study the manifestations of Islamist terrorism in individual countries or at the regional or global levels, serving as an accessible tool for confirming the hypotheses put forward about the development of Islamist terrorism.

As with any quantitative method used in the social sciences and humanities, our approach also has its limitations. This is mainly due to the fact because the GTD does not contain complete data for 2021–2024. This does not allow us to make empirically substantiated conclusions on current trends in Islamist terrorism. However, as the University of

Maryland, which is developing the GTD, is continuing this project, this restriction may be lifted in the future. It is also possible to turn to other databases that update information more quickly than the GTD. In addition, it seems promising to create and develop Russia's own databases of terrorism, which would more clearly reflect the Russian approach to understanding this phenomenon.

It is also noteworthy that in the course of the applied analysis, it turned out to be very difficult to take into account the activity of "umbrella" groups, which unite small groups with different agendas (including both secular — for example, separatism or opposition to the ruling regime, and Islamist). At the same time, the situation is aggravated by the fact that such "umbrella" structures are most often found in states engulfed in armed conflicts (Iraq, Syria, Libya). In this regard, it becomes almost impossible to separate Islamists' participation in the struggle for power in the context of civil wars of a hybrid nature (Pochta, 2021) from the terrorist activity itself, which is aimed at intimidating *society* through the systematic use of violence. It seems that the latter aspect acts as a limitation for terrorism research in general, but it is most evident in quantitative methods.

### Conclusion

To summarize the above, we presented the main findings of this study.

The presented methodology makes it possible to identify three distinct stages in the activities of Islamist terrorist groups. The first (2000–2006) and second (2007–2011) stages are associated with the activities of Al-Qaeda (banned in Russia) and affiliated groups, as well as the terrorist activity of the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) and the mujahideen organizations in Pakistan and India, neighboring Afghanistan. The conflict in Iraq, which destabilized the country and turned it into another "testing ground" for terrorists along

with Afghanistan, had a serious impact on the growth of Islamist activity at these stages. The third stage (2012–2020) is associated with the terrorist activity of ISIL (banned in Russia) and the numerous groups in Asia and Africa that have sworn allegiance to it.

Empirical analysis has helped to confirm the presence of a direct proportional relationship between the increase in the number of terrorist attacks committed by Islamists and the number of victims. A similar conclusion was drawn in previous studies on the relationship between the structure and goals of groups and the mortality from terrorist attacks. However, additional research is needed to identify these relationships in individual regions.

As a scientific novelty of the study, obtained by applying the presented methodology, it is possible to highlight the

refutation of a widespread point of view associated with the perception of the MENA region as the epicenter of Islamist terrorism. The quantitative analysis revealed that MENA's primacy was periodically challenged by South Asia, and that in 2011–2012 and 2019–2020, Sub-Saharan Africa “overtook” MENA in the number of terrorist attacks by Islamist groups, taking second place among all regions of the world.

It is posited that the proposed methodology can form the basis for future studies aimed at identifying the regional specifics of Islamist terrorism, network analysis of affiliated groups, as well as clarifying the criteria for identifying organizations related to Islamist ones, which, as a result, can contribute to the development of clearer definitions of concepts such as ‘Islamist terrorism’ and ‘jihadism.’

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