Terrorism Risk in Southeast / South Asia

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INSURANCE GROUP

In the ongoing conflict that commenced in October 2023 with a substantial attack on Israel by Hamas, the Islamic extremist group that effectively governs the Gaza Strip in the Palestinian Authority, the number of civilian casualties has been on the rise due to the Israeli invasion. Amidst the chaotic situation in Gaza, two major international terrorist organizations, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)* and al-Qaeda, have been calling on their affiliates and lone offenders around the world who sympathize with their ideologies to carry out attacks. The global risk of terrorism centered on Islamic extremists is escalating. This article presents an overview of terrorism risks in Southeast Asia (SEA) and South Asia (SA) and outline the measures that companies and employees should adopt.
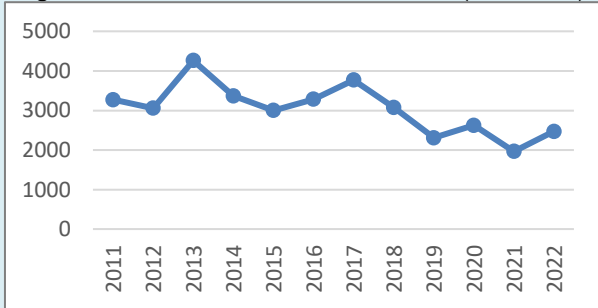
* ISIL is sometimes referred to the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) or "Daesh"

1. Global Terrorism Trends

Looking at the number of terror attacks worldwide since 2011, a marked decline was observed in 2019, attributable to clearance operations spearheaded by the US and advancements in counter-terrorism efforts, including widespread arrests across various nations. . Nevertheless, the figures have largely plateaued since 2019. The Global Terrorism Index 2022 (GTI), a research report, points out that the possibility of an increase in the number of attacks as the movement of people resumes and the impact of Covid-19 subsides.

*Cyberattacks are not included in "terror attack".

Figure: Number of terror attacks worldwide (2011-2022)

(Source: Created based on 2023 Terrorism database of Tokio Marine dR(TdR))

2. Agitation by ISIL and Al-Qaeda

Although the current main fields where terrorism is prevalent are South Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, the continuous precaution about the 2 major organizations is still needed because it is affecting the rest of the world. In response to the conflict between Israel and Hamas, ISIL and Al-Qaeda have respectively called for attacks on these targets listed below.

ISIL	❏ Israel-related Interests & Embassies ❏ Embassies of "Crusader" countries (Western countries) ❏ Religious facilities ❏ Nightclub ❏ Military and Government of Arab countries ❏ U.S. military bases in the Gulf states, etc.
Al-Qaeda	❏ U.S. bases, airports, embassies, and others that support Israel and provide weapons

The "Western countries" are seemed to include the US,

UK, France, Germany, Italy and Canada, all of which support Israel. The "Arab countries" are seemed as UAE and other countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel.

ISIL and Al-Qaeda are mainly active in Afghanistan where the Taliban is in control, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Africa. However, after the agitations above-mentioned, incidents indicative of hatred spreading from the Israel-Hamas conflict have been observed in other regions or have been identified in the planning stages.
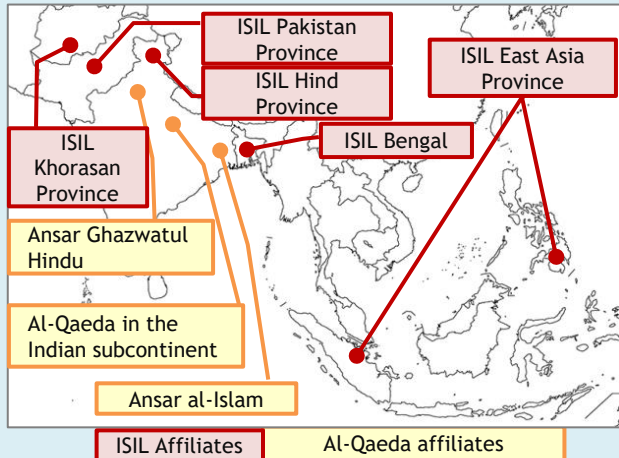
The following are excerpts from those cases.

- 13 Oct : An embassy employee was attacked and injured by a foreigner in front of the Israeli embassy in Beijing, China.
- 16 Oct: 2 people are killed in a random shooting targeting Swedes at a football stadium in Brussels, Belgium.
- 13 Oct: A school in Ars, France, was attacked by a man with a knife, killing a teacher and injuring 2 teaching staffs.
- 2 Dec: Tourists were attacked near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France by a man pledging allegiance to ISIL, killing 1 and injuring 2 others.
- 4 Dec: A boy who supports ISIL is arrested in Las Vegas, USA, for planning a bomb attack.

In response to the agitations, on 19th Oct 2023, the US issued a travel advisory to its citizens, advising them to remain exercise caution due to heightened risks of attacks targeting US citizens worldwide. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and other agencies have also pointed out that the threat of attacks targeting churches, synagogues, and Jewish communities by international terrorist organizations and offenders influenced by them will increase over this holiday season in US.

Although the majority of the above-mentioned incidents have occurred in the West, it is important to note that there are organizations in Southeast Asia and South Asia that are influenced by ISIL and Al-Qaeda as well. The next page shows the distribution of affiliates with close ties to ISIL and Al-Qaeda. ISIL's "Provinces" are the regions in which terrorist organizations allied with ISIL call themselves ISIL's "territories", and the current most active province, Khorasan, is responsible for many terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In SEA, there are no affiliated organizations except in the Philippines and Indonesia, but in other countries, many lone offenders unaffiliated to any organization but influenced by extremist ideology propagated through the Internet have been identified. ISIL has set up a "PR Bureau" within itself and make clever use of social media, posting brutal videos and texts in multiple languages appealing to extremist ideology.

Figure: ISIL and Al-Qaeda Affiliates

(Source: based on the International Terrorism Handbook 2023)

In addition, although they are not directly related to the 2 major organizations, terrorist organizations exist in various regions, including armed groups in Thailand that advocate for the secession of the Muslim-majority deep south and the Arakan Rohingya Coalition, which advocates for the relief of Bengali Muslims known as "Rohingya" in Myanmar. There are also concerns about the infiltration of ISIL and Al-Qaeda into local armed groups and other organizations.

Under these circumstances, it is undeniable that terrorism may occur in SEA and SA in response to the agitations from international terrorist organizations.

3. Situation in Major Southeast Asia (SEA) Countries

This chapter summarizes terror trends in major SEA and SA countries, based on the "International Terrorism Handbook 2023" (Japan's Public Security Intelligence Agency) and the terrorism DB of TdR.

Philippines

In Philippines, ISIL East Asia Province, a coalition of organizations supporting and collaborating with ISIL, is active in the southern Sulu Islands and western Mindanao. Most of the attacks mainly target security authorities, Christians and indigenous peoples, etc., and most of them occur in western Mindanao, but there have also been cases in the Manila metropolitan area, where activities such as recruitment, training, and fundraising of members are secretly conducted. Hence, there are concerns that the group will become more active in the future. ISIL has also been involved in bombing of a university in the Philippines in December 2023. In addition, the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has repeatedly attacked security forces.

Major Terrorism in Philippines	❑ Dec 2023: Explosion during a Christian mass at a university in Mindanao, 4 killed, ISIL Declared the crime. ❑ Jan 2022: Attack on construction site in Mindanao

Indonesia

In Indonesia, the East Indonesian Mujahideen (MIT) and Jamaah Ansharut Dawla (JAD), organizations that pledge allegiance to ISIL, are also operating under the name "ISIL East Asian Province", but as a result of a sweep operation by the authorities, the destruction of MIT was declared in December 2022.

Meanwhile, the terrorist organization's activities continue with 40 members of JAD and 19 members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) were arrested in October 2023, on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack to disrupt the presidential election in February of the following year. In addition, terrorism by the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), which advocates the secession of the Papuan ethnic group, has been rampant, resulting in a series of civilian casualties.

Major Terrorism in Indonesia	❑ Feb 2023: TPNPB hijacked a commercial airline and took the captain hostage. ❑ July 2022: TPNPB and others fired on trucks, 10 civilians killed, 2 injured. ❑ Mar 2021: 2 JAD members carried out a suicide bombing, more than 20 worshippers and other injured.

Myanmar

Since the coup in 2021, clashes between the military regime and democratic armed forces have continued, resulting in the worst death toll in the past 20 years in 2022, and the frontline is expanding in 2023 as well. The actual situation is considered even worse, although the use of force by the national army is not counted as terrorism. 70% of all other terror attacks occur in Yangon, and the risk in Yangon remains high.

Thailand

In Thailand, many terror attacks have been committed by separatist Islamic armed groups in the deep south, such as the Pattani Malay National Revolutionary Front (BRN), and the action by the new government took office in 2023 has caught the attention of the public. In recent years, it has been confirmed that group possibly associated with ISIL has been promoting attacks in Thailand on social media, raising concerns about ISIL's penetration on Thailand's armed forces. In addition, there have been a number of incidents in Bangkok, including indiscriminate shootings at commercial facilities in 2023 and a series of bombings in conjunction with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2019, and the risk of terrorism in the capital remains high.

Major Terrorism in Thailand	❑ Aug 2019: 9 bombs exploded across Bangkok during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. ❑ Aug 2016: 4 killed and 35 injured in a series of bombings in the resorts Hua Hin and Phuket. ❑ Aug 2015: Explosion near Erawan shrine in central Bangkok, 20 killed, 125 injured.

Malaysia

Although there have not been many physical terror attacks in Malaysia, there were crimes related to the "Abu Sayyaf Group Sulu" (ASG Sulu), which joined the ISIL East Asia Province in 2019-2020, as well as videos have been posted by "ISIL Malaysia", and it is believed that Islamic extremists have been involved in recruitment, fundraising, and propaganda.

Major Terrorism in Malaysia	❑ May 2023: A bomb planted in a store in Kuala Lumpur exploded. ❑ Jun 2016: 8 people injured when a grenade was thrown into a restaurant in Selangor province, perpetrated by ISIL members and others.

Singapore

Although there have been no terror attacks in Singapore for the last 4 years, 3 attacks (warning of attack) have been reported in succession between August and October 2023, and we need to pay close attention to future trends. In relation to international terrorist organizations, people claiming to be a Singaporean member appeared in ISIL videos, and there have been cases in the past where foreigners in arrested after radicalization and suggesting violence or planning to join ISIL.

Vietnam

Although terrorism had not been reported in Vietnam for a long time, in June 2023, a police station in the central Dak Lak province was attacked by an armed group of about 30 people, killing 8 police officers and others. There was no specific information on any links to international terrorist organizations.

Cambodia

There were no significant signs of terrorism in Cambodia in recent years.

4. Situation in Major South Asia (SA) Countries

This chapter summarizes terror trends in major SA countries, based on the "International Terrorism Handbook 2023" (Japan's Public Security Intelligence Agency) and the terrorism DB of TdR.

India

In India, 254 terror attacks were reported in 2022, making it the 3rd highest terror-prone country in the world after Nigeria and Syria. The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-M), which is active in the eastern region, is the largest terrorist organization, but while the CPI-M has been weakened by the authorities' anti-terrorism operations, terrorism by Islamic extremists such as Ansar Ghazwatul Hindu (AGH), Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist group and ISIL "Hind Province" occurs frequently. Both Al-Qaeda and ISIL have positioned India as a country where Muslims are oppressed and deprived of their rights, and religious conflicts have also occurred including attacks on a Sikh temple by "ISIL Khorasan province", in response to statements made by Indian ruling party politicians about Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, etc.

Major Terrorism in India	❑ Jul 2022: Attack on security authorities in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, 4 killed and injured; ISIL Hind province declared the crime. ❑ Jun 2022: ISIL Khorasan province attacked a Sikh temple in retaliation for blasphemous comments, many people killed and injured. ❑ Oct 2020: AGH members and others who planned the attack were arrested.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the number of terrorism incidents has worsened for the third consecutive year, with 195 terrorist attacks by in October 2023, far exceeding the 174 incidents in 2022, ranking 4th in the world. In particular, terrorism occurs frequently near the Afghan border, and ISIL "Khorasan Province" which are located in Afghanistan where the Taliban holds effective control and "Pakistan Province" have carried out many suicide bombings in Pakistan.

In addition, in Pakistan, the Baluch Raj Ajoy Sanghal (BRAS), which advocates for the secession of the Baluch people, and the Sindh Revolutionary Army (SRA), which advocates for the secession of Sindh, have joined together to criticize China's Belt and Road Initiative and carry out terrorism targeting Chinese interests.

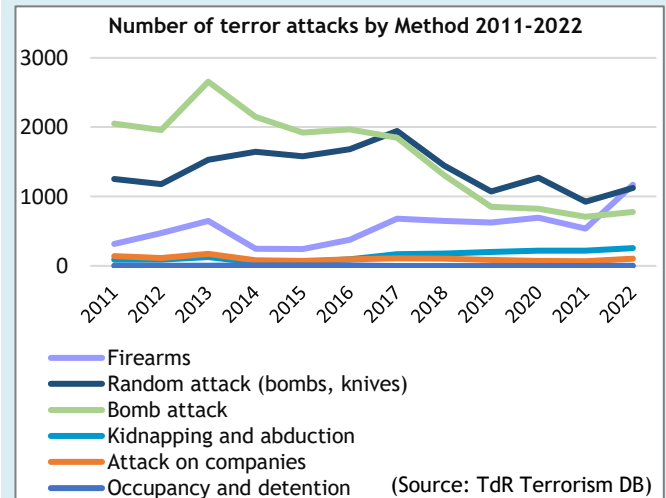| Major Terrorism in Pakistan	❑ Sep 2023: Suicide bombing during a religious procession, 52 killed and 50 injured. ❑ Jul 2023: Suicide bombing at a political party rally, 54 killed, including the party's local leader, and 200 injured, ISIL declared the crime. ❑ Apr 2022: BRAS affiliate carried out a suicide bombing near the Confucius Institute in Karachi.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, ISIL Bengal and Ansar al-Islam (AAI), an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, has carried out terror attacks targeting security authorities, politicians, foreigners, bloggers, etc. ISIL has not been active in Bangladesh since 2021, but AAI has been active, issuing a series of statement on social media.

Major Terrorism in Bangladesh	❑ Jul 2016: Carried out an attack on a restaurant in Dhaka, 20 people including 7 Japanese killed. ❑ May 2021: AAI members attempted to attack the parliament in Dhaka, and there were incidents in which people inspired by AAI ideology threw petrol bombs.

5. Changes in Terrorism Methods

Looking at TdR Terrorism DB for the proportion of global terrorism by method, "bombings" has been on a downward trend since 2018, while "firearms" has significantly increased in 2022, doubling from the previous year.

Number of terror attacks by Method 2011-2022

- Firearms
- Random attack (bombs, knives)
- Bomb attack
- Kidnapping and abduction
- Attack on companies
- Occupancy and detention

(Source: TdR Terrorism DB)

The number of "kidnappings and abductions" which occurring in India, the Philippines, Malaysia, etc. has been steadily increasing, albeit at a low level. In 2019, a British businessman and his wife were kidnapped for ransom by Islamic extremists in the Zamboanga del Sur province, in the Philippines.

In addition to changes in the proportion of traditional terrorist methods, terrorist organizations are increasing the efficiency of their attacks by utilizing drones, civilian vehicles, and other means.

1) Drone Attacks

Terrorist organizations such as Hamas and ISIL, etc. actually carry out small bombs and firearms using Quadcopter and fixed-wing drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) with high agility to attack and assassinate specific targets in terrorism in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In addition to being able to fly a large number of formation drones, it is also possible to carry harmful CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) threats, making it difficult to prevent attacks. In Asia, there was an incident in which a drone carrying radioactive material flew into the Japanese Prime Minister's residence, and there have been reports of bomb attacks using drones by armed groups in Myanmar, killing 6 people. It is thought that drone attacks can be easily implemented in Asian countries as well.

2) Vehicle Attacks

In countries or regions where explosives or firearms are difficult to obtain, terrorism using large vehicles may be chosen. Typical examples are the terror attacks that occurred at a fireworks festival in Nice, France in July 2016, and at the Christmas market in Berlin, Germany in December 2016, when a truck struck crowds of visitors and shoppers at high speed, killing 86 and 12 people. In both cases, ISIL admitted the crimes, and ISIL recommended the use of vehicles in its journal "Rumiyah". It should be noted that vehicular attacks have not been common in Asia with the only terrorist incident occurring in Indonesia in May 2018 in which a JAD sympathetic to ISIL attacked a police headquarters, but there is no guarantee that such attacks will not occur in the future.

6. Measures to be taken by Company

Based on the above situation, it is believed that there is a certain degree of risk that company's employees and their family members may also be involved in terror attacks in SEA and SA. In this chapter, we will explain the measures that should be taken to avoid terror attacks, especially considering the increasing number of terror methods in recent years.

Common Terrorism

First, it is important to understand the locations that are likely to be targeted by terrorism. Attacks can be roughly divided into attacks that target specific interests and random attacks.

Targeted attacks often focus on the government, military, police, schools, critical infrastructure, and sites and people associated with a specific religion, as being called by ISIL and Al-Qaeda. In addition, stores and offices of global brands representing each countries, such as McDonald's and Starbucks, are targeted, or in the case of terrorist organizations that attack Western interests, Western hotels are targeted.

The main purpose of random attacks is to cause shock and fear in society by causing a lot of damage or symbolic damage, so soft targets (such as shopping malls, events, stadiums, theatres, sightseeing spot and public transportation where unspecified large number of people gather and security is weak) are the main target of random attacks.

It is important to analyze what kind of terrorist organizations are active in your business area, identify locations with a high risk of being targeted, and keep your employees and their families away from them as much as possible. However, when visiting shopping mall, public transportation, and other places that you have no choice but to use for business or daily life, be vigilant and be aware of evacuation routes and exits. When using sites where there are few security guards or lack of inspection, it is necessary to be more cautious and stay away from suspicious persons or objects.

Drone Attacks

Drones are often used to attack specific targets due to their agility. For individual, it is important to move away from the drones immediately if hearing the sound of flying. In case of company that handles important infrastructure such as energy sector, etc., consider deploying countermeasure equipment at your base, such as drone radio detecting and jamming devices or net launchers to capture drones, depending on the risk.

Photo: Drone Catcher

(Source: Delft Dynamics B.V. https://dronecatcher.nl/)

Vehicle Attacks

Most vehicular attacks are carried out on crowds. It is important to avoid crowds as much as possible on a daily life, as crowds tend to be target for other terrorist attacks. If you are attacked by a vehicle, take the following actions: run behind a bollard that prevents vehicles from entering the area, hide behind something so that the attacker cannot see you, and if you fall, curl up in a defensive posture and get up as quickly as possible to avoid being run over by a vehicle. Be aware of your surroundings and only help others when it is safe to do so.

Firearms Use

In case of a shooting, you have to take action to protect your own life. During the random shooting at the shopping mall in Bangkok in October 2023, staffs guided visitors to evacuate, but it is thought that the level of response may vary depending on the mall, and staff members also have a policy of prioritizing their own safety.

The City of Houston, US, has released a video called "RUN. HIDE. FIGHT." that summarizes the principles of action for ordinary people to protect their lives if they encounter random gunfire. For your reference, we have summarized the main points on the right table. Even when the police arrive, you must understand that their first mission is not to rescue but to seize the criminal. Do not do anything that could cause you to be mistaken for the criminal (jumping out, screaming, hiding your hands, pointing).

RUN	☐ Make escape as a top priority. ☐ Look for the evacuation exits wherever you go. ☐ If there is an escape route, evacuate in the direction away from the perpetrator. ☐ Run away even if others disagree. ☐ Leave the belongings behind and run away. ☐ If possible, help others evacuate. ☐ Once you reach a safe place, keep others away from danger. ☐ Once safety is confirmed, report the incident to the police, etc.
HIDE	☐ If evacuation is not possible, move quickly and quietly to find a place to hide. ☐ Choose a place to hide that it cannot be seen by the criminal, shielding from gunfire, and easy to take the next action. ☐ Barricade the door to prevent the criminals from entering. ☐ Turn off lights and lock doors if possible. ☐ Put your cell phone on silent mode. ☐ If no safe place or closet, hide behind a large object. ☐ Be quiet and don't make any noise.
FIGHT	☐ Fight as a last effort when there is no other way. ☐ Use whatever you can as an improvised weapon. ☐ Take away the criminal's weapon. ☐ Collaborate with others to attack by surprise. ☐ Fight for your life, do your best to disempower the criminal.

(Source: YouTube - Ready Houston. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0)

Kidnapping and Abduction

Kidnapping and abduction for ransom often target individuals or organizations perceived to have significant financial resources, including foreigners, foreign VIPs, and affluent individuals. It is generally recommended not to disclose unnecessary information about one's financial status.

Kidnappings tend to occur in locations with lapses in security, particularly during vulnerable moments such as leaving a residence and transitioning to a vehicle, alighting from car in parking lot and entering company, or while waiting at traffic lights in a vehicle. To minimize the risk of kidnapping, executives should vary their commuting routes and schedules irregularly, avoiding the sharing of this information among drivers. Additionally, it is essential to remain vigilant for suspicious individuals or vehicles in the vicinity, conduct periodic checks for GPS or wiretapping devices in vehicles, and perform background checks on hired drivers to ensure they are not potential accomplices to terrorists.

In the worse case that you encounter a kidnapping or abduction, it is advisable to respond by shouting for help or attempting to escape. At the initial stage, the intent is not to kill, so there is no direct danger to life. However, once you are kidnapped and recognized the terrorist's appearance, vehicle, incubation site, etc., your resistance increases risk of being killed.

Response by company

Finally, your company has to respond to terror attacks by ensuring the safety of employees, safety confirmation, and caring damages to employees or properties. To respond quickly and steadily, it is a good idea to prepare a crisis response manual containing policies and procedures and to conduct training.

Among the response, we focus on communications, as crisis response is more likely to fail if the actions are delayed.

Firstly, please make sure your system is ready to quickly take a first report. It is important to make an emergency contact known within the company that can be communicated to crisis management responsible (such as CRO) at any time, as well as a criteria for request a report.

After receiving reports, instruct employees to leave the danger zone immediately, conduct safety confirmation, and consult with relevant personnel (authorities, embassies, global headquarters, employees' families, etc.) as necessary. It is desirable to have a simultaneous communication methods and a contact list.

Finally, there are many cases where these information sharing cannot be used due to lack of understanding or outdated contact information unless regular communication training is conducted.

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