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# IHS Jane's Terrorism Special Report

Islamic State worldwide operations: July – September 2015

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## SPECIAL REPORT

IHS Jane's Terrorism and  
Insurgency Centre (JTIC)

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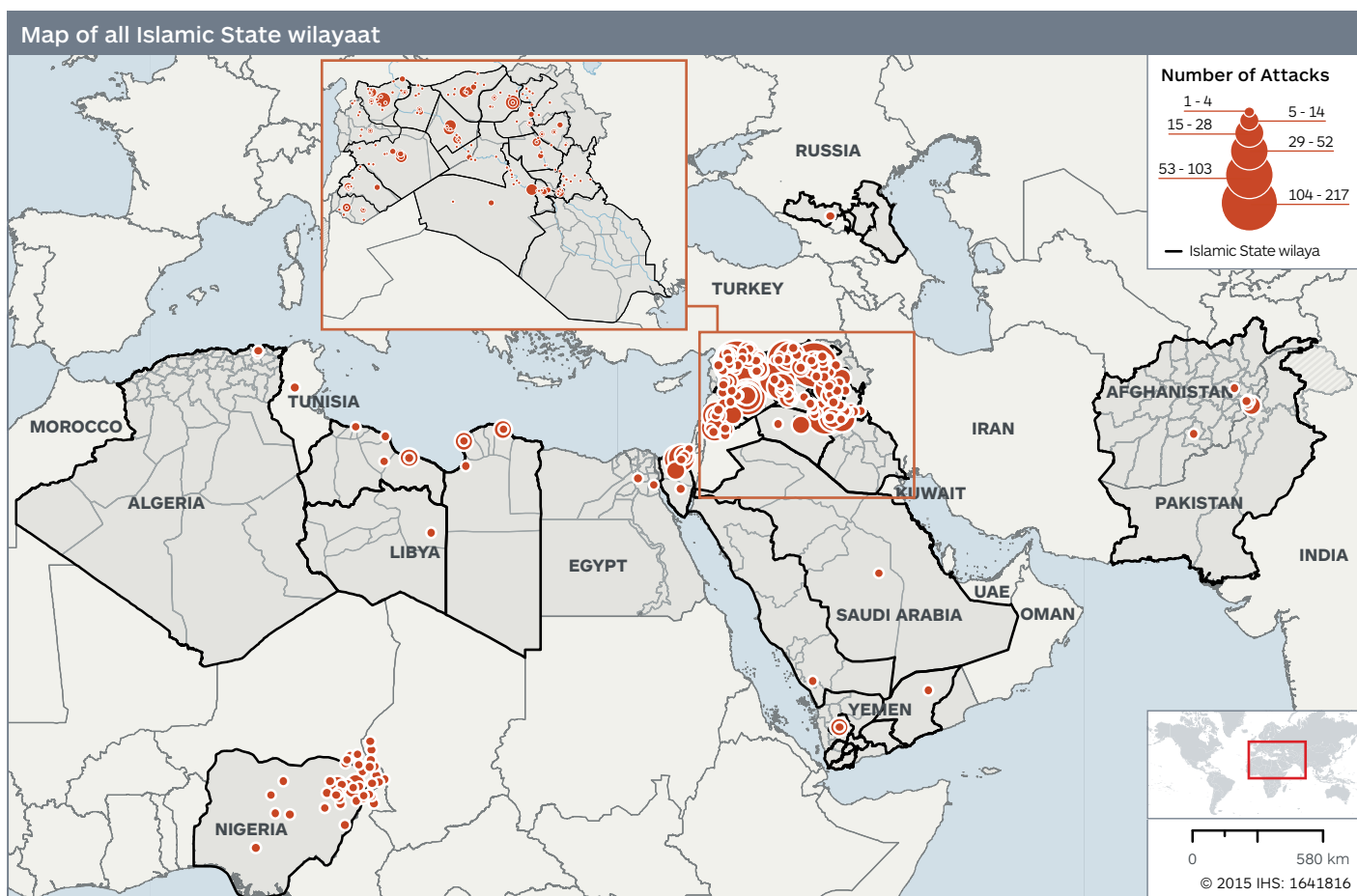
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Cover image: Islamic State

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**1,086**  
attacks

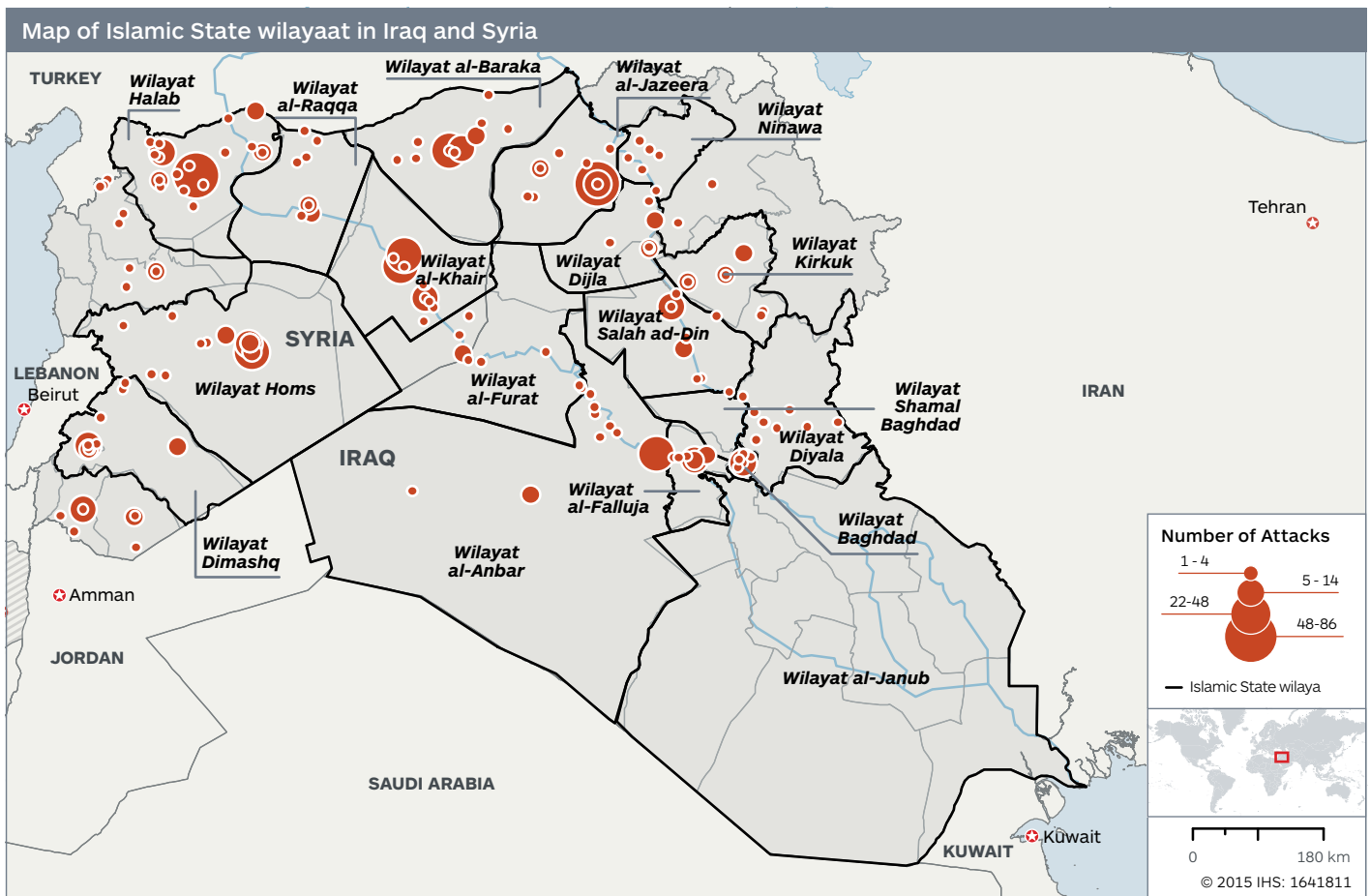
**2,978**  
fatalities

In the three months between 1 July and 30 September 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre (JTIC) recorded a total of 1,086 attacks by the Islamic State worldwide from open sources. This represented a substantial 42.2% increase in the average daily number of attacks, from 8.3 in the preceding quarter (1 April – 30 June) to 11.8 in the reporting period. Furthermore, the average 11.8 attacks per day in the reporting period represented a notable 38.8% increase from the average 8.5 attacks per day over the preceding 12 months.

It is worth caveating that the above attacks consist of operations that were either claimed by the Islamic State or definitively attributed to the group by national authorities. Indeed, there were likely a far higher number of attacks conducted by the Islamic State in the reporting period, particularly in Iraq and Syria, which could not be definitively linked to the group and as such were not included in the figures.

The 1,086 recorded Islamic State attacks resulted in a total of 2,978 non-militant fatalities. This figure represented a concurrent major 65.3% increase in the average daily number of fatalities, from 19.6 in the preceding quarter to 32.4 in the reporting period. Similarly, the average 32.4 fatalities per day in the reporting period represented an 81.0% increase from the average 17.9 fatalities per day over the preceding 12 months.

On a global scale there was relatively little in the way of nominal territorial expansion by the Islamic State. Following the announcement of four wilayaat (provinces) in Russia's North Caucasus in late June, this was followed only by the emergence of a new wilaya (province) – Wilayat Hijaz – in Saudi Arabia in early August. Otherwise, the Islamic State maintained its strategy of expanding and consolidating local territorial control within its existing structure of wilayaat.



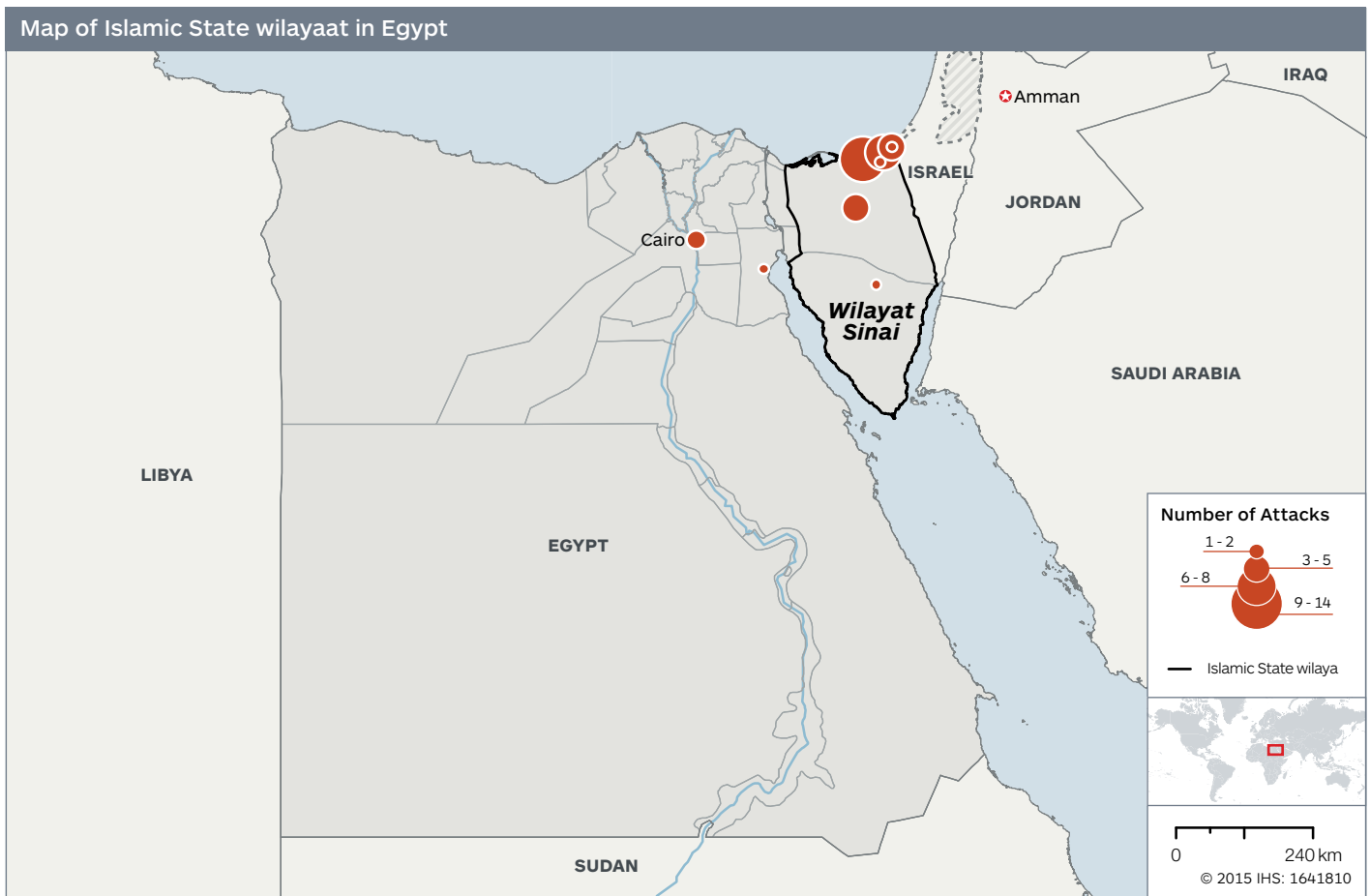
**902**  
attacks  
**1,780**  
fatalities

Across the reporting period the plurality of Islamic State wilayaat in Iraq and Syria were recorded as conducting 902 attacks, which resulted in a total on 1,780 non-militant fatalities. The two countries are assessed together as several of the wilayaat along the shared border deliberately contain territory from both countries, making it problematic to effectively divide the territory into purely Syrian and Iraqi wilayaat. Given the frequent relocation of fighters between conflict areas in both countries, this adds further impetus to assess them collectively.

Given that the two countries represent the operational and ideological heartland of the Islamic State, along with the largest concentration of its fighters, it is therefore unsurprising that Iraq and Syria account for the majority of the group's total attacks (83.1%) and non-militant fatalities (59.8%) worldwide. There were a series of noteworthy trends and developments across the two countries, though, as the Islamic State maintained its twin strategy of expansion and consolidation.

While the 902 attacks recorded represented a substantial increase from 667 recorded in the preceding quarter, there was only a slight increase in fatalities from 1,607 to 1,780. Although there were fluctuations across the reporting period, this trend largely indicated an increase in low-level violence by the Islamic State, with the overall incidence of mass-casualty violence not rising in line with the overall increase in operational tempo. This was somewhat accounted for by the Islamic State engaging in frequent, low-level, close-quarters engagements with either security forces or rival militant groups – whether Kurdish, Islamist, or nationalist – in areas recently captured by the group in the preceding quarter, with the Iraqi city of Ramadi and the Syria city of Palmyra/Tadmur strong examples of such.

Nonetheless, when the Islamic State came under increasing territorial pressure or losses, it was quick to respond with mass-casualty operations, underlining that the group's capacity to wage a territorial-focused insurgency in conjunction with a punitive campaign of terrorist attacks remains undiminished, despite an increasingly broad spectrum of armed opposition.



**41**  
attacks  
**110**  
fatalities

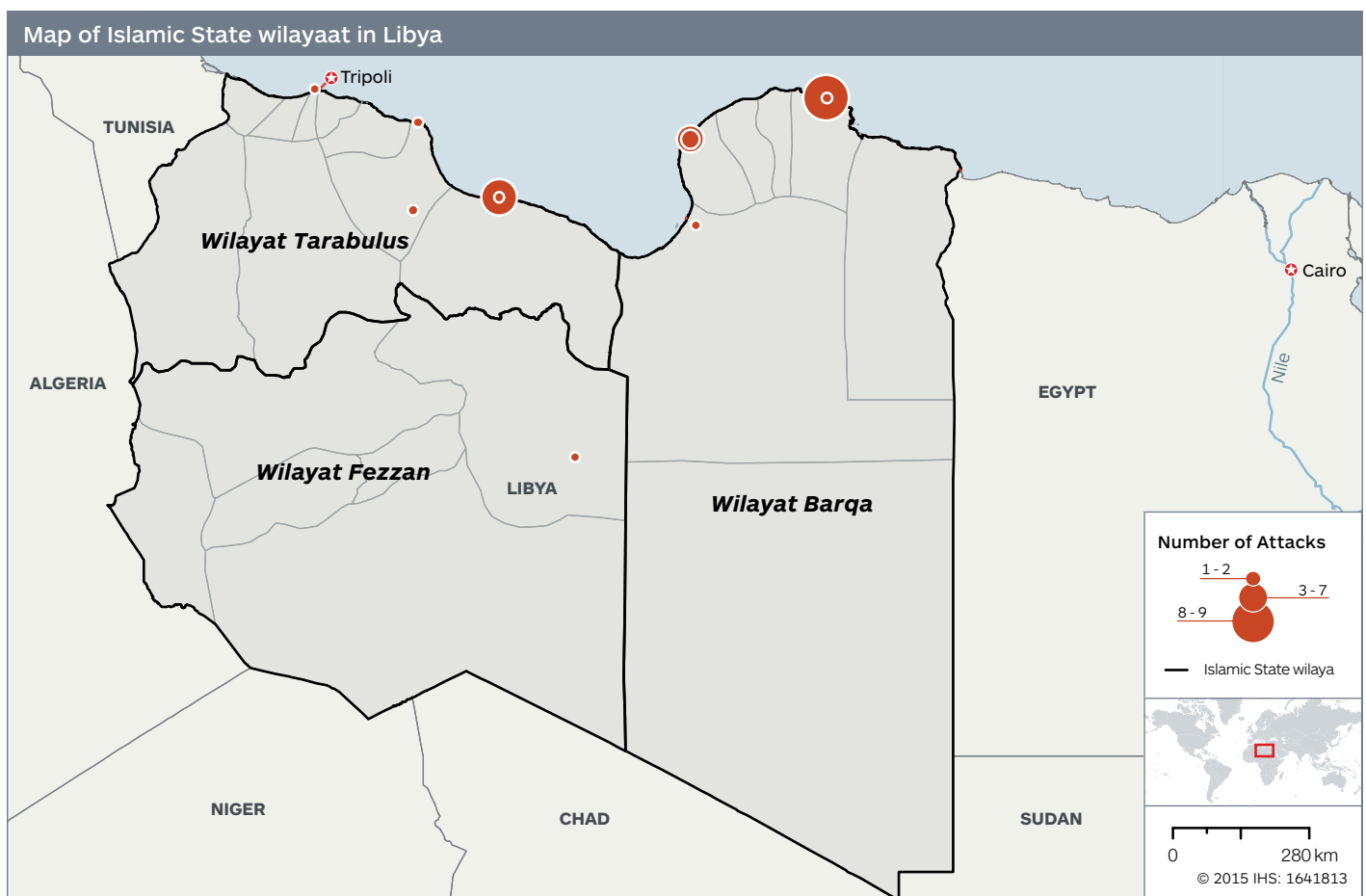
The Islamic State's Wilayat Sinai conducted at least 41 recorded attacks across the reporting period, resulting in a total of 110 non-militant fatalities. This was a substantive rise from the 33 attacks and 59 fatalities recorded in the preceding period.

The majority of the casualties were accounted for by one major Wilayat Sinai operation on 1 July, with a series of coordinated attacks – involving the use of suicide attacks, anti-tank guided missiles, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades – on at least 15 security force positions, including the main police station, in the town of Sheikh Zuwayid in North Sinai. The operation was seemingly an attempt to seize control of the town, although it may equally have been a test of the capabilities of the Egyptian military to respond to such an attempt. In any event,

it required a lengthy military response, including airstrikes, to end the attack, and while the official government death toll provided was 17 soldiers and four civilians, credible security officials anonymously revealed to international media sources that at least 64 soldiers had died. The attack signalled not only the growing capabilities of Wilayat Sinai but also its evolving intent, transitioning from guerrilla operations against security forces to urban assaults and seeming attempts to seize control of territory.

Nonetheless, Wilayat Sinai conducted a series of further noteworthy attacks across the reporting period, including the sinking of a naval frigate off the coast of Sinai in a missile strike, a VBIED attack on the Italian consulate in Cairo, and a double IED attack that wounded six members of the multinational peacekeeping force in North Sinai – including four United States nationals.

Separately, in mid-September a group identifying itself as the “Islamic State in Egypt” claimed to have ambushed a military patrol in the country's Western Desert, potentially indicating an expansion of the Islamic State insurgency in the country to an area close to the border with Libya.



**33**  
attacks

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**59**  
fatalities

In the reporting period, 33 attacks by the Islamic State's three wilayaat in Libya were recorded, resulting in a total of 59 non-militant fatalities. This represented a slight decrease from the 35 attacks recorded in the preceding quarter but a slight increase from the 46 fatalities these attacks caused.

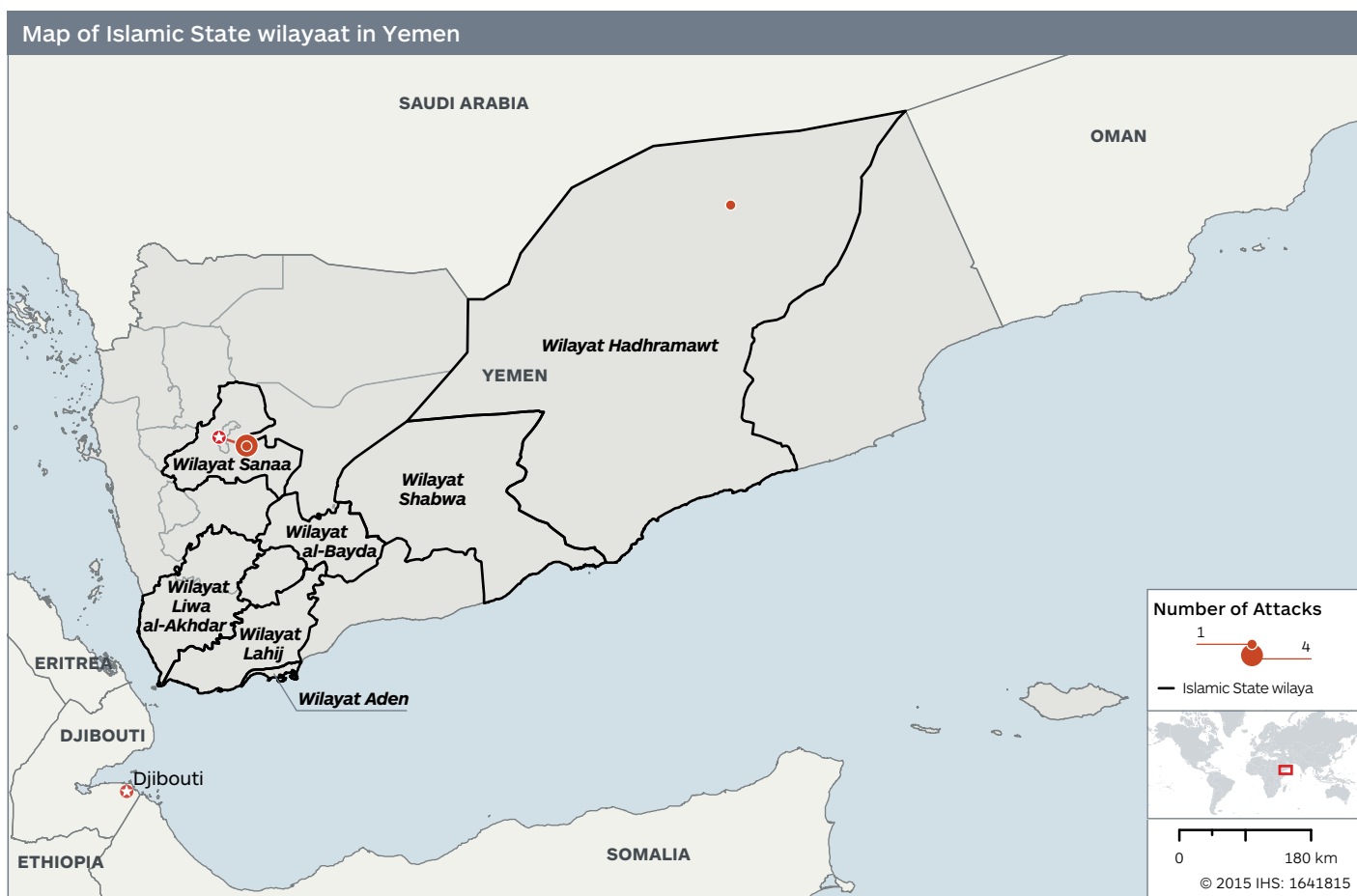
As the map indicates, Islamic State operational activity in Libya was concentrated in the central coastal city of Sirte and in the eastern coastal cities of Benghazi and Derna, with attacks in the three cities combined accounting for 85% of all recorded Islamic State attacks nationwide. The nature of the group's operations in the three cities also reflect the complex nature of the security situation in Libya, the spectrum of actors involved, and the Islamic State's varying

relationships with such actors.

Sirte has been under the control of Wilayat Tarabulus since June and over the following months it has been implementing a similar form of governance in the city as witnessed in cities under the Islamic State's control in Iraq and Syria, including the execution of those who transgress against its strict interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). There have also been periodic episodes of heavy fighting in the city, such as when Islamist militiamen attacked the city on 10 August, leaving 25 combatants dead. Several days later, Wilayat Tarabulus militants stormed a hospital in the city and executed 22 militiamen who had been wounded in the fighting and receiving medical treatment.

In the city of Benghazi, Wilayat Barqa militants fought alongside Islamist militia Ansar al-Sharia against military forces commanded by General Khalifa Haftar in ongoing clashes for control of the city, including periodic suicide attacks. Meanwhile, in the nearby city of Derna, Wilayat Barqa militants were expelled by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen following heavy fighting in June, but across the reporting period the Islamic State launched several attacks on the city, including a triple suicide attack on 3 July and heavy fighting on 30 July that left 39 combatants dead.





**6**  
attacks

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**67**  
fatalities

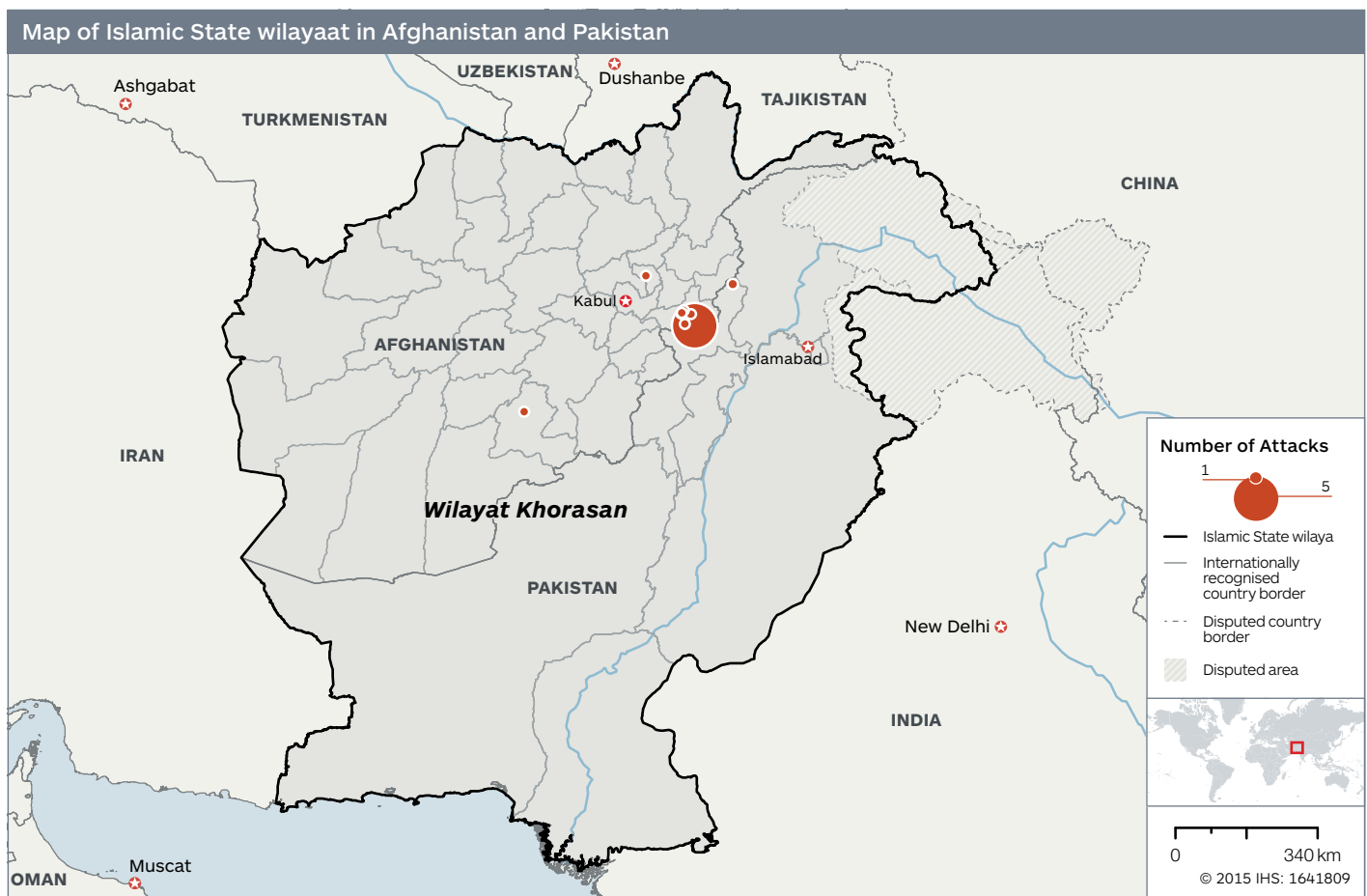
In the reporting period, six attacks by the Islamic State's various wilayaat in Yemen were recorded, resulting in a total of 67 non-militant fatalities. The three confirmed Islamic State attacks in Yemen over the preceding 12 months focused on suicide attacks targeting mosques popular with fighters, members, and supporters of Zaidi Shia Muslim group Ansar Allah in the capital Sanaa, and this operational trend continued in the reporting period.

On three separate occasions across July, the Islamic State's Wilayat Sanaa detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) outside such mosques in the capital Sanaa, leaving a total of 10 people dead. A little over a month later, in early September, the wilaya launched a more complex operation, with a suicide bomber detonating their explosives inside the Al-

Moayyad mosque in Sanaa, before a VBIED was then detonated targeting security forces and medical workers responding to the initial attack, leaving at least 28 people dead and more than 75 wounded in total. Another 25 people were then killed when a Wilayat Sanaa suicide bomber attacked the Balili mosque in the city on 24 September.

The remaining Islamic State attack was accounted for by a Wilayat Hadhramawt small-arms attack on a military post in a desert area of Hadhramawt governorate, close to the border with Saudi Arabia, on 20 August that left four soldiers dead.

The sporadic nature of such operations, along with the predominant operational focus on mass-casualty demonstrative attacks in Sanaa underlines that the Islamic State likely remains some distance from having the capability to challenge either the state or rival Islamist militants Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) for territorial control of areas of the country.



**15**  
attacks

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**10**  
fatalities

The Islamic State's Wilayat Khorasan conducted at least 15 attacks across the reporting period, resulting in a total of 10 non-militant fatalities. However, this fatality count is not fully reflective of the nature of Wilayat Khorasan violence in the period, with the majority of the group's attacks targeting Taliban militants in its area of operations. Such clashes have focused on areas of Nangarhar province along the border with Pakistan, where the militants have been challenging both the Taliban and security forces for control of remote border districts. A better indicator of the scale of such violence is indicated by the fact that seven attacks targeting Taliban militants in Nangarhar resulted in a total of 55 militant fatalities. The nature of open-source reporting on such clashes rarely provided a breakdown of the fatalities between the two groups, making it difficult to assess the course of the fighting and the extent to which the

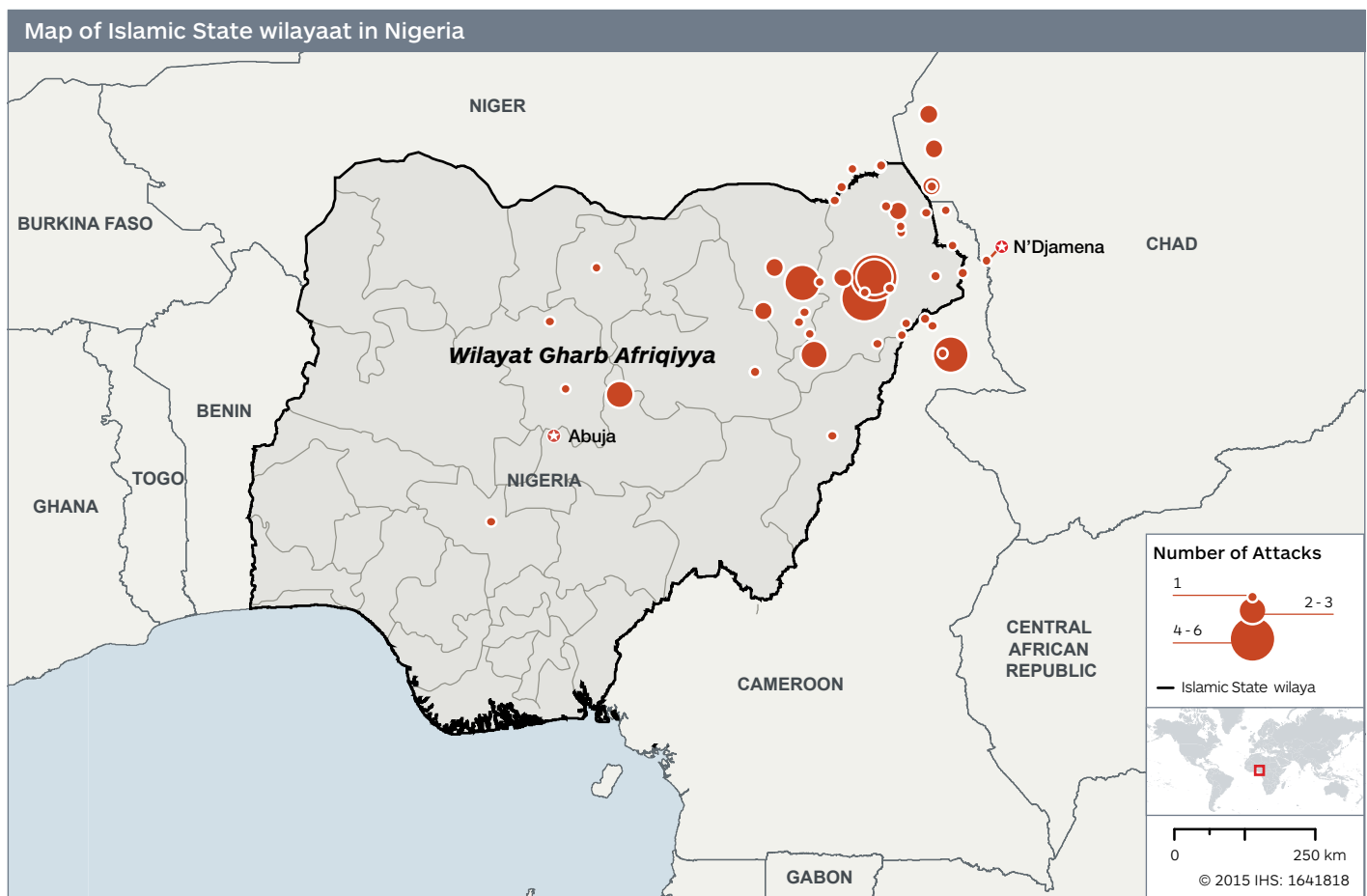
Taliban has, if at all, managed to contain and handle the growing localised challenge posed by Wilayat Khorasan. The latter exacerbated the situation further across the reporting period by releasing several videos in which Taliban fighters and/or supporters were executed in brutal fashion using explosives.

In addition to attacking the Taliban in areas of Nangarhar, Wilayat Khorasan has also attempted to empower itself locally by undermining informal local power structures, such as by executing tribal elders and a prominent local imam.

On a more periodic basis, Wilayat Khorasan militants have attacked security checkpoints in several districts of Nangarhar, with a particular spate of such attacks in late September. While these resulted in only moderate security force losses, claims by security official that almost 150 Wilayat Khorasan militants were killed in total in the repelling of these attacks remain unverified and lack credibility.

Potentially highlighting the growing capabilities of Wilayat Khorasan, a UN report released in late September claimed that as many as 70 Islamic State militants from Iraq and Syria had travelled to Afghanistan and had formed the core of the group, likely providing training and strategic direction.



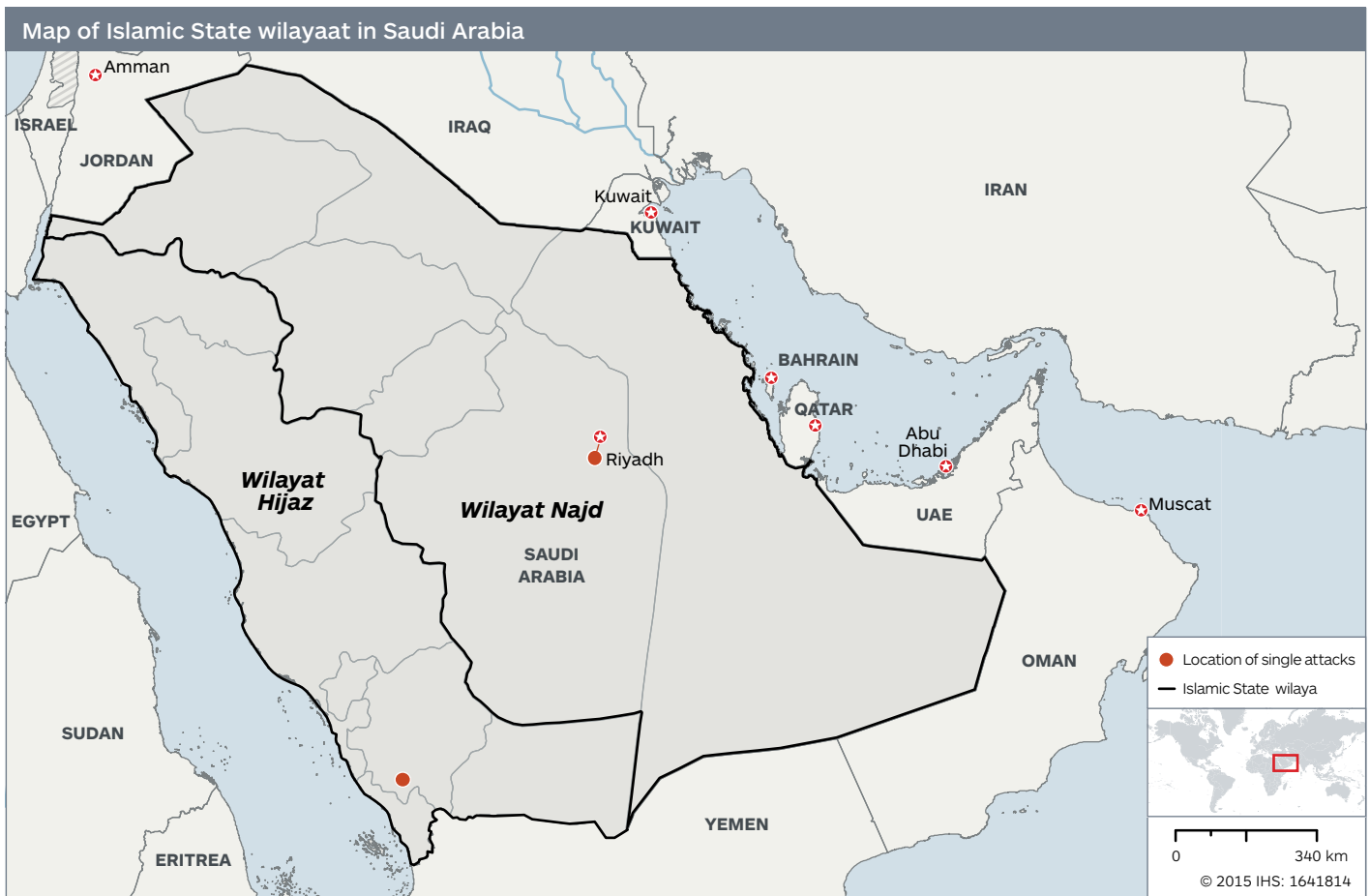


**58**  
attacks  
**760**  
fatalities

The Islamic State's Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya – formerly known as Boko Haram – conducted at least 58 recorded attacks in the reporting period, resulting in a total of 760 non-militant fatalities. The exact status of this particular wilaya is somewhat unclear. Firstly, Boko Haram is more a collection of factions than a unified body, and it was only the largest faction under leader Imam Abubakar bin Mohammed (alias Abubakar Shekau) that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Secondly, while the pledge of allegiance was accepted by the Islamic State, the faction simply began referring to itself as Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya, rather than the wilaya being formally announced by the Islamic State leadership, as with all other wilayaat. Nonetheless, the group has continued to use the name without any kind of public rebuke from the Islamic State leadership and can credibly be considered at least semi-official.

The recorded statistics for Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya in the reporting period – with a higher death toll than recorded Islamic State attacks in Syria and the highest average fatalities per attack of any wilaya – underline the nature of the group's insurgency in Nigeria and several bordering countries, with its operations characterised by mass-casualty operations targeting the civilian population in the group's northeast operational heartland. Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya has maintained a high intensity of such operations despite a multinational counter-insurgency offensive that has been ongoing since March.

Suicide attacks were a major element of these operations, and Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya utilised suicide bombers on at least 22 occasions in the reporting period, only narrowly behind Syria (27) and Iraq (32). In addition to being used punitively against the civilian population in key areas across the northeast – particularly in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Gombe – the use of suicide attacks has also been a key element of reprisal operations against neighbouring countries for participation in the multinational offensive. Notably, a suicide attack in the Chadian capital Ndjamena on 11 July left at least 17 people dead, while five separate suicide attacks were conducted across Cameroon's Extreme-Nord region, leaving at least 69 people dead.

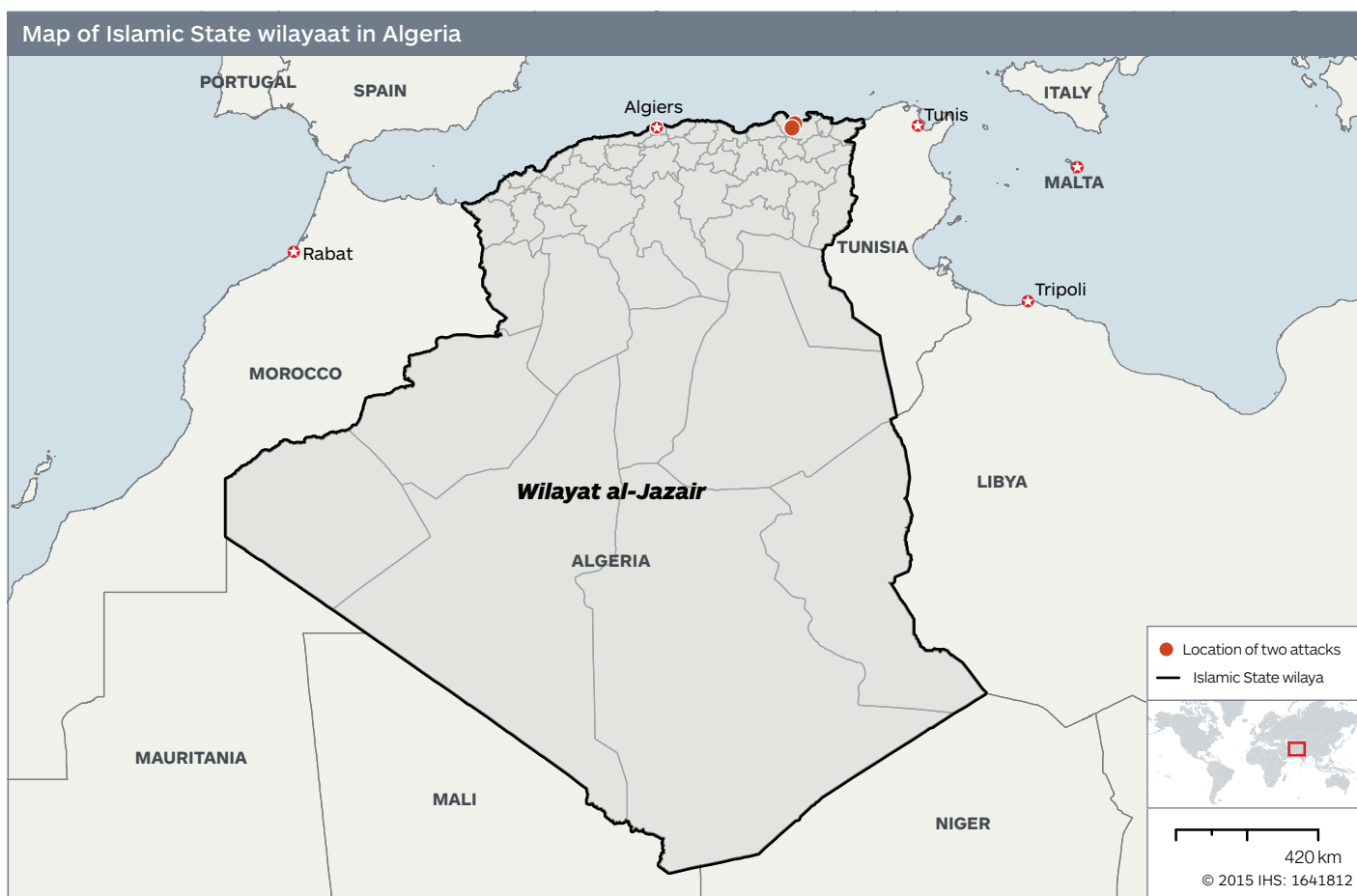


**2**  
attacks  
**15**  
fatalities

Two attacks by the Islamic State were recorded in Saudi Arabia in the reporting period, resulting in a total of 15 non-militant fatalities. In previous months, the group's Wilayat Najd had conducted suicide attacks at Shia mosques in both the east of the country and in neighbouring Kuwait. This operational pattern was continued in the reporting period, when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives inside a mosque in the southwest city of Abha in Asir province on 6 August, killing 15 people and wounding dozens of others.

Notably the attack was claimed by a new wilaya, identifying itself as Wilayat Hijaz, and indicating a further expansion of the Islamic State's activities in the country. Also of note was the seeming targeting rationale behind the operation. Whereas previous operations by the Islamic State in Saudi Arabia had explicitly targeted the Shia Muslim minority, in a likely attempt to inflame sectarian divisions in the country and undermine the government, the Abha attack was different. The mosque in question was frequented by security force personnel and at least 12 special forces personnel were among those killed, likely indicating a new intention to directly target the state and security forces, rather than just the Shia minority.

This targeting orientation may have been a response to a counter-terrorism crackdown on the group by Saudi authorities in the wake of the initial mosque attacks. Indeed, a police officer was killed during the course of a counter-terrorism in the city of Taif on 3 July targeting suspected Islamic State militants, and of more significance Saudi officials claimed on 18 July to have foiled a major series of Islamic State operations in the country. Officials stated that 37 people – including six suspected militants and an unspecified combination of civilians and security force personnel – had been killed and more than 400 suspected Islamic State militants detained during operations across the country, with the suspects allegedly planning suicide attacks on mosques, security force installations, and an undisclosed diplomatic mission.



**2**  
attacks

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**2**  
fatalities

In the reporting period, two attacks by suspected Islamic State militants were recorded in Algeria, resulting in a total of two non-militant fatalities. While the Islamic State-affiliated Jund al-Khilifa fi Ard al-Jazaair had previously carried out several attacks in the country over the preceding 12 months, there were no attacks claimed by, or attributed to, this group in the reporting period. However, two attacks in mid-August by unidentified Islamist militants on security force targets in Skikda province – leaving two police officers dead – were assessed by IHS Jane's as likely to have been conducted by a group of Skikda-based former Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) militants who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State as Katibat Skikda in May.

Prior to these attacks being launched, the Islamic State had released a video in mid-July in which two Syria-based Algerian militants threatened that the country would “pay a heavy price” for its security crackdown on Islamist militants in the country. The two militants also welcomed the pledge of allegiance by Katibat Skikda and called for other Islamist militants in the country to pledge allegiance.

While a further defection of AQIM militants to the Islamic State was announced by the latter in early September, triumphantly reporting the defection of AQIM's Katibat al-Ansar, AQIM quickly responded and claimed that fewer than 10 members of the battalion had actually defected.

Regardless of the truth of the matter, the low operational tempo of Islamist militants in Algeria, whether Islamic State or AQIM, is predominantly indicative of the restrictive security environment in the country, which has prompted many Algerian militants to travel to neighbouring Libya or further afield to Syria and Iraq.



**1**  
attacks

**0**  
fatalities

The Islamic State announced a series of four separate wilayaat in the North Caucasus in late June, covering the republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia – while the republic of North Ossetia was not specifically listed, this may be included within Wilayat Ingushetia – which together form the Wilayaat al-Qawqaz, or Caucasus Provinces. The wilayaat were formed by militants who had defected from the existing Al-Qaeda-linked militant Islamist umbrella grouping in the North Caucasus, Imarat Kavkaz or the Caucasus Emirate.

In the first three months of its existence, though, the operational tempo of the Wilayaat al-Qawqaz has been somewhat underwhelming, with a notable absence of any keynote attacks to establish the group as a credible force that might supplant the weakened but persisting Imarat Kavkaz or give any indication of the group's operational capabilities. In early September, Wilayat Dagestan claimed to have launched its first attack, purportedly attacking a military barracks in the Magaramkent area of Dagestan. However, there is no military barracks in the area and local residents claimed that no such attack had taken place.

The one recorded attack attributed to the Islamic State in the reporting period came a month earlier on 6 August when an Islamist militant was shot dead by police after he opened fire on them with small-arms and a grenade in the city of Nalchik in Kabardino-Balkaria. Police subsequently alleged that the militant was an Islamic State recruiter.

The current low capabilities of Islamist militants in the North Caucasus is reflective not only of the highly-restrictive operational environment as a consequence of intensive Russian counter-terrorism efforts in the republics but also the extent to which large numbers of North Caucasian militants have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join either the Islamic State or Imarat Kavkaz-affiliated groups. The extent to which this has deprived Wilayaat al-Qawqaz of manpower was potentially reflected to an extent in a message released by Wilayat Dagestan in early October calling on Russians not to travel to Syria and Iraq but to instead stay and fight in the North Caucasus.

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