



Danish Institute for International Studies

The Islamic State's Khorasan Province

Terror plots in Europe

Krause, Dino

Publication date:
2025

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Krause, D. (2025). *The Islamic State's Khorasan Province: Terror plots in Europe*. Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). DIIS Report Vol. 2025 No. 09

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



DIIS REPORT 2025: 09



THE ISLAMIC STATE'S KHORASAN PROVINCE: TERROR PLOTS IN EUROPE

Dino Krause

This report is written by Dino Krause, Postdoc, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The report is published by DIIS.

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies
Gl. Kalkbrænderi Vej 51A
DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
Tel: +45 32 69 87 87
E-mail: diis@diis.dk
www.diis.dk

Layout, tables and figures by Ravnkilde Design
Cover illustration by Cecilie Castor
Printed in Denmark by Johansen Grafisk A/S
All DIIS Reports are printed on Ecolabel and FSC certified paper

ISBN: 978-87-7236-098-0 print
ISBN: 978-87-7236-099-7 pdf

DIIS publications can be downloaded free of charge from www.diis.dk
© Copenhagen 2025, the author and DIIS.

CONTENTS

Abstract	4
List of abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
ISKP and the global Islamic State	7
ISKP's external operations campaign	13
Policy implications	25
Conclusion	29
References	31

ABSTRACT

The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) is perceived as the biggest jihadi terrorist threat to Europe. Yet, its operations in Europe are rarely analysed as a coherent phenomenon. Addressing this gap, this report traces seven ISKP-linked terror plots in Europe between 2020-2024. Facilitated by its unparalleled, multilingual propaganda output, ISKP has relied on remotely establishing contact with sympathisers physically located in Europe, subsequently guiding them in their attack planning. Moreover, the group's plots in Europe overwhelmingly involved operatives from Central Asian and Russian (North Caucasian) diaspora groups. Based on these findings, the report outlines several policy recommendations to counter ISKP's vast online presence, strengthen intelligence capacities and improve existing prevention programmes to the new threat. Additionally, given the EU's strained relationships with countries such as Russia, Iran and the Afghan Taliban regime, the report also argues for expanding diplomatic engagement with other third countries affected by ISKP-related violence.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADP	Administration of Distant Provinces
DSA	Digital Services Act
EU	European Union
GDP	General Directorate of Provinces
IS	Islamic State
ISHP	Islamic State Hind Province
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Sham
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
ISPP	Islamic State Pakistan Province
OMON	Special Purpose Mobile Unit; Ministry of Internal Affairs Tajikistan
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the remnants of the Islamic State's (IS) self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2019, the following years were characterised by a relatively low number of IS-related terror plots in Europe. However, starting with the second half of 2022, reports of foiled attacks with connections to IS began to multiply across Europe, a trend that continued throughout 2023 and 2024. The directors of multiple European intelligence services have since warned that one particular IS affiliate, the so-called Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), has transformed into the primary jihadi threat to European security (see, for example, de Barochez and Gubert 2024). Despite a drop of activity in 2025, the most recent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) report continued to assess ISKP as 'the most significant terrorist threat' to Europe (UNSC 2025b, 15). At the same time, these assessments appear puzzling: How can a group without consolidated territorial control and with decreased operational capabilities in its core area of operations – Afghanistan and Pakistan – direct terrorist plots in Europe? And what does it mean when ISKP becomes 'involved' in terror plots in Europe?

This report begins by examining the group's situatedness within the larger IS organisation. Internal reforms within IS, implemented around 2019 (Hamming 2023), have led to substantial changes in the planning of external operations, including in Europe. During the height of the IS caliphate (2014-17), responsibility for these external operations was centralised within IS's organisational core based in Iraq and Syria. Today, however, the organisation's external attack plotting constitutes a shared responsibility across various regional offices and their respectively

subordinated provinces, including the so-called al-Siddiq Office responsible for ISKP (Zelin 2024c). This reform can partially help explain why ISKP has increasingly become involved in attack plots in Europe.

To provide a clearer picture of the threat posed by ISKP in Europe, this report identifies and analyses seven terror plots in Europe between 2020-2024 that have been linked to the group. Rather than sending its own operatives from Afghanistan or Pakistan to Europe, ISKP has primarily relied on establishing contact with operatives in Europe, primarily via Telegram, remotely guiding them on target and weapons selection as well as on logistical matters. This communication is managed by ISKP operatives based in Afghanistan as well as by intermediary handlers in third countries such as Iran, Turkey or some of the post-Soviet Central Asian states. ISKP is particularly successful in establishing these contacts because of its unparalleled production of multilingual propaganda, which has increased the pool of sympathisers. ISKP's plots in Europe have overwhelmingly involved post-Soviet Central Asian nationals as well as operatives with North Caucasian (Chechen and Dagestani) roots.

Based on these findings, several implications for policymakers are derived. European governments need to extend existing frameworks for mutual intelligence-sharing, find ways to improve access to and retention of metadata as well as increase investments in the development of AI-based tools to process large amounts of data. At the EU-level, increased pressure on Telegram is required to hold the platform accountable under the strictest regulations of the Digital Services Act (DSA), while simultaneously strengthening the mandate of Europol. Moreover, it is suggested that national governments revise and potentially adjust existing initiatives in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), for instance to account for the growing prevalence of suspects with Central Asian and North Caucasian roots in ISKP-related plots. Diplomatically, a distinct challenge lies in ISKP's presence in countries with strained diplomatic relations to the West, requiring a higher reliance on channelling diplomatic contacts through intermediary states.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: The next section provides a brief overview of ISKP's emergence as a 'province' of the Islamic State in January 2015, before outlining its situatedness within the global IS organisation. This is followed by the main empirical analysis of the group's (publicly known) attack plots in Europe. Based on these findings, prior to the conclusion, I formulate several policy implications.




Islamic State military parades through the city. Ar-Raqqa, Syria, 2014.
Photo: ZUMA Press / Alamy.com

ISKP AND THE GLOBAL ISLAMIC STATE

ISKP'S EMERGENCE AS AN IS 'PROVINCE'

ISKP is a branch of the so-called Islamic State (IS), which originally emerged as an insurgent group in Iraq in the aftermath of the US-led invasion in 2003, before later expanding its presence into Syria in order to exploit the civil war that broke out there in 2011 (Bunzel 2015, 25-31). Having seized large portions of land across Syria and Iraq, the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in July 2014, announced the caliphate from the al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul. In the following weeks and months, jihadi groups from around the world, many of whom had been loyal to al-Qaeda, swore their oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to al-Baghdadi as the self-proclaimed IS caliph. From November

2014 onwards, IS began to formally acknowledge several of these pledges, referring to the respective groups as 'provinces' (*wilayat*) (Zelin 2014). Officially, ISKP was announced as an IS province on 26 January 2015, in a speech by then IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, who announced Hafiz Said Khan, a former senior Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) leader as the group's *wali* (governor) (Giustozzi 2018, 31). The term 'Khorasan' refers to a region known for its historical importance in Islam, comprising parts of today's Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It signified both an attempt at deriving religious legitimisation and signalling regional aspirations beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan (Leonhardt and Haqiqat 2024).



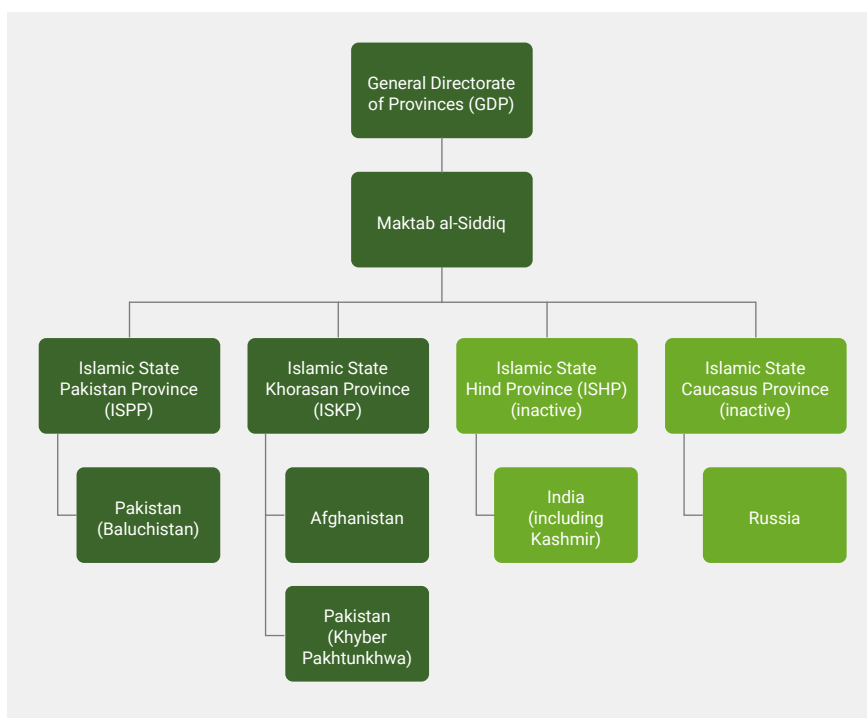
The term 'Khorasan' refers to a region known for its historical importance in Islam, comprising parts of today's Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It signified both an attempt at deriving religious legitimisation and signalling regional aspirations beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan.

When ISKP was announced in January 2015, it comprised a diverse set of factions, led by disgruntled Taliban figures (both from Afghanistan and Pakistan) who held grievances vis-à-vis their leadership, often due to doctrinal (Salafi versus Deobandi), ethnic (non-Pashtu vs. Pashtu) or tribal (including intra-Pashtu) differences. In particular, the TTP proved vulnerable to defections towards ISKP, as it was already grappling with internal power struggles and a lack of organisational cohesion (Jones 2015; Giustozzi 2018, 29-31). Also featured were al-Qaeda commanders, large parts of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan – a de facto exiled jihadi group composed primarily of Central Asian foreign fighters – and figures from the Haqqani network, (Sayed and Hamming 2023, 4-6). While several actors decided to join ISKP for practical rather than ideological reasons, a common, ideological grievance voiced by these early defectors was that they saw IS as more strongly committed to global jihad and appreciated the organisation's full-scale rejection of the nation-state-based global order (Giustozzi 2018, 33). Others felt attracted by IS's more brutal, sectarian posture vis-à-vis Shi'a Muslims (Giustozzi, 2018: 37).

ISKP UNDER THE GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF PROVINCES

Administratively, during the caliphate era (2014-19), the IS provinces outside the core strongholds in Iraq and Syria were supervised by an internal IS unit, the so-called Administration of Distant Provinces (ADP). During this period, IS's provinces in Iraq and Syria were not only hierarchically positioned above other provinces, but they were also the sole provinces tasked with external operations planning (Hamming 2023; Zelin 2024a). However, with IS having lost the last remnants of its caliphate by March 2019, its leadership adjusted its internal structure. The ADP was transformed into the so-called General Directorate of Provinces (GDP). Rather than only being responsible for the 'distant' provinces (as was the case with its predecessor, the ADP), the GDP was now overseeing all IS provinces, including the organisation's original core provinces in Iraq and Syria, a step that put these two provinces on par with other IS provinces. Thereby, IS created a more horizontal province structure, with the GDP assuming a coordinating function. It is not clear who is currently, or

Figure 1. Maktab al-Siddiq and its subordinated provinces

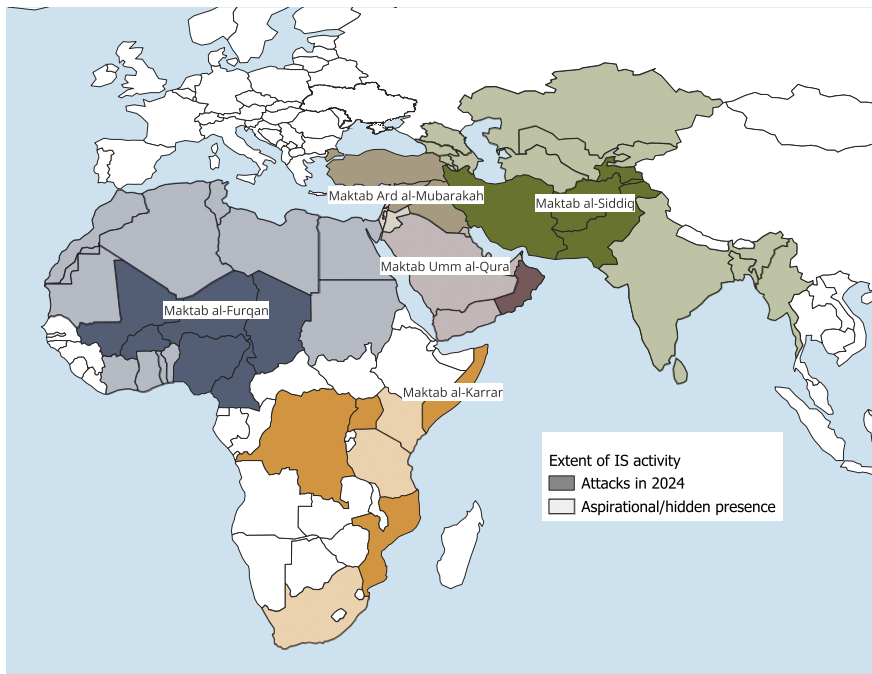


Source: Author's own visualisation.

who was recently, leading the GDP, but the two most likely options include Abdulqadir Mu'min, the current leader of IS's Somalia Province (Doctor and Ligon 2024) and Abu Khadija al-Iraqi, a recently killed, high-ranking IS operative in Iraq (UNSC 2025a).

Additionally, located below the GDP and above the provinces, an entirely new, intermediate organisational layer was introduced in the form of regional 'offices' (makatib) that now formally preside over IS provinces in particular regions, while also supervising IS operations and networks in countries without formally declared provinces. These offices are today responsible for issuing organisational guidelines, supervising the election of province leaders or mediating internal conflicts (Hamming 2023, 20-23). They also play a key part in coordinating external attack planning with the provinces under their respective jurisdictions and with the GDP (Zelin 2024a). Before discussing IS's current office structure, it should be highlighted that while IS's regional offices indeed have distinct regional responsibilities when it comes to their day-to-day activities, this does not necessarily account for their participation in external operations planning, which rather seems to be coordinated on a higher, pan-provincial level (Zelin, 2024a).


Figure 2. Islamic State's global office structure in 2024



Source: Author's own visualisation created with QGIS.

Note: While the figure is structured along international borders, it also highlights Russia's North Caucasus federal district separately, as the al-Siddiq Office's territorial reach was recently extended to cover the Caucasus (UNSC 2025a, 5).

In the case of ISKP, these functions are today exercised by the so-called al-Siddiq Office, whose leadership is physically based in Afghanistan and headed by Tamim Ansar al-Kurdi, who was reportedly appointed by the GDP and dispatched from IS's core areas in Iraq and/or Syria (UNSC (United Nations Security Council) 2022, 16; UNSC 2025a, 16). Besides ISKP, the al-Siddiq Office also supervises the India (ISHP) and Pakistan (ISPP) provinces. While ISHP is largely inactive and did not claim a single attack in 2024, ISPP is confined to Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, with ISKP's operations in Pakistan being concentrated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan (Sayed and Hamming 2023). In addition to supervising these provinces, the al-Siddiq Office is also responsible for Iran as well as the rest of South Asia and most likely also the Central Asian countries, all of which lack the presence of official IS provinces (UNSC 2022, 5). Moreover, it was recently announced that the al-Siddiq Office had also assumed responsibility for IS operations in the Caucasus region (UNSC 2025a, 5).



There is evidence of a growing degree of integration across these regional offices, not only between the different provinces under a specific regional office.

Figure 1 above maps the regional responsibilities ascribed by IS to its five currently functional regional offices. As the empirical analysis in the next section will illustrate, besides the al-Siddiq Office, the Ard al-Mubarakah Office has a central role in facilitating ISKP's operations in Europe. Until his recent death, this office was led by the same individual mentioned earlier, Abu Khadija al-Iraqi (UNSC 2025a, 5), who was also pointed out as the possible leader of the GDP (UNSC 2025a, 13), thereby taking a key role in coordinating IS's external operations planning. Under his leadership, the Ard al-Mubarakah Office not only merged responsibility for Syria, Iraq and the larger Levant (Zelin 2024a), but since 2022 reportedly also for Turkey (UNSC 2022, 5).

As highlighted by Zelin (2024a), there is evidence of a growing degree of integration across these regional offices, not only between the different provinces under a specific regional office. On the one hand, this regards the financial sphere. ISKP, for example, has received regular cryptocurrency transfers from the al-Karrar office based in Somalia (UNSC 2022, 9). On the other hand, when it comes to external operations planning, these operations are today overseen by the GDP and appear to increasingly involve coordinated planning linking several IS regional offices.



Photo: Anthony Spratt / Alamy.com

ISKP'S EXTERNAL OPERATIONS CAMPAIGN

While this report focuses on ISKP's activities in Europe, most of its operations continue to take place in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although ISKP no longer controls coherent territories in this region – as previously in parts of Eastern Afghanistan (SIGAR 2017, 88) – it has maintained the ability to continue its insurgency, including military training camps (UNSC 2025a, 17). ISKP's external operations unit, led by an Iraqi national, Abu Ahmad al-Madani, is reportedly based in the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan (UNSC 2025a, 17). In Pakistan, ISKP's strongholds lie in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which directly borders both Kunar and Nangarhar, thus allowing the group to exploit instability in the historically porous border region.

Moreover, there is a separate faction operating in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, although IS technically claims this faction's operations under the IS Pakistan Province (ISPP) label (Sayed and Hamming 2023, 8). Estimations of ISKP's total number of fighters vary substantially, ranging between 2,000-6,000 fighters (UNSC 2024a, 16). Since June 2020 the group has been led by Sanaullah Ghafari, an Afghan national of presumably Tajik ethnic origin (Yawar, Ali, and Rajesh 2024).

After its operations were constrained to Afghanistan and Pakistan during the first years, ISKP subsequently began to expand its attack plotting. Already between 2019 and 2020, it became involved in plots in India (Indian Express 2024), Tajikistan (Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty 2020) and the Maldives (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2023). The year 2020 is also when ISKP, for the first time, appeared in the context of a foiled terrorist attack in Europe, as will be discussed in the following section. Moreover, since 2020, ISKP has been linked to plots in Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, Uzbekistan and the United States (Webber and Smith 2024; Zelin 2024b).

To understand why ISKP embarked on an external operations strategy from 2019 onwards, a few additional factors – besides the already mentioned organisational reform within IS – are worthwhile mentioning. Historically a group with large contingents of foreign fighters, ISKP had initially lacked the capabilities to sustain an external operations campaign. A key change occurred after ISKP suffered several military setbacks and, by 2019, lost its last pockets of controlled territory. As a result, the group reverted towards a guerrilla type of insurgency. Relieved from the burden of having to administer territory, ISKP turned towards high-profile external operations in order to maintain relevancy and signal its continued resolve to strike its enemies (Jadoon, Mines, and Sayed 2023, 13; Jadoon 2025). This new strategy was facilitated by ISKP's increased logistical and human networks, which it had built in the previous years, and which could now be utilised to sustain an external operations campaign, in line with IS's method of insurgency (Ingram and Mines 2023). Subsequently, the Taliban takeover in 2021 and the departure of foreign forces relieved counterterrorism pressure against ISKP. Under the Taliban regime, which it continues to fight domestically, ISKP has established and strengthened cells that it has used to direct and inspire external operations from Afghanistan (Jadoon et al. 2024, 3-4).

METHODOLOGY

I follow the definition of terrorism as ‘a specific tactic where non-state actors target opponents indirectly rather than through direct conventional attacks’ (Polo and Gleditsch 2016, 816). Contrary to conventional battlefield operations, ‘the immediate targets or victims are typically non-combatants’ (ibid.). I define terrorist plots in line with Nesser (2024, 318) ‘as launched attacks, or well-documented plans to launch attacks’. This is crucial in the case of ISKP, since the group’s attempts to carry out an attack in Europe have thus far remained unsuccessful. My analysis focuses on plots in which there was plausible evidence of an actual connection between the suspects in Europe and ISKP, for example via encrypted messaging. There are additional cases in which ISKP links were initially alleged but where prosecutors subsequently struggled to provide evidence. For instance, this holds for a June 2023 plot to attack the Vienna Pride, or the 2024 Taylor Swift concert plot in Vienna. In other cases, ISKP’s increased propaganda outreach has allowed the group to inspire plots, even without direct connections to the individual cells. While these plots underscore the relevance of ISKP’s propaganda distribution, they are not at the centre of analysis of this report.

To compile a list of ISKP-related plots in Europe, I utilised the Jihadi Plots in Europe (JPE) dataset as a basis (Nesser 2024). Given its limited timeframe that only lasts until 2021, I extended the dataset for the years 2022-24. This step was in turn based on data from the Islamic State Worldwide Activity Map, which globally tracks arrests as well as actual attacks linked to IS and its various affiliate groups, thus also covering ISKP’s activities in Europe (Zelin 2023). To obtain further information on each individual plot, additional research was conducted in national media, court documents and policy reports.

ISKP-RELATED PLOTS IN EUROPE


The prototype: first pan-provincial coordination (Germany, 2020)

While it was only relatively recently that scholars started to point towards the growing prevalence of pan-provincial attack plotting (Zelin, 2024), already the first ISKP-related plot in Europe, in April 2020, involved coordination between a cell of five Tajik operatives in Europe and IS operatives embedded with both IS in Syria and ISKP in Afghanistan. Via Telegram, the cell was reportedly in contact with a Russian IS operative based in Syria known under the pseudonym Abu Fatima, who is thought to have convinced the cell to switch its original plan, from travelling to Tajikistan to

Table 1. Overview of ISKP-related plots in Europe: 2020-2024

Date	Location	Target	Outcome	International connection	Cell size	Nationality of suspects	Age of suspects	Weapons and status of preparation
04/2020	North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany	US and NATO military bases in Germany (1) and an Iranian-German Islam critic (2)	Foiled; all five suspects sentenced to several years in prison in 2022	Remote contact and directives by ISKP operatives in Afghanistan and IS operatives in Syria; one cell member arrested in Albania	5	Tajik (all five)	24, 30, 32, the rest unknown	Explosives and firearms: partially ordered, partially procured
09/2022	Iserlohn/Bremerhaven, Germany	Police officers	Foiled; both suspects sentenced to multiyear youth prison sentences	Remote contact with two ISKP operatives in Afghanistan	2	German/Kosovar, Russian	16, 17	Suicide bomb (initial plan, aborted due to problems with acquiring explosives); knife, (alternative plan, prevented due to arrest)
11/2022	Strasbourg, France	Christmas market	Foiled; no information released about trial/sentences	Remote contact and directives by ISKP operatives in Afghanistan	2	Russian, Tajik	19, 22	Unclear
07/2023	Multiple locations, Germany	Amusement park in Cologne and liberal Berlin mosque	Foiled; attack plotting charges subsequently dropped; reduced trial for ISKP support and membership ongoing	Remote contact and directives by ISKP handlers abroad, including in Turkey; cell leader arrested in the Netherlands	9	Tajik (6) Kyrgyz (2), Turkmen	21, 29, 47, the rest unknown	Unsuccessful attempts to procure automatic weapons and a stinger missile
12/2023	Cologne, Germany/Vienna, Austria	Cologne Cathedral, St. Stephen's Cathedral	Foiled; no indictments for attack plotting, all investigations ended by 2024; remaining suspects deported	Unclear	5	Tajik (3), Turkish, Russian	27, 28, 28, 30, 40	Unclear
03/2024	Gera, Germany/Stockholm, Sweden	Police forces and pedestrians outside the Swedish Parliament	Foiled; both suspects sentenced to multiyear prison sentences	Remote contact and directives by ISKP handlers in Iran	2	Afghan (both)	23, 30	Unsuccessful attempt to procure firearms
07/2024	Multiple locations, Belgium/Germany	Unclear	Foiled; no information about trial released yet	Remote contact with at least one, 'IS member', abroad	7	Russian (all seven)	Unknown, but older than 18	Unknown

carry out an attack, towards focusing on two US military facilities in Germany, as well as an Iranian-born Islam critic living in Germany (Jokinen 2020; Soliev 2021). The cell's Afghan connection consisted of a regular exchange with an unnamed, high-ranking ISKP member and preacher who held lectures for the Tajik cell via Zello, an encrypted communication platform. He reportedly also provided the cell with concrete instructions for how to plan and carry out the intended attacks (Soliev 2021, 33). In May 2022, all of the five main suspects were sentenced to multiyear prison sentences, with the court verdict explicitly confirming their connections to ISKP in Afghanistan (Tagesschau 2022).



This early plot is instructive, not only because it further illustrates the linkages between Central Asian ISKP operatives and North Caucasian migrants in Europe, but also because it shows how the ISKP cell simultaneously engaged in attack planning and fundraising.

Besides the close coordination with IS operatives in Syria, another noteworthy dimension in this case regards the Tajik cell's various contacts with migrants of Chechen origin in Europe, for example to collect donations for imprisoned IS members in Syria. The cell's Tajik ringleader had previously lived in Russia as a migrant worker and it was hypothesised that his radicalisation may have taken place there (Soliev 2021, 33-34). In this regard, this early plot is instructive, not only because it further illustrates the linkages between Central Asian ISKP operatives and North Caucasian migrants in Europe, but also because it shows how the ISKP cell simultaneously engaged in attack planning and fundraising activities, partially to finance its own activities in Europe, but partially also to transfer funds to IS operatives in Syria.

Teenage recruitment: the 16-year-old bomb maker (Germany, 2022)

The second ISKP-related plot in Europe was foiled in September 2022, when German authorities arrested an 18-year-old Russian national living in Bremerhaven, who had reportedly become radicalised only since January 2022. Shamsudin M. had established contact with an ISKP member based in Afghanistan and was subsequently instructed via Telegram on how to establish a local cell in Germany for preparing attacks. Shamsudin M. reportedly also worked as a translator for ISKP propaganda material, again illustrating the various functions fulfilled by ISKP operatives in Europe, beyond mere attack plotting. He reportedly created a Telegram

group to which he added various individuals and in which he shared execution videos as well as bomb-making manuals. Similar to the plot two years earlier, Shamsudin M. also engaged in fundraising activities, although in his case he helped arrange money transfers directly to ISKP in Afghanistan. The second indicted individual, a 16-year-old German national of Kosovar origin, Etrit P., was himself in contact with a separate ISKP member in Afghanistan, who reportedly instructed him in how to create improvised explosive devices. Fearing detection and struggling to assemble the materials, however, Etrit P. then decided to carry out a less complex attack with a knife, a plan he communicated with Shamsudin M. in advance. Ultimately, German police intervened and prevented the plot from unfolding (Generalbundesanwalt 2023; Lettgen and Brockmann 2023). Both suspects were sentenced to multiyear youth prison sentences in October 2023 (Spanner 2023).

Targeting Christian symbols: the Strasbourg Christmas market and Cologne/ Vienna cathedral plots (France, 2022; Germany/Austria, 2023)

Only two months after the arrest of the ISKP teenager cell in Germany, two similarly young Russian and Tajik nationals were detained in Strasbourg, France, for having plotted an attack against the local Christmas market. In an interview with LeMonde in December 2023, the head of the French domestic intelligence service explained that this plot had most likely been orchestrated by several ISKP operatives based in Afghanistan, the first time that such a remotely guided plot had unfolded in France (Seelow 2023). To single out Christmas markets as symbolic targets related to Christianity is a strategy long employed by IS, illustrated by the 2016 car ramming attack at a Christmas market in Berlin (Heil 2017) and the 2018 Christmas market attack in Strasbourg (Vincent 2019).

In December 2023, one year after the Strasbourg case, another ISKP cell was suspected of having plotted attacks against the Cologne Cathedral and the St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. In Cologne, the risk of an attack was deemed sufficiently high for public access to the Cathedral to remain restricted for several weeks (Spilcker 2024). Several suspects had been observed spying out the alleged attack targets, both in Cologne and in Vienna, with the 30-year-old Tajik ringleader also having travelled to Turkey, where he was suspected to have met with local ISKP operatives (Der Standard 2024). Even though authorities in both Germany and Austria ultimately struggled to produce sufficient evidence to warrant court indictments, all of the core cell's members were placed in custody to secure deportation, with the 40-year-old Russian suspect committing suicide in July 2024 in his cell in Austria (ORF 2024; Tagesschau 2024).

Besides targeting religiously symbolic sites, both plots again underscore the increasing linkages between Central Asian and Russian IS sympathisers in Europe. The Strasbourg plot featured collaboration between an ethnic Chechen, Russian citizen and a Tajik, whereas the December 2023 plot involved three Tajik suspects and one with Russian citizenship. In Strasbourg, French authorities further investigated a possible connection not only with ISKP, but also with IS's Caucasus Province. While the latter is largely defunct today, local IS networks remain sporadically active in the region (Revenaz and Rouseey 2024).

The infiltration attempt: trained operatives enter Europe (Germany/Netherlands, 2023)

In July 2023, German and Dutch authorities arrested a total of nine individuals for allegedly having plotted attacks against an amusement park in Cologne and a liberal mosque in Berlin. While the main charge of plotting an attack was dropped in January 2025, reduced charges against five of the seven suspects were maintained for their alleged financial support of ISKP and their overall IS membership. Therefore, despite the cell's attack plans being insufficiently concrete for a court verdict, the evidence regarding the cell's transnational linkages to ISKP operatives abroad warrants further discussion, as these allegations continue to be part of the remaining trial (dpa 2025).

The case constitutes the first publicly known instance of ISKP presumably having sent at least one operative to Europe, whom it had previously militarily trained (Kraetzer 2024). This 'Trojan horse' tactic had been employed earlier by IS, most prominently in the context of the cell that orchestrated the devastating attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016. The July 2023 ISKP cell consisted of nine individuals who were originally based in Kiev as well as in Russia before entering Western Europe with forged documents, disguised as refugees after the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 (Kraetzer 2024; Şenyurt and Willinger 2024). Already in Kiev, the cell had reportedly been led by Tajik national Abdusamad A., who subsequently settled in the Netherlands, with the rest of the cell seeking asylum in Germany (Baumholt and Striewski 2024; Kraetzer 2024).

The case also underscores the importance of Turkey as an organisational and financial hub for ISKP's activities in Europe. According to the official indictment, several of the cell's members were smuggling stolen goods from Germany to Turkey in order to generate funds, which were in turn used to acquire forged passports and support IS operatives in Syria's al-Hol prison camp. Moreover, the brother of one of the plotters was detained in Istanbul for IS membership and the cell's leader was

reportedly in direct phone contact with the Emir of IS's Turkey Province. The financial transfers by the Germany-based ISKP cell were in turn also used to finance ISKP's attack against the Santa Maria church in Istanbul in January 2024 (Şenyurt and Willinger 2024). Further noteworthy is that members of the cell, which primarily communicated via Telegram, were in contact with the two ISKP operatives who plotted the attack against the Strasbourg Christmas market in November 2022 (Kraetzer 2024). At the time of writing this report, the trial in Germany against the cell, with reduced charges, was still ongoing.

Exploiting outrage: the Quran burnings and the Swedish Parliament plot (Germany/Sweden, 2024)

Another ISKP-linked plot illustrates the group's determination to tap into public debates and exploit issues that spark outrage among its key target audiences. Over the course of 2023, several public Quran burnings had taken place in Sweden, prompting outrage in several Muslim-majority countries as well as within Europe. During the summer of 2023, high-ranking ISKP members abroad, presumably based in Iran, put an Afghan citizen, Ibrahim M. G., based in the German city of Gera, in charge of carrying out an attack to revenge the Quran burnings in Sweden earlier that year, aiming to kill police forces outside the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm. In line with the previously discussed plots, the communication between the cell in Germany and its international contacts took place via Telegram (Hemmerling and Kendzia 2024). The German court indictment specifies that Ibrahim M.G., who confessed in November 2024 (Svenska Dagbladet 2024), and his co-defendant Ramin N., also an Afghan national, conducted their preparations for the attack in 'close coordination' with ISKP operatives abroad. There is also an indirect connection to Syria in this case, as one of the two suspects had earlier transferred €2,000 towards IS operatives in Syria to secure the release of imprisoned IS members (Generalbundesanwalt 2024a). Interestingly, the ISKP operative based in Iran was reportedly also in charge of organising these money transfers, further indicating coordination between ISKP and IS networks in Syria (Hemmerling and Kendzia 2024). Both suspects received prison sentences in February 2025 (Tagesschau 2025).

Financial networks: from terror plots to prison breaks (Belgium/Germany, 2024)

The most recent ISKP plot in Europe dates to 25 July 2024, the day before the start of the Paris Olympic Games 2024. On this day, Belgian and German authorities arrested several Russian nationals of Chechen and Dagestani origin, accused of fundraising and attack planning. In Belgium, out of initially seven arrested individuals, three eventually remained in custody, with the rest being released after initial

interviews (van der Schoot 2024). In Germany, initially two individuals were detained for having financially supported the Belgium-based cell. Over the coming months, two additional Russian nationals living in Germany were detained in connection with the same investigation, leading to a total of four detained individuals in Germany, in addition to the three remaining suspects in Belgium (Generalbundesanwalt 2024c, 2024b, 2025). Of the suspects detained in Belgium, one was explicitly charged with having prepared a terrorist attack (Peeters and van der Schoot 2024). Authorities later informed that no concrete target had been selected yet, most likely because of the early intervention by authorities, which was undertaken to avoid risks in light of the high terrorism risk associated with the imminent start of the Paris Olympic Games (Colart 2024). While the amount of information available on this case is still limited, it was reported that the Germany-based part of the cell had, in addition to financially supporting their associates in Belgium, sent several tens of thousands of Euros to an 'IS member abroad', in order for the latter to use it to pay IS fighters and facilitate the release of female imprisoned IS members in Kurdish prisons in Syria (Generalbundesanwalt 2025).

CONTEXTUALISING THE PATTERNS

ISKP-related plots in Europe are still a recent phenomenon and, as was mentioned, the publicly available information on each of these cases varies greatly. With that caveat in mind, however, two larger patterns across the different plots can be observed.

Remote guidance

Only one of the plots discussed above involved a suspect who had presumably received military training with ISKP before travelling towards Europe. Thus, the 'Trojan horse' approach has not (yet) systematically been adopted by ISKP for its operations in Europe. Rather, the main mechanism has been to establish contact with sympathisers online and then remotely guide these cells, primarily via Telegram, on the selection of targets and weapons as well as in logistical questions. The adoption of this 'virtual planning model' (Dass 2024) was partially utilised by IS already during the caliphate era, but later became increasingly complicated due to the killing of key IS operatives in the wake of the collapse of the caliphate, as well as due to improved counterterrorism capabilities among European security agencies. Its resurgence in recent years has likely been aided by IS's strategic adaptation, which involved a move away from centralising responsibility for remote guidance in a single department, with a few well-known planners, based in Syria, towards a

model that is more decentralised both across multiple IS provinces and even within these respective provinces. In the case of ISKP alone, it has been estimated that up to 80 individuals embedded with the group in Afghanistan and Pakistan may be engaging in remote operations planning (Dass 2024). This is in addition to a large network of intermediary ISKP handlers, based in countries such as Turkey and Iran, as well as Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbouring countries (Stargardter and Jabkhiro 2024), who are equally engaged in remote guidance. At the same time, however, relying on remote guidance also comes with challenges, as the operatives typically lack military training and fighting experience, contrary to, for example, the Paris/Brussels cell that carried out several devastating attacks in 2015 and 2016, thus overall resulting in less complex attack plots.

One reason for ISKP's relative success in establishing contact with cells abroad lies in the group's surged online presence, facilitated by its production of multilingual propaganda, which has greatly increased in recent years.

One reason for ISKP's relative success in establishing contact with cells abroad lies in the group's surged online presence, facilitated by its production of multilingual propaganda, which has greatly increased in recent years. ISKP is also the only IS affiliate that runs its own centralised media agency, the so-called al-Aza'im Media Foundation (Webber and Valle 2023). Particularly noteworthy and relevant for the European context was ISKP's launch of an English version of its Voice of Khurasan propaganda magazine, which has regularly been published since February 2022. The innovative use of translation tools, increasingly relying on artificial intelligence, has allowed ISKP to disseminate its propaganda in an increasing number of languages, including Tajik and Russian, both of which are of particular relevance for the European context. (Clarke, Webber, and Smith 2024; Simon 2024). As regards the dissemination of its propaganda, ISKP has proven highly adaptable, using a wide range of encrypted messaging services, social media platforms, online fora, as well as file sharing and archiving websites, including an encompassing pro-IS archive and translation platform under the name 'I'lam Foundation' (Webber and Valle 2023; Clarke, Webber, and Smith 2024), although the latter was recently targeted in an international online counterterrorism operation (Europol 2024). The remote communication between ISKP operatives and intermediary handlers, on the one hand, and their operatives in Europe, on the other hand, has overwhelmingly occurred via Telegram.

Targeting of Russian-speaking diaspora groups

A second pattern across the plots regards the nationalities of the suspects involved. Remarkably, despite ISKP having its roots in Afghanistan, only one of the seven plots involved a suspect from that country. So far, ISKP has predominantly targeted two distinct diaspora communities in Europe. On the one hand, this regards Russian nationals with roots in the North Caucasus, specifically Chechnya and Dagestan. On the other hand, Tajik nationals played key roles in three of the seven plots, with one additional plot also involving suspects from Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. In line with this, all of the countries in which plots were uncovered – Germany, France, Belgium, Austria – are known to harbour particularly large Chechen diaspora groups (ÖIF 2023), with Germany also being home to the largest Tajik diaspora in Europe (IOM 2025). Moreover, several of the plots also involved some type of contact between these respective diaspora groups, for example in the case of the 2020 North Rhine-Westphalia plot. While the Stockholm Parliament plot proves that ISKP also recruits among the Afghan diaspora, the overall heavy reliance on Russian and Central Asian militants in Europe mirrors ISKP's external operations patterns elsewhere, for example in Turkey, Russia or Iran (Webber and Valle 2023).

To understand ISKP's success in reaching out to Central Asians and Russians with roots in the North Caucasus, it is crucial to consider the joint, historical grievances against Russia that are held by jihadists in Afghanistan (due to the Soviet invasion in 1979), the North Caucasus (due to the Chechen Wars in the 1990s and the 2000s) as well as Central Asia (due to Russian support for authoritarian, secular governments in the region). In Afghanistan, following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, ISKP's critique against the Taliban for the latter's diplomatic rapprochement with Russia has constituted a core part of the group's local propaganda strategy (Webber and Smith 2024).

IS militants from the Central Asian countries, particularly Tajikistan, and Russian IS fighters from the North Caucasus also gained joint fighting experience during the Syrian Civil War. The Russian government at some point claimed that around 5,000 -7,000 of its citizens had joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Sanderson et al. 2017, 12) and it was estimated that as many as 4,000 Central Asians joined the group at the same time (Lemon 2017), presumably almost half of them from Tajikistan (Soliev 2021, 33). A substantial share of these Central Asian fighters was radicalised and recruited while living in Russia, where they formed part of the large community of up to seven million Central Asian migrant workers (Sanderson et al.

2017, 6). Thus, even prior to arriving in Iraq and Syria, these Russian-speaking IS militants shared close linkages, despite their different national and ethnic backgrounds.

Once embedded with ISIS, several of these fighters took on prominent leadership roles. Examples include two of the group's former 'Ministers of War', Omar al-Shishani aka Tarkhan Batirashvili, an ethnic Chechnyan Georgian citizen, as well as Gulmurod Khalimov, a former head of the Ministry of Interior special forces (OMON) of the Tajik state (CEP (Counter Extremism Project) 2025a; CEP 2025b). The thousands of Russian-speaking ISIS fighters settled in the same areas, particularly in and around Raqqa, sending their children to Russian-language schools, and establishing joint fighting brigades (Jedinia 2016). While most of these fighters are today dead or imprisoned (Soliev 2021, 33), an unknown number has been able to survive the war and is today embedded with IS's remaining contingents of fighters in the Central Syrian Badia region (UNSC (United Nations Security Council) 2024b; UNSC 2025a). The contact between Russian-speaking IS operatives based in Syria and ISKP has been facilitated by the historic embeddedness of Central Asian and, to a smaller extent, Russian fighters among the ranks of ISKP in Afghanistan. Importantly, there were direct connections between these groups of fighters, as many of ISKP's Central Asian foreign fighters had travelled to Afghanistan after originally joining ISIS, hoping that the formation of ISKP would offer them an opportunity to expand jihad towards their home countries (Giustozzi 2018, 130-131). The recent allocation of responsibility for the remnants of IS's Caucasus Province to the al-Siddiq Office constitutes another indication of ISKP's growing interconnectedness with the Russian-speaking parts of the larger IS organisation.

Ultimately, ISKP's success in recruiting among Central Asian and North Caucasian diasporas in Europe cannot be understood without acknowledging the growing importance of Central Asian foreign fighters as well as ethnic Tajik and Uzbek militants in the ranks of ISKP in Afghanistan. Already in 2019, a Tajik ISKP shura member, Sayvaly Shafiev, reportedly coordinated the recruitment of large numbers of foreign fighters (Najibullah 2019). Two consecutive leaders of ISKP's foreign financing division were recently identified as Tajik nationals (UNSC 2024a). And even within Afghanistan, ISKP has increasingly recruited from the country's Tajik and Uzbek minorities, presumably also including the group's current leader, Sanaullah Ghafari (Yawar, Ali, and Rajesh 2024). The high prevalence of Central Asian fighters has ultimately endowed the group with substantial resources in terms of linguistic capacity and personal networks, which the group has successfully utilised to link up with the respective diasporas abroad.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings bear several implications for European policymakers. They can be structured along four key dimensions: 1) intelligence capabilities; 2) preventive measures; 3) online regulation; and 4) diplomacy.

First, to effectively counter the threat posed by ISKP, it is crucial that national intelligence services enhance their ability to track and monitor communication across the vast ISKP online ecosystem. In some EU Member States, such as Germany, this task is complicated by legal barriers against the preventive storage of IP addresses. Dependence on US intelligence remains high across Europe, which increasingly poses a security risk, given the growing concerns about the Trump administration's lack of reliability as a partner, which has revitalised longstanding discussions about the need for increased intelligence-sharing at a European level (Lunday 2025). In light of the recent diplomatic crisis surrounding Greenland, the risk of the Trump administration weaponising intelligence is of particular relevance for Denmark. An important step into the right direction came in June 2025, with the EU Commission presenting a roadmap towards expanding Europol's mandate and strengthening national law enforcement authorities' access to digital data. Particularly relevant for countering (ISKP-linked) jihadist actors online are the roadmap's goals of harmonising legal frameworks to allow for more extended metadata retention, enabling national law enforcement agencies to mutually share critical information as well as investing in the development of AI-based tools to process large amounts of data (Dubois and Foy 2025; European Commission 2025). The latter would be particularly relevant in order to identify and process the vast amounts of ISKP-related multilingual propaganda and online communication.

Second, preventive approaches against radicalisation should be strengthened. IS-related terror plots in Europe today increasingly involve teenagers (Krause 2025), a pattern also reflected in several of the plots discussed in this report. On the one hand, to help schoolteachers detect early signs of radicalisation, governments may consider introducing basic knowledge about radicalisation processes into the curricula of teacher education programmes at universities, while also supporting schools in establishing procedures for how to handle cases of suspected radicalisation. On the other hand, strengthening the digital literacy of children is equally crucial, in order to increase their resilience against propaganda. Given ISKP's targeted outreach to Central Asian and Russian (North Caucasian) migrant communities, specialised actors working in the field of P/CVE should be supported in adjusting their existing programmes to this still recent trend. For example, this would involve investing in language capacities, so that programmes can be delivered in relevant native languages such as Tajik, Russian or Chechen. Effective P/CVE work in these contexts also requires region-specific sensitivity to avoid generic counter-narratives. Lastly, since several ISKP plotters were asylum seekers, migration officers and personnel working in asylum shelters should be trained and sensitised to detect behavioural indicators of radicalisation, especially among asylum seekers with Central Asian and North Caucasian backgrounds.

Third, to tackle the growing proliferation of ISKP propaganda online, the European Commission – at least in theory – has a powerful instrument to force large platform providers to sharpen their content moderation, namely the Digital Services Act (DSA). For ISKP, Telegram remains the key platform, as it combines social network functions – which are crucial for propaganda distribution – with the functions of a discrete messaging app, which ISKP has repeatedly utilised to facilitate communication with its respective cells in Europe. However, Telegram alleges that its total number of users in the EU remains below 45 million, which is the threshold that would allow the Commission to treat it as a 'very large online platform' and force it to comply with the DSA's strictest rules (Holt 2024). To render Telegram accountable under the DSA's strictest regulations should thus constitute a key priority. Importantly, while Telegram does have a 'secret chat' function that entails full end-to-end encryption, the company in theory (that is, if requested by law enforcement authorities) does have access to all other chats where this function is not manually activated by the users, including all group chats (Shurson 2024, 2). In parallel, the mandate of Europol should be expanded – as recently proposed by the EU Commission – in order for the agency to move closer towards becoming 'a truly operational police agency' (Immenkamp 2025) at the European level. Already now, Europol is well-positioned to support member states via its European Counter

Terrorism Centre (ECTS) and the latter's Internet Referral Unit (IRU), such as most recently in the previously mentioned June 2024 operation against ISKP online infrastructure. However, Europol still lacks the mandate to actually request content takedowns, or to request social media platforms to disclose non-publicly available data (see, for example, Amarasingam 2020). These limitations prevent Europol from fully leveraging its unique position in order to tackle ISKP as a transnational security threat at the EU level.

Fourth, on a diplomatic level, one main challenge with regards to ISKP lies in the group's presence in states without diplomatic relations to EU Member States, such as in the case of Afghanistan, or where such relations are extremely strained, as in the case of Iran or Russia. To make matters even worse, governments in these states have repeatedly sought to portray ISKP as being part of a global conspiracy, sponsored by their respective adversaries, including the West. Yet, to develop effective counter strategies against ISKP on a global level, at least some level of co-operation and information-sharing among the various concerned governments would be needed (Bacon 2024). Against this backdrop, extending co-operation with intermediary governments, for example some of the Central Asian countries, who maintain better ties to the respective states, could constitute an actionable alternative path.

CONCLUSION

Following its emergence as an IS province in January 2015, ISKP began to appear in terror plots in Europe from 2020 onwards. This development is partially linked to an organisational reform within IS, implemented at some point around 2019, which saw responsibility for external operations, previously an exclusive competence of the group's provinces in Iraq and Syria, being horizontally divided up across IS's various provinces, coordinated by several newly created regional 'offices' and under the leadership of IS's General Directorate of Provinces (GDP).

This report identified and analysed seven ISKP-related plots in Europe since 2020, carving out two larger patterns. First, ISKP's preferred modus operandi in Europe has been to establish contact with individuals online and then guide them remotely via their own operatives based in Afghanistan, or handlers in third countries such as Iran or Turkey. This strategy has been facilitated by ISKP's disproportionately vast and multilingual propaganda output, which has created a large pool of online sympathisers from which to recruit. Second, ISKP has heavily targeted specific diaspora communities in Europe with roots in Chechnya and Dagestan as well as in Central Asia, primarily Tajikistan.

In addition to the policy implications that were formulated in the previous section, it is crucial to emphasise that ISKP is not the sole jihadi threat to Europe, as other IS provinces are equally engaging in external attack plotting. In February, a US airstrike in Somalia reportedly targeted an IS Somalia cell that was 'planning external attacks, including against American interests and their allies' (Hourelid 2025). In a more pessimistic scenario, the already existing connections between IS's regional

offices and some of the subordinated provinces may grow closer and potentially also allow for more complex, joint external operations planning. Therefore, while doubling down on efforts against ISKP is crucial, European governments should not lose IS as a global organisation out of sight.

Lastly, since around mid-2024, the trend towards increasingly frequent ISKP-linked plots in Europe has stalled. During the first six months of 2025, ISKP was not linked to any known terrorist plot in Europe. This shift is likely linked to a major online counterterrorism operation, conducted in June 2024, which involved judicial and law enforcement authorities from across Europe and the US. According to Europol, it resulted in the dismantling of critical online infrastructure linked to ISKP's I'lam Foundation, which had been crucial for the dissemination of multilingual propaganda (Europol 2024). Additionally, the operation targeted ISKP's internal communication infrastructure, including the group's Rocket Chat server, while the arrest of one of ISKP's leading propagandists further added to the momentum. As a result of these setbacks, ISKP's online followers have encouraged each other to take precautionary measures to avoid detection (Basit 2025). At the time of writing, it is still too early to tell if these changes will have a lasting impact, or if they rather constitute a temporary interruption of ISKP's external operations activities in Europe.

ISKP'S MULTILINGUAL PROPAGANDA

- The al-Azai'm Foundation functions as the group's official propaganda arm.
- Historically, ISKP propaganda was released in Pashto (primarily) as well as Arabic and Dari; today it appears in over a dozen languages, including English, Russian, Tajik and Turkish.
- The launch of the English version of Voice of Khorasan in February 2022 marked the beginning of ISKP's soaring multilingual propaganda production.
- The content of ISKP's propaganda is specifically tailored to the respective linguistic target groups.
- ISKP propaganda is released and distributed via Telegram (primarily) as well as various other social media and communication platforms, including TikTok and Facebook.

REFERENCES

- Amarasingam, Amarnath. 2020. "A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with an Official at Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit." *CTC Sentinel* 13 (2): 15-19. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CTC-SENTINEL-022020.pdf>.
- Bacon, Tricia. 2024. "The Islamic State in Khorasan Province: Exploiting a Counterterrorism Gap." CSIS (Center for Strategic & International Studies). Accessed 06 March 2025. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/islamic-state-khorasan-province-exploiting-counterterrorism-gap>.
- Basit, Abdul. 2025. "Is the Islamic State of Khorasan Province Losing Momentum?". *The Diplomat*. Accessed 30 July 2025. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/is-the-islamic-state-of-khorasan-province-losing-momentum/>.
- Baumholt, Boris, and Rainer Striewski. 2024. "Die Terrorpläne der Islamisten aus NRW." *WDR*. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/landespolitik/islamisten-nrw-100.html>.
- Bunzel, Cole. 2015. *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State. Vol. 19. The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World - Analysis Paper*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.
- CEP (Counter Extremism Project). 2025a. "Extremist Leaders: Gulmurod Khalimov." Accessed 26 February 2025. <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/gulmurod-khalimov>.
- . 2025b. "Extremist Leaders: Omar al-Shishani." Accessed 26 February 2025. <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/omar-al-shishani>.
- Clarke, Colin P., Lucas Webber, and Peter Smith. 2024. "ISKP's Latest Campaign: Expanded Propaganda and External Operations." *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*. Accessed 06 March 2025. <https://gnet-research.org/2024/06/27/iskps-latest-campaign-expanded-propaganda-and-external-operations/>.
- Colart, Louis. 2024. "Une opération antiterroriste en Belgique volontairement déclenchée avant la cérémonie d'ouverture des JO." *Le Soir*. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.lesoir.be/612042/article/2024-07-25/une-operation-antiterroriste-en-belgique-volontairement-declenchee-avant-la>.
- Dass, Rueben. 2024. "Islamic State-Khorasan Province's Virtual Planning." *The Lawfare Institute*. Accessed 06 March 2025. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/islamic-state-khorasan-province-s-virtual-planning>.
- de Barochez, Luc, and Romain Gubert. 2024. "EXCLUSIF. Rendez-vous avec le patron de la DGSE dans la salle de crise." *Le Point*. Accessed 23 January 2025. https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/exclusif-quand-on-s-en-prend-a-elle-la-france-repond-notre-interview-avec-le-directeur-general-de-la-dgse-20-11-2024-2575894_24.php#11.
- Der Standard. 2024. "Staatsanwaltschaft lässt in Niederösterreich erneut nach IS-Waffen graben." Accessed 12 March 2025. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000220265/terrorermittlungen-grabungen-in-n214-auf-suche-nach-m246glichen-waffen>.
- Doctor, Austin, and Gina Ligon. 2024. "The Death of an Islamic State Global Leader in Africa?" *CTC Sentinel* 17 (7). <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-death-of-an-islamic-state-global-leader-in-africa/>.

dpa (Deutsche Presse-Agentur). 2025. "Terrorprozess: Fünf Haftbefehle aufgehoben." Zeit Online. Accessed 11 March 2025. <https://www.zeit.de/news/2025-01/28/terrorprozess-fuenf-haftbefehle-aufgehoben>.

Dubois, Laura, and Henry Foy. 2025. "EU plans to strengthen police powers to tackle foreign threats." Financial Times. Accessed 05 August 2025. https://www.ft.com/content/f93e86f5-e89d-4652-b1e4-7662222b2b9d?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

European Commission. 2025. "Commission presents Roadmap for effective and lawful access to data for law enforcement." Accessed 05 August 2025. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-presents-roadmap-effective-and-lawful-access-data-law-enforcement-2025-06-24_en.

Europol. 2024. "Major takedown of critical online infrastructure to disrupt terrorist communications and propaganda." Accessed 30 July 2025. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/major-takedown-of-critical-online-infrastructure-to-disrupt-terrorist-communications-and-propaganda>.

Generalbundesanwalt. 2023. "Anklage gegen ein mutmaßliches Mitglied sowie einen mutmaßlichen Unterstützer der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung „Islamischer Staat (IS)“ erhoben." Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/Pressemitteilung-vom-16-03-2023.html>.

—. 2024a. "Anklage gegen ein mutmaßliches Mitglied und einen Unterstützer der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung „Islamischer Staat“ erhoben." Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2024/Pressemitteilung-vom-21-08-2024.html>.

—. 2024b. "Festnahme von zwei mutmaßlichen Unterstützern der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung „Islamischer Staat (IS)“ im Zusammenhang mit der Beteiligung an einem IS-Finanzierungsnetzwerk." Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2024/Pressemitteilung-vom-25-07-2024.html?nn=2031572>.

—. 2024c. "Vorführung eines mutmaßlichen Unterstützers der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung „Islamischer Staat (IS)“ zur Verkündung eines Haftbefehls im Zusammenhang mit der Beteiligung an einem IS-Finanzierungsnetzwerk." Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2024/Pressemitteilung-vom-01-08-2024.html?nn=2031572>.

—. 2025. "Festnahme eines mutmaßlichen Unterstützers der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung „Islamischer Staat“ (IS) im Zusammenhang mit der Beteiligung an einem IS-Finanzierungsnetzwerk." Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2025/Pressemitteilung-vom-28-01-2025.html?nn=478184>.

Giustozzi, Antonio. 2018. *The Islamic State in Khorasan: Afghanistan, Pakistan and the New Central Asian Jihad*. London: C. Hurst & Co.

Hamming, Tore Refslund. 2023. "The General Directorate of Provinces: Managing the Islamic State's Global Network." *CTC Sentinel* 16 (7): 20-27.

Heil, Georg. 2017. "The Berlin Attack and the "Abu Walaa" Islamic State Recruitment Network." *CTC Sentinel* 10 (2): 1-11.

- Hemmerling, Axel, and Ludwig Kendzia. 2024. "Terrorismus-Prozess am Oberlandesgericht: So planten mutmaßliche Islamisten aus Gera den Anschlag in Schweden." MDR. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/thueringen/ost-thueringen/gera/islamisten-terroranschlag-jena-parlament-schweden-staatsschutz-100.html>.
- Holt, Kris. 2024. "EU officials believe Telegram lied about user numbers to skirt regulation." Accessed 13 March 2025. <https://www.engadget.com/big-tech/eu-officials-believe-telegram-lied-about-user-numbers-to-skirt-regulation-165538148.html>
- Houreld, Katharine. 2025. "The Islamic State has regrouped in Somalia — and has global ambitions." Washington Post. Accessed 05 March 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/02/09/somalia-islamic-state-puntland-terrorism/>.
- Immenkamp, Beatrix. 2025. "Strengthening Europol's mandate." EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service. Accessed 06 August 2025. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772865/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)772865_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772865/EPRS_BRI(2025)772865_EN.pdf).
- Indian Express. 2024. "ISIS operative in Kerala found guilty of conspiring to orchestrate terror attack." Accessed 10 March 2025. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/isis-operative-kerala-guilty-conspiring-orchestrate-terror-attack-9148586/>.
- Ingram, Haroro J., and Andrew Mines. 2023. "From Expeditionary to Inspired: Situating External Operations within the Islamic State's Insurgency Method." International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT). Accessed 20 February 2025. <https://icct.nl/publication/expeditionary-inspired-situating-external-operations-within-islamic-states-insurgency>.
- IOM (International Organization for Migration). 2025. "Migration Data Platform for Evidence-Based Regional Development (M-POWERD): Migration from and to Tajikistan." <https://seeecadata.iom.int/msite/seeecadata/country/tajikistan>.
- Jadoon, Amira. 2025. "Presentation at Webinar "ISKP's Evolving Role: Regional Stronghold, Global Reach?"". George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Accessed 05 August 2025. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/iskps-evolving-role-regional-stronghold-global-reach>.
- Jadoon, Amira, Andrew Mines, and Abdul Sayed. 2023. "The Enduring Duel: Islamic State Khorasan's Survival under Afghanistan's New Rulers." *CTC Sentinel* 16 (8): 8-15.
- Jadoon, Amira, Abdul Sayed, Lucas Webber, and Riccardo Valle. 2024. "From Tajikistan to Moscow and Iran: Mapping the Local and Transnational Threat of Islamic State Khorasan." *CTC Sentinel* 17 (5): 1.
- Jedinia, Mehdi. 2016. "IS 'Cyrillic Jihadists' Create Their Own Community in Syria." Voice of America (VOA). Accessed 26 February 2025. <https://www.voanews.com/a/is-cyrillic-jihadists-create-their-own-community-in-syria/3261535.html>.
- Jokinen, Christian. 2020. "The "Tajik Plot" Represents Continuity in Germany's History of Terrorism." *Terrorism Monitor* 18 (9). <https://jamestown.org/program/the-tajik-plot-represents-continuity-in-germanys-history-of-terrorism/>.
- Jones, Seth G. 2015. "Expanding the Caliphate: ISIS' South Asia Strategy." Foreign Affairs. Accessed 30 July 2025. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2015-06-11/expanding-caliphate>.

Kraetzer, Ulrich. 2024. "Islamisten planten Angriff auf liberale Moschee in Berlin." Welt. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article251914406/Terrorismus-Islamisten-wollten-liberale-Moschee-in-Berlin-angreifen.html>.

Krause, Dino. 2025. *Europe's Teenage Jihadists: A Growing Security Challenge*. Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/europes-teenage-jihadists>.

Lemon, Edward. 2017. "The Varied Roads from Central Asia to the Islamic State." Impakter. Accessed 26 February 2025. <http://impakter.com/varied-roads-central-asia-islamic-state/>.

Leonhardt, Christoph, and Muska Haqiqat. 2024. "Was der Aufstieg des IS-PK in Afghanistan bedeutet." Zenith. <https://magazin.zenith.me/de/politik/islamischer-staat-provinz-khorasan-afghanistan>.

Lettgen, Stephanie, and Thorsten Brockmann. 2023. "Anschlagspläne: Mutmaßlicher IS-Anhänger aus Bremerhaven vor Gericht." Nordsee Zeitung. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.nordsee-zeitung.de/Bremerhaven/Anschlagsplaene-Mutmasslicher-IS-Anhaenger-aus-Bremerhaven-vor-Gericht-143167.html?checkout=success&price=9,9&payment=CrefoPay>.

Lunday, Chris. 2025. "German lawmakers float 'Euro Eyes' spy network amid uncertainty on US intel." Politico. Accessed 13 March 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-russia-bundestag-lawmakers-float-euro-spy-network-us-intel/>.

Najibullah, Farangis. 2019. "Tajik Man Emerges In Afghanistan As Leader Of IS Unit Of Central Asian Fighters." Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. Accessed 05 August 2025. <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-islamic-state-central-asia-leader-sayvaly-shafiev/30105372.html>.

Nesser, Petter. 2024. "Introducing the Jihadi Plots in Europe Dataset (JPED)." *Journal of peace research* 61 (2): 317-329. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221123360>.

ÖIF (Österreichischer Integrations Fonds). 2023. *Tschetschenische Bevölkerung in Österreich*. https://www.integrationsfonds.at/fileadmin/content/AT/monitor/Laender_Factsheet_Tschetschenien.pdf.

ORF. 2024. "Stephansdom-Anschlagsplan: Ermittlungen eingestellt." Accessed 12 March 2025. <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3278790/>.

Peeters, Femke, and Jasper van der Schoot. 2024. "Drie Tsjetsjeense terreurverdachten die opgepakt werden na verschillende huiszoekingen blijven aangehouden." Het Laatste Nieuws. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.hln.be/antwerpen/drie-tsjetsjeense-terreurverdachten-die-opgepakt-werden-na-verschillende-huiszoekingen-blijven-aangehouden~a9cdd6e1/>.

Polo, Sara MT, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. 2016. "Twisting arms and sending messages: Terrorist tactics in civil war." *Journal of Peace Research* 53 (6): 815-829.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty. 2020. "Seven Tajik Men Get Prison Terms Over Deadly November Attack On Border Post." Accessed 10 March 2025. <https://www.rferl.org/a/seven-tajik-men-get-prison-terms-over-deadly-november-attack-on-border-post/30725859.html>.

Revenaz, Pauline, and Emilie Rouseey. 2024. "Cibles, profils des suspects... Ce que l'on sait sur les deux attentats "déloués" depuis janvier." BFMTV. Accessed 21 February 2025. https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/terrorisme/cibles-profils-des-suspects-ce-que-l-on-sait-sur-les-deux-attentats-dejoues-depuis-janvier_AV-202403250834.html.

Sanderson, Thomas M, Olga Oliker, Maria Galperin Donnelly, Denis Sokolov, Maxwell B Markusen, Charles Vallee, Uran Botobekov, Byron Tomes, and Seth Harrison. 2017. *Russian-Speaking Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria: Assessing the Threat from (and to) Russia and Central Asia*. Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS).

Sayed, Abdul, and Tore Refslund Hamming. 2023. *The Growing Threat of the Islamic State in Afghanistan and South Asia*. (United States Institute of Peace (USIP)).

Seelow, Soren. 2023. "« La propagande de l'Etat islamique séduit une nouvelle génération d'adolescents » : entretien avec le patron de la DGSI sur la menace terroriste." *Le Monde*. Accessed 21 February 2025. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2023/12/06/l-etat-islamique-beneficie-d-un-attraire-nouveau-au-sein-des-jeunes-generations-l-analyse-du-patron-de-la-dg-si-sur-la-hausse-de-la-menace-terroriste_6204153_3224.html?lmd_medium=al&lmd_campaign=envoye-par-appli&lmd_creation=ios&lmd_source=default&random=406394179.

Şenyurt, Ahmet, and Katharina Willinger. 2024. "Terrorgruppe ISPK - Drehscheibe Istanbul." *Tagesschau*. Accessed 04 March 2025. <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/swr/is-khorasan-terrorismus-prozess-deutschland-tuerkei-100.html>.

Shurson, Jessica. 2024. "A European right to end-to-end encryption?" *Computer Law & Security Review* 55: 106063. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2024.106063>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0267364924001298>.

SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction). 30 January 2017. *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*. (Arlington, VA).

Simon, Michelle Inez. 2024. "How IS-K group linked to Taylor Swift terror plot is increasing in strength and influence." *Sky News*. Accessed 05 March 2025. <https://news.sky.com/story/how-is-k-group-linked-to-taylor-swift-terror-plot-is-increasing-in-strength-and-influence-13206097>.

Soliev, Nodirbek. 2021. "The April 2020 Islamic State Terror Plot Against U.S. and NATO Military Bases in Germany: The Tajik Connection." *CTC Sentinel* 14 (1): 30-37.

Spanner, Elke. 2023. "Was ist ein Geständnis wert?". *Zeit*. Accessed 11 March 2025. <https://www.zeit.de/hamburg/2023-10/is-propaganda-jugendliche-selbstmord-anschlag-gerichtsprozess>.

Spilcker, Axel. 2024. "Abgeschoben, ausgeliefert, ausgereist: Zum Teil auf freiem Fuß: Wo sich die Terror-Planer vom Kölner Dom jetzt aufhalten." *Focus Online*. Accessed 12 March 2025. https://www.focus.de/panorama/abgeschoben-ausgeliefert-ausgereist-koeln-wo-sich-die-terror-planer-vom-dom-jetzt-aufhalten_id_259805519.html.

Stargardt, Gabriel, and Juliette Jabkhiro. 2024. "France races to head off ISIS-K threat to Paris Olympics." *Reuters*. Accessed 28 March 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-races-head-off-isis-k-threat-paris-olympics-2024-07-19/>.

Svenska Dagbladet. 2024. "Erkänner terrorplan mot riksdagen." Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.svd.se/a/4Bx9KG/man-erkanner-terrorplaner-mot-riksdagen>.

Tagesschau. 2022. "Bis zu neuneinhalb Jahre Haft für IS-Terroristen." Accessed 11 March 2025. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/is-terroristen-haft-urteil-duesseldorf-101.html>.

—. 2024. "Verdächtiger tot in Zelle gefunden." Accessed 12 March 2025. <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/anschlagsplaene-koeln-wien-tod-verdaechtiger-100.html>.

- . 2025. "Jena: Islamisten zu mehrjährigen Haftstrafen verurteilt." Accessed 11 March 2025. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/thueringen/mdr-jena-islamisten-zu-mehrjaehrigen-haftstrafen-verurteilt-100.html>.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2023. "Treasury Designates Leaders and Financial Facilitators of ISIS and al-Qa'ida Cells in Maldives." Accessed 10 March 2025. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1659>.
- UNSC (United Nations Security Council). 2022. Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities. In S/2022/547.
- . 2024a. Thirty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2734 (2024) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities. In S/2024/556.
- . 2024b. Thirty-third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities. In S/2024/92.
- . 2025a. Thirty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2734 (2024) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities. In S/2025/71.
- . 2025b. Thirty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2734 (2024) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities. In S/2025/482.
- van der Schoot, Jasper. 2024. "Antwerpse onderzoeksrechter houdt drie van zeven terreurverdachten aan: "Allemaal meerderjarig en van Tsjetsjeense afkomst"." *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Accessed 21 February 2025. <https://www.hln.be/antwerpen/antwerpse-onderzoeksrechter-houdt-drie-van-zeven-terreurverdachten-aan-allemaal-meerderjarig-en-van-tsjetsjeense-afkomst~a0d90ddc/>.
- Vincent, Élise. 2019. "L'attentat de Strasbourg était prémédité." *Le Monde*. Accessed 04 August 2025. https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2019/01/14/l-attentat-de-strasbourg-etait-premedite_5409040_1653578.html.
- Webber, Lucas, and Peter Smith. 2024. "IS Khurasan's Multipolar War: Propaganda and Operations Against the Great Powers." Hudson Institute. Accessed 10 March 2025. <https://www.hudson.org/foreign-policy/khurasans-multipolar-war-propaganda-operations-against-great-powers-peter-smith-lucas-webber#footNote4>.
- Webber, Lucas, and Riccardo Valle. 2023. *The Islamic State's Central Asian Contingents and Their International Threat*. Hudson Institute. <https://www.hudson.org/foreign-policy/islamic-states-central-asian-contingents-their-international-threat>.
- Yawar, Mohammad Yunus, Mushtaq Ali, and YP Rajesh. 2024. "How ISIS-K leader forged one of Islamic State's most fearsome groups." *Reuters*. Accessed 10 March 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/leader-isis-group-linked-moscow-attack-has-global-ambitions-2024-03-25/>.
- Zelin, Aaron Y. 2014. "The Islamic State's Archipelago of Provinces." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Accessed 05 February 2025. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/islamic-states-archipelago-provinces>.

- . 2023. "The Islamic State Select Worldwide Activity Interactive Map." The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/ISEssay2023March17FINAL_0.pdf.
- . 2024a. "A Globally Integrated Islamic State." War on the Rocks. Accessed 10 February 2025. <https://warontherocks.com/2024/07/a-globally-integrated-islamic-state/>.
- . 2024b. *ISKP Goes Global: External Operations from Afghanistan*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iskp-goes-global-external-operations-afghanistan>.
- . 2024c. "The Islamic State's External Operations Are More Than Just ISKP." The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Accessed 10 February 2025. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/islamic-states-external-operations-are-more-just-iskp>.

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies is a leading independent public research institute dedicated to the analysis of international affairs. DIIS conducts and disseminates multidisciplinary research on globalisation, security, development, and foreign policy. DIIS is committed to contributing to academic scholarship, shaping policy agendas, and informing public discourse. We put great effort into ensuring that research findings and their possible applications are accessible and relevant to policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public.

Defence and Security Studies at DIIS

This publication forms part of the Defence and Security Studies project at DIIS. The project aims to provide in-depth multidisciplinary knowledge on topics that are central to Danish defence and security policy, both at present and in the long term. The design and the conclusions of research conducted by the Defence and Security Studies project are fully independent. All reports undergo peer-review. The views expressed do not reflect those of the Danish ministries or any other government agencies involved, nor do they constitute an official position of DIIS. Further information about DIIS and its Defence and Security Studies project can be found at www.diis.dk.

Subscribe to DIIS's newsletter



DIIS · DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Gl. Kalkbrænderi Vej 51A | DK-2100 Copenhagen | Denmark | www.diis.dk