DANISH DEFENCE
INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Intelligence Risk Assessment 2017

An assessment of developments abroad impacting on Danish security

Danish Defence Intelligence Service

Intelligence Risk Assessment
2017

Introduction

The Intelligence Risk Assessment from the Danish Defence Intelligence Service provides a survey of the most serious current threats that could affect Danish national security. We view the threats in perspectives of as much as 10 years into the future.

The Risk Assessment deals with international security trends. This year, its main emphasis is on the cyber threat, Russia's political and military activities, and the terrorist threat from militant Islamist groups. Another high-priority area is the Middle East, which will continue to be fraught with conflicts and generate flows of refugees and migrants.

The main findings show that the cyber threat against Denmark is very high and persistent. Danish public authorities and private companies are facing constant cyber espionage attempts, especially from foreign states. Also, cyber attacks are growing increasingly advanced just as sophisticated hacker tools are spreading to non-state actors. In addition, certain states have shown willingness to launch more offensive cyber attacks aimed, for instance, at swaying public opinion in other countries.

Russia continues its military build-up and modernization in western Russia, and the Baltic Sea region remains a key area of friction between Russia and NATO. In the event of a crisis, Russia could severely hamper NATO's collective security guarantee to the Baltic countries. However, it is highly unlikely that Russia will launch a direct military attack on the three Baltic countries, just as it will not risk a direct confrontation with NATO.

The terrorist threat remains among the most severe threats to Danish national security. Having lost its unbroken belt of territory in Syria and Iraq, ISIL, and by extension the global terrorist threat, is entering a new phase in which the threat is growing increasingly complex. Both radicalized individuals and terrorist groups such as ISIL and al-Qaida will constitute a threat.

The analyses in this Risk Assessment are based on intelligence, and the data have been processed accordingly. However, the Risk Assessment is unclassified and written for a wide audience, which is reflected in the wording and the extent of details contained in the Assessment.

In addition to this annual unclassified Risk Assessment, we produce mainly classified assessments and analyses. These reports are part of the patchwork of information that helps Denmark define and pursue its foreign, security and defence policies as a sovereign state.

Information Cut-Off Date 30 November 2017.

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Contents

Main conclusions

Denmark is continuously facing a very high cyber threat, especially from foreign states. Some states are persistent in their efforts to conduct cyber espionage against Danish public authorities and private companies, and they have become more skilled at disguising their cyber activities. In addition, certain states have shown their willingness to conduct more offensive cyber attacks, such as cyber attacks aimed at swaying public opinion in other countries. At the same time, an increasing number of non-state actors are gaining access to sophisticated hacking tools.

Russia wants the United States to recognize it as an equal great power, and it is also Russia's strategic objective to strengthen its regional security and influence. Russia is significantly building up its ground forces in the western part of the country and its missile systems in the Kaliningrad region. The Baltic Sea region remains an area of tension between Russia and NATO. In the event of a crisis, Russia would be able to threaten NATO efforts to reinforce the Baltic countries. However, it is highly unlikely that Russia would launch a direct military aggression against the three Baltic countries, and Russia will not risk a direct confrontation with NATO. As a result of Russia's closed decision-making processes and Russia's willingness to take risks, Russia's actions and reactions in times of escalating crisis will be difficult to predict, also in the Baltic Sea region. Russia conducts influence campaigns in order to improve its ability to influence public opinion in Western countries in directions favourable to Russia's strategic interest. Consequently, Russia will continue to pose a significant security challenge to the West, including Denmark.

Militant Islamism poses a serious terrorist threat to Denmark and the West. The threat mainly emanates from radicalized lone wolves capable of launching simple attacks and foreign fighters who leave the conflict areas to re-emerge in other countries. Terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qaida (AQ) will continue to plan large, complex attacks in the West. The trend involving terrorist attacks against soft civilian targets will continue to characterize the terrorism landscape, and the West will remain a target of terrorist attacks in the short to medium term.

Conflicts and instability in the Middle East and North Africa will continue to provide fertile ground for extremism and safe havens for terrorist groups, even after ISIL's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria. The regional power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia fuels the conflicts in the region. Iran's regional influence has grown. Iran's missile programme and the nuclear agreement will remain two key points of contention in relations between Iran and the United States. President Bashar al-Assad will highly likely remain in power, and, within a few years, the regime will manage to regain formal control over most parts of the country. Still, the armed conflict is far from over, and Syria will remain riddled with instability for years to come. The country is in ruins, the central power will be weak, and the Assad regime will continue to rely heavily on its allies.

Since 2010, the conflicts in Africa seem to have worsened compared to the previous decade. Several ongoing conflicts have spread across borders, and new alliances between internal and external actors have added new complexity to the conflicts. As a result of the absence of stable state structures and the presence of conflict, Libya will continue to be the main transit point for migration from Africa to Europe.

Russia defines itself as the leading Arctic power and continues to focus on three large Arctic projects with international impact: maritime border demarcation, military expansion and development of the Northern Sea Route. The prospect of shorter shipping routes to Europe and North America and the opportunity to gain access to raw materials in the Arctic have also served to bolster Chinese interest in the region. China wants to increase its influence in the Arctic through trade and research cooperation with the Arctic states, including Denmark.

The political and security development in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Over the next year, the Taliban will continue its military progress despite the efforts of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). However, the Taliban's cohesion is weakened by internal division among its senior leadership. Cohesion within the Afghan national unity government is also under pressure as the ethnic divides harden and as Afghanistan's neighbours and Russia step up their involvement in the conflict.

China's foreign policy influence will continue to grow under President Xi Jinping, and China will become increasingly self-confident on the global scene. China's Belt and Road Initiative will also affect Europe and Denmark. The Chinese leadership uses uncertainty and confusion over US foreign policy to promote its own interests. China will continue its South China Sea policy, and Chinese involvement in Central Asia generates challenges in relations with Russia.

North Korea will continue efforts to establish itself as a nuclear weapons state with long-range ballistic missiles. New North Korean nuclear tests are a possibility, and additional missile tests are highly likely. North Korea will neither succumb to the pressure of sanctions nor abandon its missile and nuclear weapons programme.

The Cyber Threat

Denmark is continuously facing a very high cyber threat, especially from foreign states. Some states are persistent in their efforts to conduct cyber espionage against Danish public authorities and private companies, and they have become more skilled at disguising their cyber activities. In addition, certain states have shown their willingness to conduct more offensive cyber attacks, such as cyber attacks aimed at swaying public opinion in other countries. At the same time, an increasing number of non-state actors are gaining access to sophisticated hacking tools.

Denmark is one of the most digitized countries in the world. Public authorities and private companies are widely digitally interconnected and connected to the rest of the world. Even though digitization and the use of new technology offer numerous benefits and provide the basis for growth, they have also introduced new vulnerabilities that make Denmark a target for cyber attacks.

The processing of sensitive information digitally and via online systems enables hackers to gain access to this information, even though they may be located several thousand kilometres away. In addition, hackers may cause system breakdowns or disruptions with far-reaching consequences to Danish society as an increasing number of critical sectors depend on digital solutions.

Cyber attacks

The term cyber attacks covers incidents where an actor is trying to cause disruptions or gain unauthorized access to data, systems, digital networks or digital services.

As a result of global digitization, cyber attacks launched on the other side of the globe may quickly spread to systems and units in Denmark, both intentionally and unintentionally. The 12 May 2017 WannaCry attack and the 27 June 2017 NotPetya attack are examples of cyber attacks that went global in a matter of few hours and had serious implications for public authorities and private companies worldwide.

Danish public authorities and private companies are engaged in a continuous race with foreign states, hacker groups and individuals capable of continuously developing new ways of using cyber attacks to further their political or economic goals. In particular, the use of cyber attacks by foreign states is increasingly a basic condition that Denmark faces.

Several countries are developing the capabilities to

conduct advanced cyber attacks, and those that already hold advanced cyber capabilities continue to develop and employ them. In addition, some countries are willing to launch attacks for purposes other than cyber espionage, including hack and leak of sensitive information and destructive cyber attacks. However, cyber espionage still poses the greatest cyber threat to Denmark and Danish interests.

Foreign states turn their attention to Denmark

Cyber espionage poses a security and economic threat to Denmark and Danish interests. Some countries are actively engaged in cyber espionage campaigns aimed at stealing information from Danish public authorities and private companies.

Cyber espionage by state actors is a common phenomenon often involving hackers linked to foreign security and intelligence services. However, some countries even outsource espionage activities to hacker groups or IT security companies that already offer vulnerability scans and IT security advice. The use of middlemen has made it easier for these countries to conceal their involvement and deny any knowledge of cyber espionage operations.

The attack on Danish Defence email system

In 2015 and 2016, a hacker group known as APT28, among other names, believed by the public to operate on behalf of the Russian intelligence service, compromised a Danish Defence email system used for non-classified communication. Defence staff members were lured into entering their usernames and passwords on fake login pages, thereby allowing the actor access through the real login pages.

The threat of cyber espionage against Danish public authorities will persist in the long term and is thus a basic condition. Compared to traditional espionage, cyber espionage is a relatively effective and risk-free method for foreign security and intelligence services to gain information. The states can potentially gain access to networks worldwide, and their attacks are often difficult to detect. In addition, they can use relatively simple means to hide the identity of the attacker and thus avoid potential sanctions in case the malicious behaviour is detected. Consequently, states with the capabilities to conduct cyber espionage will continue to attack targets of strategic, geopolitical and economic relevance.

The threat of cyber espionage is especially directed at the parts of the public sector in Denmark that hold information of strategic, political and economic importance. Foreign states persistently target authorities that are vital to Danish foreign and security policy. Consequently, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its representations abroad have repeatedly been targets of cyber espionage attempts. Similarly, there have been persistent attempts at espionage against the Danish Ministry of Defence as well as against Danish institutions and individuals affiliated with the Danish Defence and NATO.

Russia

Russia is still a leading and highly active actor in the cyber realm. Russia has extensive capabilities for carrying out cyber espionage and destructive cyber attacks that can underpin its strategic and security policy interests and bolstering its military operations. Russia has invested intensively in its capabilities to promote its interests in the West and has been known to use cyber attacks to achieve this goal.

Unlike physical threats, the threat of cyber espionage is not confined to geographical areas. Danish troops deployed abroad, for instance to the Baltic or Iraq, may thus become targets of cyber espionage as a result of their presence in the countries to which they are deployed or their affiliation with authorities and staffs in Denmark.

Cyber attacks have also been directed against Danish diplomatic representations abroad. The threat against Danish representations emanates in part from foreign states wanting to spy against Denmark and Danish foreign policy and in part from foreign states wanting to use Danish representations as a launch pad for cyber espionage campaigns against the countries or regions where the representations are located. Some Danish representations may have caught the interest of foreign states due to their special role in international organizations.

Danish companies are exposed to financially motivated cyber espionage

Some foreign states also conduct cyber espionage against Danish companies. Industrial espionage via the Internet is an attractive method for states to reap the benefits of the knowledge and technology developed by other countries, saving them time and resources they would otherwise have spent developing the technologies on their own. Thus, foreign states will continue to collect data and steal intellectual property that could support their economic interests and enable them to gain a competitive edge over their competitors in the international market. Therefore, the threat of industrial espionage has a special focus on research-heavy institutions within fields such as high-tech, energy and pharmaceuticals.

China

China has advanced cyber capabilities, which it uses for defensive and offensive purposes alike. China has just concluded a major military reorganization of its cyber capabilities, likely allowing Chinese actors to conduct more sophisticated cyber espionage campaigns that are harder to detect. Chinese intelligence services have repeatedly been accused of extensive cyber espionage campaigns against public authorities and private companies on a global scale.

State-sponsored hacker groups also direct cyber attacks at companies and subcontractors that can be used as launch pads for gaining access to information on their end targets. The growing use of subcontractors and outsourcing of IT operations or infrastructure may increase the vulnerability of Danish public authorities and private companies to cyber espionage, as the subcontractors often have access to sensitive client information. In addition, it may prove difficult to pull IT management back in-house or maintain

control of outsourced infrastructure abroad in case of a diplomatic or military crisis.

In 2017, certain state-sponsored hacker groups have specifically targeted subcontractors offering cloud solutions and data storage services globally. By compromising these subcontractors, the state perpetrators have been able to gain remote access to client networks and steal information. Because the states exploited the subcontractors' trusted networks and used legitimate usernames and passwords, it proved difficult for the victims to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate activity. In some instances, the actors also gained access to client data stored on the subcontractors' own servers.

Other state-sponsored hacker groups have deliberately targeted Western law and consultancy firms within the investment industry in a bid to gain access to relevant and often sensitive information from the companies themselves as well as from their clients.

States are increasing their efforts to disguise their cyber activities
States are making strong efforts to cover all traces of their cyber espionage activities. Some state-sponsored hacker groups use considerable resources on technical tools enabling them to disguise their online activities, possibly due to the public revelations of cyber operations in which the identities of state-employed hackers have been revealed.

The states use different methods to disguise the origin of the cyber espionage. Some state-sponsored hacker groups have abandoned the tools that used to be the hallmark of their cyber campaigns. Other state-sponsored hacker groups are making efforts to ensure their anonymity by increasingly using publicly available tools used by cyber criminals or legitimate IT security companies and experts alike. When states use publicly available tools instead of their own unique tools, it becomes easier for them to disclaim their involvement.

Some state-sponsored hacker groups likely pose as cyber activists or cyber criminals to hide their involvement and motives. Thus, there have been numerous examples of cyber activist hacker groups suddenly appearing and claiming responsibility for sophisticated cyber operations. Creating these fictitious hacker groups will enable the states to hide the real identity of the attacker to the public.

States attack in different ways
Several states have demonstrated the will to launch cyber attacks for purposes other than cyber espionage, such as hack and leak campaigns and destructive cyber attacks. Stolen information has repeatedly been leaked in a bid to sway public opinion or political decisions. This has happened in connection with elections abroad where the attacks have been aimed at adversely affecting the public's view of and trust in specific politicians as well as causing people to lose trust in the democratic process. An example is the hack and leak campaign during the US presidential election in 2016 where US Intelligence Services have attributed the cyber attacks to Russia.

In these incidents, cyber attacks have been but one tool in wider information and influence campaigns, which have included fake online news stories and social media activities amongst else. It is possible that cyber attacks, such as hack and leak of sensitive information, may be used to sway public opinion in Denmark. The threat of such cyber attacks could rise in connection with political incidents whose outcome foreign states may have an interest in affecting or in connection with political or military conflicts.

Iran

Over the past few years, Iran has improved its cyber capabilities. In addition to cyber espionage activities, Iranian hacker groups may have been behind simple destructive cyber attacks that wiped data on thousands of computers. These attacks targeted the chemical, oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

North Korea

For several years, North Korea has developed a significant capability to launch different types of cyber attacks, including simple destructive cyber attacks. These attacks have especially targeted South Korea, but North Korea is likely also willing and able to launch large-scale cyber attacks against targets in other countries. In addition, there are indications that North Korea is engaged in cyber crime abroad.
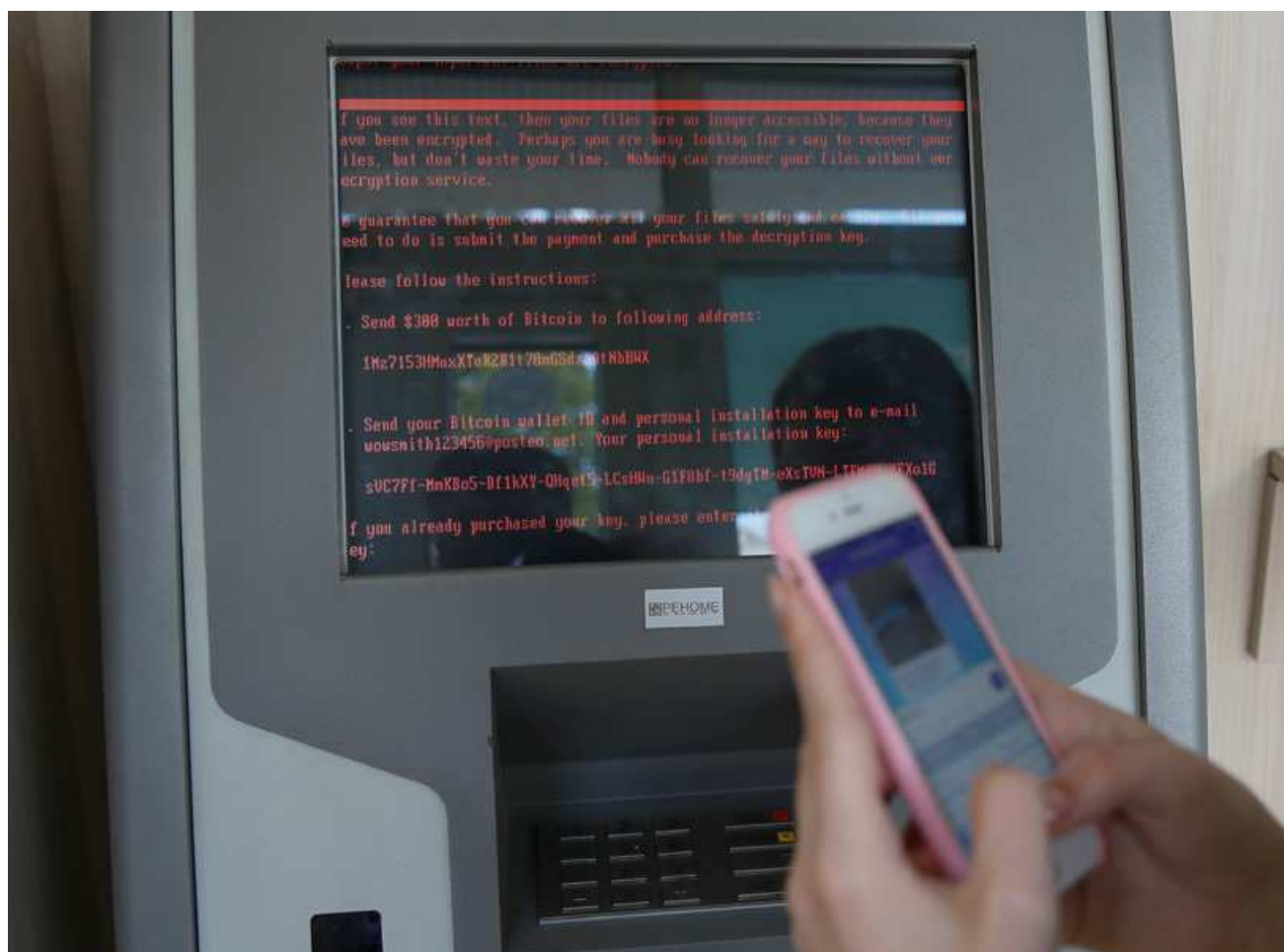
It is highly likely that some states have become more willing to launch destructive cyber attacks. Destructive cyber attacks are attacks that could potentially result in death, personal injury, property damage or destruction or manipulation of information, data or software, rendering them unfit for use unless extensive restoration is undertaken. One example of a destructive cyber attack is the Shamoon2 attack, which destroyed data on thousands of computers in Saudi Arabia, in particular, in late 2016 and early 2017. Other examples of destructive cyber attacks include the December 2015 and December 2016 attacks against Ukrainian electricity companies. Both attacks caused blackouts in parts of the country, and the attacks made it more difficult to restore power.

In the short term, it is less likely that foreign states will launch such attacks on critical infrastructure in Denmark.

However, at present, Danish companies may risk becoming collateral damage in connection with destructive cyber attacks against targets outside of Denmark, especially companies operating in conflict areas where foreign states or organized hacker groups with strong cyber capabilities

The NotPetya attack

The NotPetya attack, which struck Ukraine on 27 June 2017, is an example of a destructive cyber attack that affected Danish companies. The NotPetya attack is the largest destructive cyber attack ever seen in Europe, indicating an increasing readiness to use this type of attack even though the consequences may be hard to predict.

Ukrainian ATM that was down following the NotPetya attack

have vested interests, for example in parts of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Criminals and activists gain access to more and improved cyber tools
An increasing number of hacking tools are readily available for download on the Internet. Hacking tools are shared and traded on the Internet, and when new malware techniques or information on system vulnerabilities are shared online, the hackers are quick to exploit or improve them. Often the hackers are faster to exploit vulnerabilities than private companies and public authorities are to protect themselves against them.

For example, in September 2016, the Mirai malware code was shared on a hacker forum, and the code was subsequently used to launch some of the largest Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks to date. DDoS attacks deliberately overload websites or servers, rendering them useless. One of these attacks rendered several Internet services such as Twitter and Netflix unavailable. In addition, the dissemination of hacking tools enables individuals and groups with limited IT skills to buy DDoS attacks, thereby contributing to the increasing number of this type of attack.

Hackers also share and sell more advanced tools and vulnerabilities online. As a result, tools and vulnerabilities that were previously used or exploited by states are increasingly also available to cyber criminals or cyber activists.

There have been several examples of hackers having either sold or shared advanced tools and information on vulnerabilities, which they claim to have stolen from different intelligence services or private companies that have developed the tools in order to sell them to various states. In the wake of leaks or sales, hackers have been particularly quick to exploit these new tools and vulnerabilities. Consequently, public authorities, private companies and citizens may be increasingly targeted with cyber attacks with harmful effects.

For example, sale of advanced cyber tools enabled the WannaCry and NotPetya ransomware attacks. Launched on 12 May 2017, the WannaCry attack spread rapidly, affecting several hundred thousand computers worldwide. The reason why the WannaCry attack had such a wide effect was the way it was spread. Unlike many other types of malware, WannaCry was able to infect computers without requiring the victims to click on any links or download any files. This was possible because the attackers used advanced tools that had been sold online two months earlier by a group calling itself Shadow Brokers. Shadow Brokers claims to have stolen these tools from the United States' National Security Agency. On 27 June 2017, Shadow Brokers' tools were used once again in the NotPetya attack, which affected Maersk, among others.

The threat of cyber crime is very high and increasingly complex
Cyber crime will continue to pose a substantial threat to Danish public authorities, private companies and citizens in the long term. Cyber criminals are creative in their attempts to make financial gain, and they use an array of cyber attacks, some displaying increased sophistication and complexity. There have been examples of cyber criminals launching advanced digital bank robberies and defrauding companies of millions or blackmailing companies into paying very high sums of money. Thus, cyber crime ranges from sophisticated attacks against financial systems to simple attacks that could, in principle, be launched by criminals with very limited hacking skills, such as manipulation of employees by means of fake e-mails.

There is a prominent threat from cyber crime aimed at extorting money from public authorities or private companies. Cyber criminals launch ransomware attacks that involve installing malware that encrypts data on the victim's computer and demanding ransom to restore the victim's access to the data. In addition to having financial consequences for the affected organization, ransomware attacks could potentially affect society in general, as they could cause disruption to vital services such as hospital care and transportation.

Cyber criminals also use other means than ransomware to extort their victims, for example by launching DDoS attacks or by threatening to publish stolen data. The latter happened to the telecom company "3" in Denmark, when hackers in February 2017 demanded millions for not publishing data stolen from the company.

Denmark may land in cyber activists' crosshairs
Examples of severe cyber activism against Danish public authorities or private companies are few. However, some hacker groups and individuals associated with cyber activist networks have significant capabilities and the resources to launch cyber attacks. Thus, the threat may suddenly

increase if Danish public authorities or private companies attract the attention of cyber activists.

That was the case in September 2017, when a DDoS attack likely launched by Turkish cyber activists temporarily made the websites of the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office unavailable. The attack was likely launched in response to a debate on the Muhammad cartoons. The group, which calls itself Aslan Neferler Tim, has repeatedly claimed responsibility throughout 2017 for cyber attacks against European countries that the group claims have offended Turkey's leaders, Turkish national pride or Islam.

Militant extremists lack the skills and resources to conduct cyber terrorism
Militant extremists have limited skills and resources for launching serious cyber attacks, and despite having expressed an interest in conducting cyber terrorism, they currently lack the capabilities for doing so. Consequently, there is a low threat against Denmark from cyber attacks that have the same purpose as conventional terrorism.

Over the past year, several hacker groups supporting ISIL have made efforts to bolster their cyber capabilities by forming a hacker network called United Cyber Caliphate (UCC). However, so far, their skills and resources remain limited. At present, they are only capable of launching simple cyber attacks aimed, in particular, at creating attention and disseminating ISIL propaganda.

The UCC has not to any great extent been able to launch targeted attacks. Consequently, the network has primarily directed its attacks at websites with low IT security, ranging from the websites of dance instructors to those of car enthusiasts.

So far, ISIL's leadership has not officially recognized the UCC. The threat from hackers supporting ISIL or other extremist terrorist groups could increase if groups such as ISIL choose to support the UCC or other hacker groups in future. In the short term, it is less likely that ISIL or other Sunni extremist terrorist groups will support the development of cyber capabilities to the extent that the threat of cyber terrorism will rise as a result.

Militant extremists with sufficient financial resources can also purchase more advanced cyber capabilities. However, the tools they can acquire at present are not advanced enough to launch serious cyber attacks that have the same effect as conventional terrorism.

Russia

Russia wants the United States to recognize it as an equal great power, and it is also Russia's strategic objective to strengthen its regional security and influence. Russia is significantly building up its ground forces in the western part of the country and its missile systems in the Kaliningrad region. The Baltic Sea region remains an area of tension between Russia and NATO. In the event of a crisis, Russia would be able to threaten NATO efforts to reinforce the Baltic countries. However, it is highly unlikely that Russia would launch a direct military aggression against the three Baltic countries, and Russia will not risk a direct confrontation with NATO. As a result of Russia's closed decision-making processes and Russia's willingness to take risks, Russia's actions and reactions in times of escalating crisis will be difficult to predict, also in the Baltic Sea region. Russia conducts influence campaigns in order to improve its ability to influence public opinion in Western countries in directions favourable to Russia's strategic interest. Consequently, Russia will continue to pose a significant security challenge to the West, including Denmark.

Russia's claim to be a global great power rests on weak foundations. However, when Russia chooses to confront the West, the ability of its leadership to make quick and high-risk decisions can give Russia tactical advantages towards the West. In addition, Russia's leadership has demonstrated its willingness to use a wide range of instruments, including military means, hybrid warfare, and information and influence campaigns to achieve its strategic objectives.

Despite strained relations with the United States, Russia's primary strategic objective will still be to obtain US recognition of Russia as an equal great power. Russia's expectations of an understanding with the United States for a new foundation for the relations between the two great powers have not been realised. Still, Russia and the United States will have to find ways to address a wide range of strategic issues pragmatically.

Russia wants the two great powers to mutually recognize and respect that they have different, and at times competing, strategic interests. Russia likely wants to obtain US acceptance that the post-Soviet space, in particular Ukraine, constitutes Russia's sphere of interest. In addition, based on its position in Syria, Russia also likely wants US recognition of Russia's future key role in the Middle East.

In Russia's view a Russian-US understanding along such lines will stabilize relations between the two great powers and make it possible for them to handle their competing strategic differences and thus also to regulate key aspects of international politics with respect for the opposite side's interests.

Russia is seeking many avenues to great power status
Russia's claim to be a global great power rests on weak foundations, as Russia – according to political, economic and military yardsticks – is inferior to the United States and

the West and, in part, to China. Russia's economy remains dependent on export revenue from raw materials and energy and this limits the country's ability to sustain its claim to be a global great power. However, Russia's leadership does not let Russia's economic situation influence its global strategic ambitions in any substantial way.

Apart from Russia's permanent membership of the UN Security Council, Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal is the only asset that puts it on an equal footing with the United States. Consequently, Russia will continue to give high priority to its strategic nuclear weapons. Russia sees the military-technological superiority of the United States – including the US programmes for conventional long-range weapons systems and NATO's missile defence programme – as a potential threat to its ability to preserve its nuclear deterrent towards the United States.

Russia is seeking many avenues to the status of a global great power capable of challenging the United States as the strategic nuclear weapons and Russia's permanent membership of the UN Security Council are insufficient to achieve this objective. Russia has thus succeeded in using its political and military involvement in Syria to gain a key role in the Middle East to the point where the United States has to accept Russia as an unavoidable actor in the international attempts to regulate and solve several of the many crises in the Middle East.

Russia is also trying to position itself as a key actor in global politics by aligning with large and small states that – like Russia – are attempting to challenge the United States and the West. Thus, Russia is cooperating in various degrees with e.g. Belarus, Syria and Iran. However, all of Russia's partners share a common distrust of Russia's intentions, including China, which will not let its cooperation with Russia evolve into a full-fledged alliance.

In order to sustain its great power role, Russia is willing to use military force within a wide spectrum of possibilities. Thus, Russia has conducted full-scale warfare with Georgia, hybrid warfare in Ukraine, has militarily annexed Crimea, and has militarily intervened in Syria. Russia also regularly uses its forces for strategic messaging in the form of exercises in the vicinity of NATO member states and in the form of long-range power projection involving naval vessels and strategic bombers. Finally, Russia also uses threatening military rhetoric against neighbours, e.g. in the Nordic region and in the Baltic Sea region, if Russia finds their security policy unacceptable.

Russia wants spheres of interest and security zones
It is also a main strategic objective for Russia to strengthen its regional security and influence. In Russia's understanding, this objective cannot be reached by bilateral cooperation and regional confidence-building measures but primarily by spheres of interest and security zones which give strategic depth to the military defence of Russia.

In Russia's understanding, its neighbours in the post-Soviet space – particularly in areas with Russian-speaking minorities of the Russian-Orthodox faith, viz. mainly Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova – belong to Russia's sphere of interest due to their shared history and culture. In Russia's view, NATO and the EU have encroached on its sphere of interest in the post-Soviet space with the purpose of disseminating Western democratic ideals and standards and undermining Russia's security interests. Russia's ambition to secure its historical and cultural sphere of interest is thus closely linked to its security objective of keeping the EU and, in particular, NATO from encroaching on its borders. To this end, Russia seeks to maintain dominating influence on its neighbours' foreign and security policy, claiming that Ukraine, in particular, is crucial to Russia's strategic interests in the post-Soviet space.

It is therefore Russia's intention to maintain the status quo in south-eastern Ukraine as it prevents Ukraine from getting NATO and EU membership. Western sanctions will likely not significantly change Russia's policy towards Ukraine, despite their negative impact on the Russian economy. In the Minsk negotiations on south-eastern Ukraine, Russia will only make tactical concessions with the intent to portray the government in Kiev as the obstructive party. In the long term, Russia will also uphold its military threat to Ukraine, which it can carry out with short notice.

In addition, Russia will seek to strengthen its regional influence and security outside the post-Soviet space, in particular along its western borders with NATO member states and from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and also in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Russia improves its ability to threaten NATO access to the Baltic countries
The Baltic Sea region remains an area of tension between Russia and NATO. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has caused Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to call for measures to reassure NATO's collective defence commitment to the three NATO member states.

Russia is deeply wary of NATO's presence and activities in the Baltic Sea region and of Sweden's and Finland's military cooperation with NATO. Russia will attempt to influence and deter Sweden and Finland with political means and also partly with rhetoric military threats from applying for NATO membership.

Russia still regards Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as part of its historical sphere of interest, but the three countries' membership of NATO and EU significantly limits Russia's possibilities for regaining dominance over them. In the first half of 2017, NATO started deploying the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) to the three Baltic countries and Poland. The purpose of the eFP is to send a strong message that NATO takes its commitment to collective defence of the countries seriously.

Though it is highly unlikely that Russia will launch direct military aggression against the three Baltic countries, it is Russia's intention to undermine the credibility of NATO's collective defence of the three countries.

Russia is building up its forces in western Russia but has not built up its forces along the border with Estonia and Latvia, where Russia has garrisoned one army tasked with territorial defence as well as airborne forces on high alert. However, Russia has the capacity to deploy additional forces with less than a week's notice to the areas bordering the Baltic countries, where Russia can assemble ground and airborne forces that would be superior to the forces of the Baltic countries and deployed NATO forces.

Russia is increasing and upgrading its mobile and modern long-range missile systems, its so-called Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capacity, in the Kaliningrad region and in

western Russia. This will enable Russia to threaten NATO movements in the Baltic Sea and the Baltic Sea airspace to the point where it would be time-consuming and risky for NATO to deploy reinforcements to the Baltic countries in times of crisis.

Over the past years, Russia has deployed several long-range air defence missile systems to the western military district and the Kaliningrad region. In the last half of 2016, the Baltic Sea Fleet also received modern, long-range Bastion coastal defence missiles and new missile corvettes armed with long-range Kalibr missiles capable of striking sea and ground targets. Finally, Russia is preparing to permanently deploy surface-to-surface Iskander missiles in the Kaliningrad region.

In an escalating crisis, Russia could use its local superiority and its A2/AD capacity to put the Baltic countries and NATO under significant military, and thus also political, pressure with the purpose of threatening NATO's ability to exercise its collective defence commitment.

Russia's closed decision-making processes and the willingness of Russia's leadership's to take risky decisions increase the risk of misunderstandings and miscalculations.

Thus, Russia's actions and reactions in times of an escalating crisis will be difficult to predict, also in the Baltic Sea region.

Russia will strengthen its regional influence in the Black Sea and Western Balkans

Russia is determined to fully integrate Crimea, and it is highly unlikely that Russia will abandon its de facto control of the peninsula. Russia has also increased its military presence in Crimea and now has the ability to dominate large parts of the Black Sea with, in particular, long-range missile systems deployed in Crimea.

Russia is also showing a growing interest in increasing its influence in the Western Balkans, in particular Serbia, and among the Bosnian-Serbian community in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Macedonia. Russia wants to keep the three countries out of NATO and to ensure that they maintain their alliance-free status. Russia highly likely supported the autumn 2016 coup attempt in Montenegro to prevent it from entering NATO in the summer of 2017. Similarly, Russia likely intended its support for the coup attempt to demonstrate its willingness to go to great lengths to support pro-Russian forces in the Western Balkans.

Map of the approximate ranges of the Russian mobile missile systems in the Baltic Sea region

Russia uses its presence in Syria for regional influence
Russia's military intervention in Syria has placed Russia in a key role in the international negotiations on the Syrian crisis. It is a highly prioritized objective for Russia to position itself as a decisive actor in the Middle East on an equal footing the United States. Consequently, Russia intends to use its role in the international negotiations on Syria and its presence in the country as a platform for regional influence in the Middle East and the Mediterranean in general. Russia will thus try to improve its bilateral relations with key regional powers in the Middle East, including Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Russia will likely also try to use its links to the Egyptian regime and to militia leaders in eastern Libya to increase its presence in the eastern and southern Mediterranean through a mix of political and economic means, as well as military means in the form of logistical and weapons support.

Russia conducts centrally controlled influence campaigns
In Russia's assessment, tensions between the political elites and new populistic political movements in several Western countries have, to some extent, improved Russia's ability to influence public opinion in the West in directions favourable to Russia's interests. As part of its Soviet legacy, Russia has the experience to conduct information and influence campaigns, but today the popularity of social media makes such campaigns highly effective. Russia uses influence campaigns to fuel public distrust of Western politicians, authorities and opinion makers and to undermine the credibility of Western media. In the short term, Russia may aim at influencing a specific election campaign or, in the long term, at deepening internal discord and division among the citizens of a Western country.

Russia's information and influence campaigns are also intended to create division within Western international organizations. Finally, Russia also intends to weaken the appeal of the West to the populations in what Russia perceives as its sphere of influence and, in the process, the West's and NATO's engagement and presence in this area.

Russia uses state-controlled media targeting Western audiences, dissemination of information through Russian think tanks and research institutions, wholly and partially state-owned media channels that appear to have no state affiliation, and social media activities in which the Russian origin has been disguised.

Russia also uses more direct approaches to influence individual political actors and other decision or opinion makers to cultivate views that are sympathetic to Russia inside national parliaments, governments or international organizations. Russia is trying to disguise the involvement of the state by using non-state Russian actors or Western actors as intermediaries, tailoring its methods to the situation in each individual country.

Influence campaigns – a growing threat to Denmark
Russian influence campaigns will likely constitute a growing threat, also against Demark, which may become the target of Russian influence campaigns with little or no warning. Russia would highly likely target and adjust influence campaigns against Denmark. Russian influence campaigns against Denmark may originate from an intention to influence a Danish election campaign or from Russia's general strategic intention to influence the situation in the Baltic Sea region. In this connection, Russia's increased information and influence efforts against, for instance, the Baltic countries, Sweden and Finland could also lead to an increased focus on Denmark.

Russia's main strategic objectives are static
Russia's main strategic objectives will likely remain largely unchanged. President Vladimir Putin will highly likely be re-elected in the spring of 2018, and reshuffles in the top of Russia's leadership will basically leave a country's key strategic objectives unchanged. Russia's great power role and its demand for spheres of interest and security zones are cornerstones in its strategic objectives, and Russia will in the long term with patience pursue these objectives despite the country's weak foundations for a global great power role.

Russia's leadership will continue its efforts to strengthen its domestic legitimacy with an often assertive foreign policy, portraying it as a defence against the threat from the United States and the West.

The opposition in Russia is weak and divided, and there are no major actors in Russia that can challenge the country's main strategic objectives or offer Russia's leadership serious opposition based on a Western-oriented political agenda. Russia's leadership will thus likely still enjoy widespread support among the Russian political establishment and the population for massive economic investments in the build-up of modern military forces to sustain Russia's key strategic policy objectives.

Russia achieves strategic objectives

Russia has since 2013 with boldness and success intervened in Ukraine and Syria and has thus created results that contribute to Russia's main strategic objectives. Russia will still attempt to exploit favourable conditions to achieve these objectives.

Russia's leadership is able to take quick and risky political decisions due to the strongly centralized and closed political decision-making process. Furthermore, in Russia no independent and powerful public opinion interferes in the leadership's decision-making process. Russia's leadership is thus able to react quickly, decisively and in unison. This gives Russia a tactical advantage which Russia may attempt to exploit and turn into a relative strategic advantage vis-à- vis the West.

Russia's leadership has demonstrated its willingness to use and coordinate influence and cyber operations, offensive intelligence operations, hybrid warfare and military means to achieve strategic objectives. Russia's leadership has also demonstrated its ability to disguise and deny its involvement.

Russia will accept risks to achieve strategic objectives

Russia will still be willing to accept risks in order to secure its dominant influence in the post-Soviet space. This could happen if e.g. Russia assesses that its strategic interests in the area is seriously threated by the West or if Russia assesses that it has the opportunity to exploit favourable situations to further consolidate its influence. In addition, Russia will likely also be willing to accept risks to achieve strategic objectives outside the post-Soviet space, if favourable opportunities arise.

Russia will use military means, within the concept of hybrid warfare, to put inferior adversaries under significant pressure in order to weaken their resolve and resilience. In the event of an escalating crisis involving NATO, Russia would likely attempt to maximise its influence and control of the crisis by maintaining the ability to decide, react and deploy forces more swiftly than NATO.

Russia will likely be willing to escalate its use of military means to the threshold of the risk of a military confrontation with the United States and NATO. Due to NATO's overall military superiority, Russia's leadership will not risk a direct military confrontation with the United States and NATO.

Because of Russia's deep mistrust of NATO, there is a risk that Russia's leadership, in the event of a crisis, could misunderstand NATO's intentions and military dispositions and activities. Such a situation would contribute to the uncertainty about Russia's initiatives and reactions in an escalating crisis.

Russia builds up its ground forces in western Russia

Since 2016, Russia has been building up its ground forces in the Western Military district, which is responsible for Russia's western strategic direction.

The build-up is part of the reorganization of the command structures from independent brigades to the re-introduction of divisions with subordinate combat and combat service support regiments. The build-up encompasses a substantial increase in the number of combat essential equipment such as tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and artillery systems. In addition, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), command and control systems, and electronic warfare capabilities have significantly improved.

The re-introduction of the division as a formation demonstrates that Russia deems it necessary to re-establish larger tactical units that are capable of conducting cohesive combat operations against an equal adversary. The new divisions and command structures will likely be fully operational around 2020.

The place of garrison of the three new divisions is an indication that Russia mainly wants to consolidate its superior military presence close to Ukraine.

In the short term, the new divisions will also improve Russia's ability to deploy battalion tactical groups, which during the Ukraine crisis proved highly effective in the context of hybrid warfare against an inferior adversary.

In the framework of large exercises, Russia regularly trains deployment of forces over long distances. As a result, Russia has developed the ability to flexibly and quickly change its military focus between the country's different strategic directions and thus to achieve and consolidate local military superiority.

Russia capable of maintaining military strategic priorities despite ailing economy

Even though the country's ailing economy has forced Russia's leadership to cut the defence budget, Russia

remains determined to continue its military build-up and modernization programme. In the short to medium term, it is highly unlikely that these cuts will impact decisively on Russia's military strategic priorities, i.e. preservation of a nuclear deterrence, the capability for global power projection and military superiority in the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, the defence cuts will likely initially impact on expensive prestige projects such as a new aircraft carrier project and the development of new combat aircraft and combat vehicles. Overall, the defence budget cuts are limited compared to the very strong budget increases seen until 2016.

Russia's military strategic priorities

Russia sees military means as a key instrument in establishing its role as a global great power. In addition to the build-up of conventional local superiority, Russia's military strategy also encompasses:

Nuclear deterrence
- Russia possesses a wide array of nuclear weapons, from short-range artillery grenades to intercontinental ballistic missiles. The role of the strategic nuclear weapons is strategic retaliation and elimination of enemies if Russia itself were to become the target of a nuclear attack.

- A key element in Russia's strategic doctrine is the flexible use of nuclear weapons to stop a conflict threatening the survival of Russia as a state, even if the conflict is conventional. Russia is using this strategy to compensate for its conventional inferiority in the event of a conflict with the West or China. Russia's first step would likely be to use a smaller tactical nuclear weapon against a military target with the lowest possible civilian collateral damage. The purpose would be to strongly warn adversaries that Russia is ready to escalate the conflict to nuclear war, thus forcing a negotiated solution to the conflict which is acceptable to Russia.

Strategic power projection

- Russia gives high priority to demonstrating military power over long distances mainly through strategic bombers, naval units and submarines armed with advanced long-range cruise missiles. Specific examples that have impacted on Danish security policy are Russia's flights with strategic bombers near Danish territory in the North Sea, the Baltic Sea and in the Arctic area. Russia's ambitions for projection of military power in the Arctic have also been reflected in exercises involving air landing of airborne troops on the North Pole, far from Russian borders.

Zapad 2017

Russia conducted its annual strategic military exercise in September 2017. Every year, the geographical focus of the exercise alternates among Russia's four military districts. This year's exercise focused on a conflict in the western direction.

The official exercise scenario was to defend Belarus and western Russia against illegal armed groups and Western military incursion. The first stages of the scenario included deployment and stability operations. Subsequently, the exercise scenario changed into a full-scale Western invasion of Russia and Belarus, thus having the Russian and Belarussian forces transitioning to combat operations, eventually defeating their adversaries and re-establishing territorial integrity. Therefore, the exercise scenario is fully aligned with Russia's view of the West and NATO, which are defined as the greatest threat to Russian national security.

Russia does not observe international regulations on transparency

Within the framework of the Vienna Document, the OSCE countries, including Russia, have agreed to apply transparency measures in connection with large military exercises. However, Russia regularly disregards the spirit of the treaty by utilising no-notice exercises and dividing the exercise activities into smaller areas, claiming that the exercises are independent and coincidentally concurrent. Illustrative of this was the Kavkaz 2016 exercise when Chief of the General Staff Valerij Gerasimov stated that 120,000 troops had participated in the exercise. However, Gerasimov emphasised that no more than 12,500 troops were present in the same training area at any one time, citing that the number of troops did not exceed the threshold stipulated in the Vienna Document.

It is likely that the Zapad 2017 exercise and the Kavkaz 2016 exercise were largely equal in size and that, this year, Russia used the same methods as in 2016 and earlier to conceal the actual size of the exercise.

Russia avoided provocative and escalating activities

We have no information that simulated attacks on Western countries or deliberate violations of territorial borders were conducted during Zapad 2017. Overall, the Zapad 2017 exercise leaves the impression that Russia focused on exercising the deployment and command and control of forces in a regional conflict against the West rather than use the exercise as military muscle-flexing or intimidating military conduct in the Baltic Sea region. This impression is underpinned by the absence of major amphibious assault landing exercises or significant deployments into the Kaliningrad region close to the Polish and Lithuanian borders. Russia likely refrained from these activities to avoid further escalation of already high tensions in the region.

Terrorism

Militant Islamism poses a serious terrorist threat to Denmark and the West. The threat mainly emanates from radicalized lone wolves capable of launching simple attacks and foreign fighters who leave the conflict areas to re-emerge in other countries. Terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qaida (AQ) will continue to plan large, complex attacks in the West. The trend involving terrorist attacks against soft civilian targets will continue to characterize the terrorism landscape, and the West will remain a target of terrorist attacks in the short to medium term.

For a number of years, ISIL has posed the number one global terrorist threat. Since 2014, Syria and Iraq have provided a safe haven for terrorism launched against the West. For a number of years, al-Qaida has also enjoyed a safe haven in Syria, and just like ISIL, al-Qaida has a strategy aimed at attacks in the West. Both groups use propaganda to disseminate their militant ideology to a global audience.

Most of the attacks launched in Europe since 2014 are attributable to ISIL. The group has both planned and directed complex attacks out of Syria, it has enabled individuals in Europe in their terrorist planning, and it has used its propaganda to inspire sympathizers to launch terrorist attacks.

Having lost its safe havens in Syria and Iraq, ISIL is now entering a new phase and, as a result, the global terrorist threat is becoming ever more amorphous and unpredictable. One thing is clear, though: the capacity built up by ISIL in recent years and the militant and deeply violent ideology disseminated by the group through its propaganda will characterize the terrorist threat for years to come. This is partly the result of the conflict in Syria and Iraq having spawned a new generation of militant Islamists who will become part of the future transnational networks, and it is partly the consequence of ISIL having preserved the capacity to inspire and mobilize sympathizers into acts of terrorism.

Sympathizers are a serious threat to the West

In recent years, most attacks and attempted attacks by militant Islamists in Europe have been launched by sympathizers of ISIL and al-Qaida inspired and motivated by the groups' propaganda. These sympathizers are radicalized individuals who, with simple means and independently, or with limited assistance from ISIL or al-Qaida, launch attacks in the West.

Over the past decade, militant Islamist propaganda has evolved, becoming increasingly professional, targeting a younger audience and reaching a still larger audience through digital medi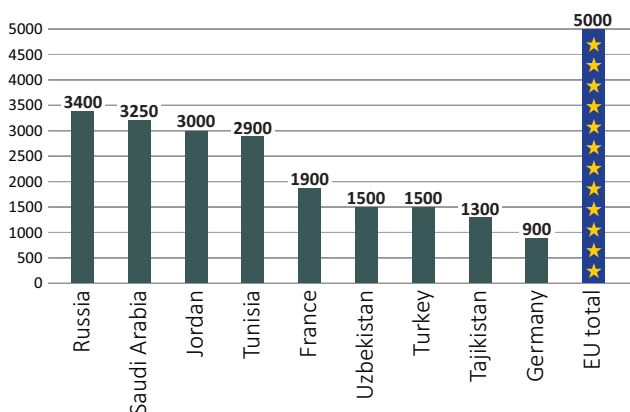a. The propaganda calls for attacks with simple means and contains detailed manuals on how to produce explosives and bombs.

As ISIL finds itself under growing military pressure in Syria and Iraq, its leadership has increasingly started urging sympathizers to remain in Europe and launch attacks in their home countries rather than travel to combat zones. Moreover, in recent years, several attacks and attempted attacks in Europe have been launched by sympathizers who have wanted to travel to conflict zones but have been prevented from doing so.

Propaganda will remain a key element in militant Islamists' efforts to disseminate their messages. The loss of safe havens in Syria and Iraq will likely cause a drop in the amount and quality of centrally produced propaganda. However, ISIL has managed to set up a decentralized propaganda regime with propaganda being produced by members of ISIL as well as by ISIL supporters globally.

This method will allow ISIL to sustain its production of propaganda. As a result, this propaganda will continue to act as a source of inspiration to militant Islamists globally

Where do the foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq come from?

The number of people from chosen countries who, since 2011, have travelled to Syria or Iraq to join militant Islamist groups.
The figures are gross figures and do not factor in the number of returned or killed fighters and, as such, the figures are subject to great uncertainty

in the short term, and the trend involving sympathizers launching simple attacks will highly likely continue.

Foreign fighters constitute a special global threat

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has created a whole new generation of militant Islamists, many of whom hail from Western countries. Since 2012, at least 6,000 fighters from the West have travelled to the conflict areas in Syria and Iraq, and though not all of them have joined the actual fighting, many of them have highly likely fought alongside ISIL or other militant Islamist groups. As a result, many of the foreign fighters have accumulated know-how and experience – including experience in the use of explosives, small arms, drones and improvised chemical weapons – that can be used in future attack planning.

In the short term, military developments in Syria and Iraq will make it harder for foreign fighters to remain in the conflict area. Some foreign fighters will try to stay put in the conflict zones regardless, while others will want to return to the West or join ISIL affiliates operating in other areas outside of Syria and Iraq. As ISIL is losing territory in Syria and Iraq, foreign fighters will likely disperse over several countries and continents, forming a network of former fighters sharing a common ideology and enemy.

In the short to medium term, foreign fighters will pose a terrorist threat to Europe, including Denmark. The militant Islamists who have previously travelled to Afghanistan, Somalia and the Balkans to fight in the local conflicts and to promote a global Islamist agenda serve as a testament that they have the potential to utilize their combat experience and readiness for violence to conduct violent activities when they return home. It is thus likely that returning foreign fighters will play a key role in radicalization and militant activities for years to come.

Threat from ISIL's central attack planning

Over a number of years, ISIL has made up the single most serious terrorist threat against the West. The fight against the West lies at the heart of ISIL's ideology, and, in Syria, ISIL has set up a structure tasked with planning, coordinating and sanctioning terrorist attacks outside Syria. Although it has been under strong military pressure in 2016 and 2017, resulting in the death of several of its senior leadership figures, ISIL has continuously planned attacks against the West, successfully directing, enabling and inspiring attacks in the West out of Syria.

ISIL's capability to centrally plan, coordinate and finance global terrorist activities will likely diminish as it loses its safe havens in Syria and Iraq. However, it is highly likely that ISIL will continue to plan attacks against the West. It is also likely that ISIL will claim responsibility for future attacks and attempted attacks in a bid to bolster its propaganda. It is likely that future attack planning will become increasingly decentralized and that attacks will not require the same level of sanctioning by the ISIL leadership.

THREE TYPES OF TERRORIST ATTACKS

Terrorist-directed attacks
This type of attack is often organized and sanctioned by the highest level of the leadership. Examples include the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the March 2016 attacks in Brussels for which the attackers had been sent to Europe from Syria.

Terrorist-enabled attacks
This type of attack involves perpetrators, who are in contact, mainly online, with one or several terrorists, who encourage, guide or in other ways enable the attack planning. They may share information on how to produce explosives or provide guidance on target selection. An example of this type of attack is the December 2016 attack in Berlin, where the Tunisian Anis Amri rammed his truck into a Christmas market.

Terrorist-inspired attacks
This type of attack involves people inspired by militant propaganda to carry out attacks independently with no direct contact with ISIL. Omar el-Hussein's attack in Copenhagen on 14-15 February is an example of such type of attack.

Over the past years, there have been a number of incidents in which individuals travelling from the Middle East to Europe posing as refugees have launched terrorist attacks in Europe. Militant Islamist groups, including ISIL, may also try to avail themselves of this method in future if the traditional migration routes through the Balkans are re-opened. It is highly likely that individuals with links to militant networks, including ISIL, have already entered Europe as part of the mass exodus of refugees in 2015.

ISIL's regional subgroups continue to pose terrorist threat locally
Over the past three years, a number of militant groups and networks have pledged their loyalty to ISIL. Branding themselves as ISIL provinces or ISIL subgroups, these militant Islamist groups are located in countries such as Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, West Africa, Somalia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though the subgroups operate very independently of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, many of them receive financial support from ISIL as well as guidance and support for their propaganda, etc. The weakening of ISIL in Syria and Iraq will, in all probability, impact negatively on several of these subgroups, making it comparatively harder for them to operate.

As ISIL's central leadership in Iraq and Syria grows increasingly weakened, subgroups may also start dissociating themselves from ISIL, opting instead to join other militant groups, such as al-Qaida, or forming new independent terrorist groups.

However, other subgroups will maintain their affiliation with ISIL, and in the short term, more ISIL sympathizers from the West will likely travel to conflict areas other than in Syria and Iraq to join ISIL networks. ISIL's leadership has repeatedly called on sympathizers to join ISIL groups outside Syria and Iraq.

Al-Qaida keeps the West in the crosshairs
The al-Qaida Senior Leadership (AQSL) has been severely crippled by years of losing al-Qaida members. The remaining members of the AQSL are still present in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Ladin's son Hamzah Bin Ladin and other high-ranking al-Qaida members are likely hiding in eastern Afghanistan and in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The AQSL's links to al-Qaida's global network are also handled by al-Zawahiri's delegates in Iran. The AQSL still harbours ambitions to attack the West and Western interests globally. The fight against the West is a long-term goal and a key tenet of the al-Qaida ideology. Though large-scale important operations likely still need to be sanctioned by the AQSL, their own capabilities seem limited.
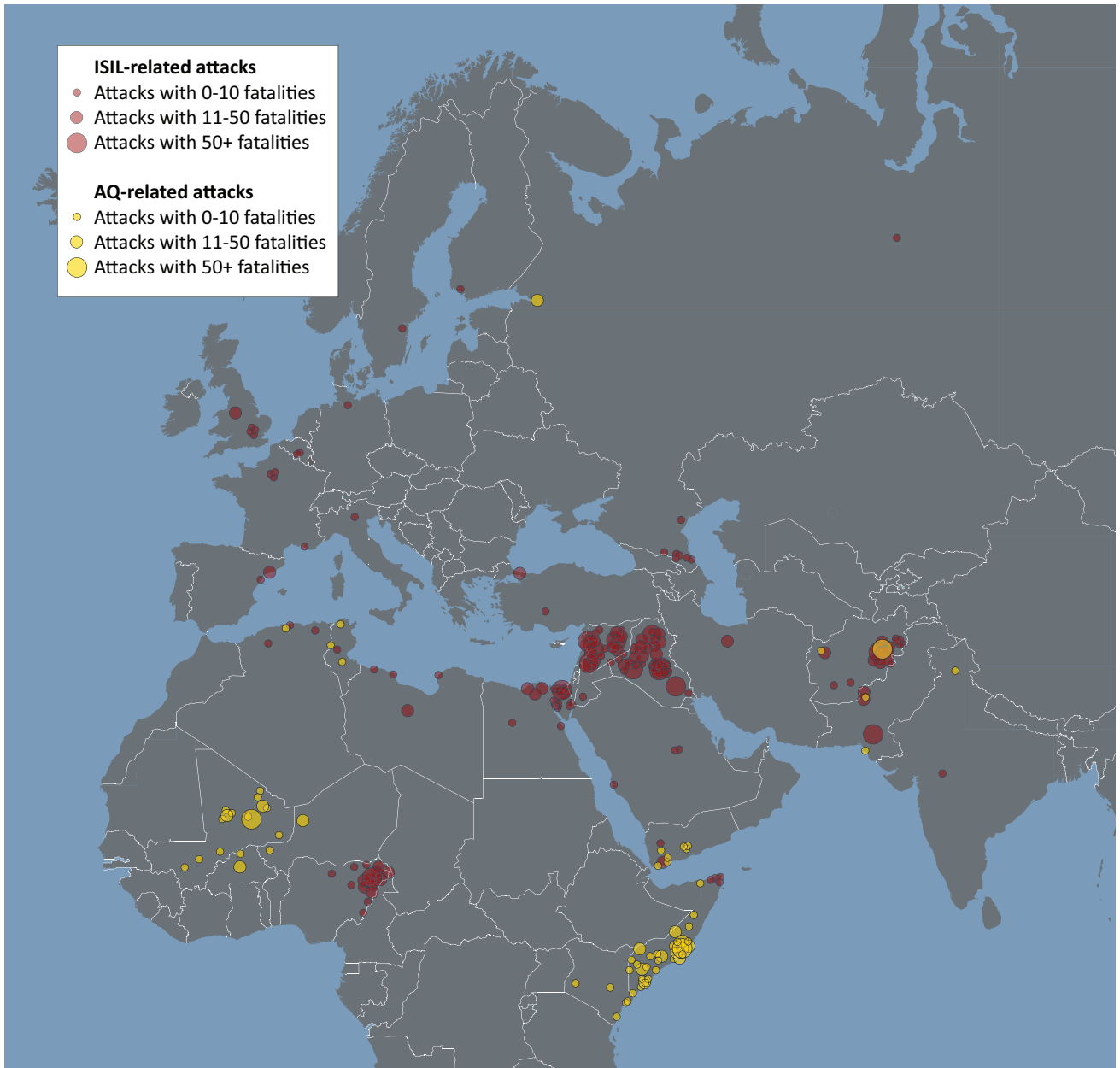
Al-Qaida's propaganda machine is quite expansive and professional, and its media wing produces the online magazine "Inspire". Al-Qaida will likely be able to continue producing and distributing high-quality militant Islamist propaganda that calls for attacks and includes easy instructions on how to launch attacks such as car-ramming attacks against pedestrians. Individuals inspired by al-Qaida propaganda will likely try to launch attacks in the West.

Al-Qaida subgroups operate in several countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Their agenda focuses on regional consolidation and on obtaining some measure of local anchoring, among other things by associating with the locals. Despite having lost several senior leaders, their position remains strong in several of the world's conflict areas, and they continue to pose a terrorist threat to Western interests, regionally as well as in the West.

Al-Qaida in Syria pushes the threat closer to Europe
Since 2012, al-Qaida has built up a significant presence in insurgent-controlled north-western Syria. In 2016, al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria, the former Nusra Front, officially disassociated itself from al-Qaida and changed its name to Jaysh Fatah al-Sham (JFS) and entered the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) alliance. It is likely that the name change was mainly motivated by ambitions to strengthen cooperation with other opposition groups in Syria and thus to secure the group a leading position. However, it is likely that several HTS members are still affiliated with al-Qaida's networks in Syria. These networks adhere to a global militant Islamist ideology and are intent on attacking targets outside of Syria.

In future, the al-Qaida networks in Syria will pose a terrorist threat to the West due to Syria's geographical proximity to Europe and the presence of Western foreign fighters in the networks. Even though the networks have come under varying degrees of pressure throughout the conflict, including losing several senior al-Qaida leaders, they have been able to maintain their presence in north-eastern Syria. Al-Qaida networks will likely continue their presence in Syria in the years to come.

Map illustrating attacks on civilian or Western targets and attacks with civilian collateral damage launched by ISIL or AQ-related groups or individuals in 2017

Militant Islamist groups still challenge stability and security in numerous places all over the world

Weak state structures, discouraging economic outlooks and conflicts between ethnic-religious groups will continue to provide fertile ground for militant Islamist groups such as al-Qaida and ISIL in a number of countries. In the years to come, areas with weak or no central governance, both in and outside urbanised areas, will continue to provide

some degree of latitude for militant groups and networks. In the short term, though, militant groups will not be able to obtain the same degree of territorial control that ISIL held in Syria and Iraq.

The Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula

ISIL still poses the most severe terrorist threat in Syria and Iraq. The group is under intense military pressure,

preventing it from launching large attacks both in and outside the region. Despite its military setbacks in Syria and Iraq, the group will preserve its intention and capacity to launch terrorist attacks against targets in both countries as part of its asymmetrical warfare tactics in the short term.

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has a direct impact on the security situation on Syria's and Iraq's neighbours, mainly Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. As neighbours to the conflict zone, the three countries are the most vulnerable in terms of the influx of Syrian refugees, fleeing ISIL fighters, increased radicalization and risk of terrorist attacks. In addition, all three countries have a high number of departed foreign fighters that constitute a special risk on their return to their native countries. ISIL and ISIL-related individuals have both the intention and a certain capacity to launch attacks against targets in the three countries.

Small ISIL networks intent on launching attacks are still present in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the ISIL leadership continues to call for attacks in the country. However, the networks here only have limited capacity and are under pressure from police and security forces. In Yemen, ISIL and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are still active as part of the ongoing civil war that gives them the latitude to operate in the country and to add to their capacity and combat experience. Both ISIL and AQAP have the intention as well as the capacity to launch attacks. It is likely that though AQAP still has the intention to launch attacks against Western targets outside the region, the group gives priority to the local fight. AQAP's online magazine "Inspire" testifies to a continued focus on Western targets and lone-wolf attacks outside the region.

North Africa

In Egypt, the terrorist threat emanates from two main groups: Islamic State Sinai Province (IS Sinai) and Islamic State in Egypt (IS Egypt). IS Sinai targets police and security forces in northern Sinai. In 2016–2017, IS Egypt has carried out several attacks against Coptic targets in mainland Egypt as part of an ethnic-religious conflict strategy for Egypt. In the short term, IS Egypt will make up the greatest terrorist threat against Western interests in Egypt. ISIL fighters may leave Syria for Egypt, which would further increase the general terrorist threat throughout Egypt.

In the summer of 2016, Islamic State in Libya (IS-Libya) was dislodged from the coastal town of Sirte, forcing it to relocate to the desert areas south of Sirte and Tripoli. Despite being diminished, the group stepped up its activities over the summer of 2017. Though the probability of IS-Libya recapturing lost territory seems less likely, the group may form alliances with other groups, thus bolstering its position in some areas. Also, some of the many North African foreign fighters currently based in Syria may return to Libya. Though it is less likely that IS-Libya possesses attack capabilities outside the region, the group may be able to direct and enable attacks in Europe as was the case with the December 2016 terrorist attack in Berlin. The al-Qaida-related groups have strong traction in Libya and will remain a threat and a destabilizing factor in the country for years to come.

ISIL-related groups and Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operate in Tunisia. In addition, a large number of Tunisians have received combat training with IS Libya. Though both ISIL and AQIM are under strong pressure, it is highly unlikely that Tunisian security authorities will be able to eliminate the terrorist threat in the country, especially since an improvement of the security situation is conditional on increased stability in neighbouring Libya. Fighters returning to Tunisia from Libya and Syria pose a threat to Western targets. AQIM and Islamic State in Algeria (IS Algeria) operate in Algeria, mainly posing a threat to local authority targets, though IS Algeria has the intention to attack Western targets. Both groups will remain active in Algeria in the short term.

West Africa

In the course of 2016 and 2017, militant Islamist groups have consolidated their position in central Mali, improving their operational latitude in the central Sahel region. The leading al-Qaida affiliates in the region have joined forces under the name Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM). The militant Islamists will likely continue their attacks against UN forces and local security forces in northern Mali. They will also expand their presence and operations in central and southern Mali and in neighbouring Burkina Faso. Militant Islamists will continue to plan attacks and kidnappings against Western targets in the region.

In north-eastern Nigeria, militant Islamists are split into two groups: the original Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa. Over 2016–2017, the Nigerian security forces have stepped up anti-terrorist operations against the two, while the militant Islamists have continued their attacks on targets in the region, including in the border areas into

neighbouring Niger, Cameroun and Chad. Boko Haram will likely preserve its capacity to launch attacks in the area, including attacks against Western interests. It is less likely that the group will direct attacks against Western targets outside the region.

East Africa

Despite military offensives, terrorist and insurgent movement al-Shabaab will maintain its stronghold in southern and central Somalia. Inside the past year, al-Shabaab has even won new territory in southern and central Somalia and increased its activities in northern Somalia. In the years to come, al-Shabaab will highly likely continue to attack both civilian and military targets throughout southern and central Somalia. Also, al-Shabaab will highly likely try to attack both Western and local interests in the countries bordering Somalia. The area in north-eastern Kenya has seen numerous al-Shabaab-launched terrorist attacks on police and military forces. This trend will highly likely continue.

Islamic State in Somalia (IS Somalia) is mainly present in Puntland in northern Somalia. IS Somalia comprises a few hundred members, and the group is likely weaker and poses a smaller threat than a year ago. Nevertheless, IS Somalia highly likely remains intent on attacking Western targets in East Africa.

ISIL will continue to exploit conflicts

Militant Islamists have been known to use ongoing conflicts or humanitarian crises involving Muslims to draw attention. There have been numerous incidents where ISIL has used the situation in Myanmar for propaganda purposes. ISIL's focus will contribute to creating a new conflict area in this part of Asia, and militant Islamists travelling to the area may internationalize the conflict.

Afghanistan, Pakistan and the rest of Asia

Afghanistan and Pakistan are key bastions for al-Qaida, including for the organization's relatively new regional franchise, Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Acting out of Afghanistan and Pakistan, both al-Qaida and AQIS support the Taliban insurgency against the Afghan

national unity government and the coalition forces, and the groups provide training in Taliban training camps. In 2018, the remaining Arab al-Qaida members and the ethnic South Asian AQIS subgroup will still be present in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where they will focus their efforts on preserving their safe havens.

Al-Qaida and AQIS constitute a threat to Western interests in the area, and they will maintain their resolve to attack the West. In the short term, the likelihood that al-Qaida and AQIS have sufficient capacity to launch attacks against targets in the West seems less probable. Sympathizer attacks launched by lone wolves in the West inspired by al-Qaida constitute a threat, though.

ISIL's franchise in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISKP), is a player in the Afghan conflict. The ISKP is a threat to Western interests in Afghanistan, mainly in Kabul, and in Pakistan.

In the future, AQIS will remain active in South Asia. The organization has close links to local Islamist groups and networks, including in Kashmir, India and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, AQIS' and ISIL's local subgroups have been under strong pressure from the security forces since the last major attack in Dhaka in the summer of 2016.

Developments in Syria and Iraq may serve to prompt a geographical shift in the conflict towards Afghanistan, where newly arrived foreign fighters in particular may seek their way towards training camps in the provinces on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan instead of Syria and Iraq.

Having pledged their allegiance to ISIL, several local militant Islamist groups have launched a series of attacks in the Philippines over the past year. In May 2017, ISIL affiliates launched a major attack in the city of Marawi with hundreds of ISIL fighters taking control over parts of the city. Fighting between government forces and ISIL-affiliated militant Islamists went on for months before the Islamists were defeated. Despite their defeat in Marawi, militant Islamists will remain a terrorist threat in the area. The terrorist threat in the Philippines and the other parts of South-East Asia may increase if a growing number of departed ISIL fighters with combat skills return to the region from Syria and Iraq.

The Middle East and North Africa

Large parts of the Middle East and North Africa will remain fraught with instability in the long term. Conflicts and instability in the Middle East and North Africa will continue to provide fertile ground for extremism and safe havens for terrorist groups, even after ISIL's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria. The regional power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia fuels the conflicts in the region. Iran's regional influence has grown.

ISIL has lost virtually all of its territories in Iraq and Syria and no longer controls a large cohesive area. However, ISIL or its successors will still hold a key destabilizing potential in Syria and Iraq, even in the medium to long term. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has ridden out the storm. However, though the insurgency has almost been contained, Syria will be riddled with conflict and instability for years to come. Iraq will continue to see internal division and conflict that prevent real national conciliation and keep the country in a state of de facto division. The conflicts in Libya and Yemen will also continue, and there is no prospect of a peaceful solution in the medium term.

Even an end to the wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya would still leave these countries struggling with the very same problems that sparked the armed conflicts in the first place. The fundamental problems revolve around lack of economic development, major increases in population and urbanisation, massive youth unemployment, and oppressive regimes riddled with rampant corruption and abuse of power.

As a result of the armed conflicts, the rulers will be left with even more divided societies and a massive need for reconstruction. In the long term, the conflicts and their aftermaths will result in social and political unrest and create fertile ground for extremism and terrorism, contributing to generating migration and refugee flows towards Europe. Instability will not only present a problem to the Middle Eastern states directly affected, but will also have an impact on surrounding countries and regions, including Europe.

In an attempt to quell the problems, several of the states are once again moving in an increasingly authoritarian direction with increasing political and economic marginalization of certain population groups as a result. This, in turn, serves to deepen social and political instability. Across the Middle East, sectarianism has often been linked to the fight for political power and resources, only serving to exacerbate the conflicts. These divides are exploited and deepened by rivalling regional powers.

The conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen are the strongest manifestations of the regional struggle for power currently unfolding between Shiite Persian Iran and Sunni Arab Saudi Arabia. The conflict in Libya is also complicated by international and regional powers backing rivalling Libyan power centres. The joint efforts of Turkey and Qatar and their support for Muslim Brotherhood groups in the Middle East and North Africa have also soured relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which regard such groups as a threat to the existing societal structures.

The strong degree of international and, in particular, regional engagement contributes to protracting and deepening the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, producing some highly dynamic conflicts with highly volatile alliances in the process.

Turkey has long worked to secure its position as a key actor in the region, pursuing a very activist foreign policy. In recent years, through its interventions in Syria, Turkey has solidified its place as a key player in the end game for the Syrian conflict, not only militarily but also in terms of political negotiations, especially as regards the Kurdish issue, which Turkey regards as a key national matter. Turkey also has an influence on developments in Iraq. Turkey has embarked on closer cooperation with the central government in Baghdad, though it still cultivates close political and economic ties to the Kurdish Regional Government.

The most significant development trend in the region, however, is Iran's strengthening of its influence and position in the region. From the fall of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in 2003 and latest through its recent engagement in the Syrian conflict and in the fight against ISIL in Iraq which have contributed to its regional hold as well. Iran has successfully bolstered its political and military influence in both Syria and Iraq, not least as a result of the efforts by powerful Iranian-controlled Shiite militias. Iran has also managed to strengthen its position in the region through enhanced political, economic and military cooperation with Russia and Turkey.

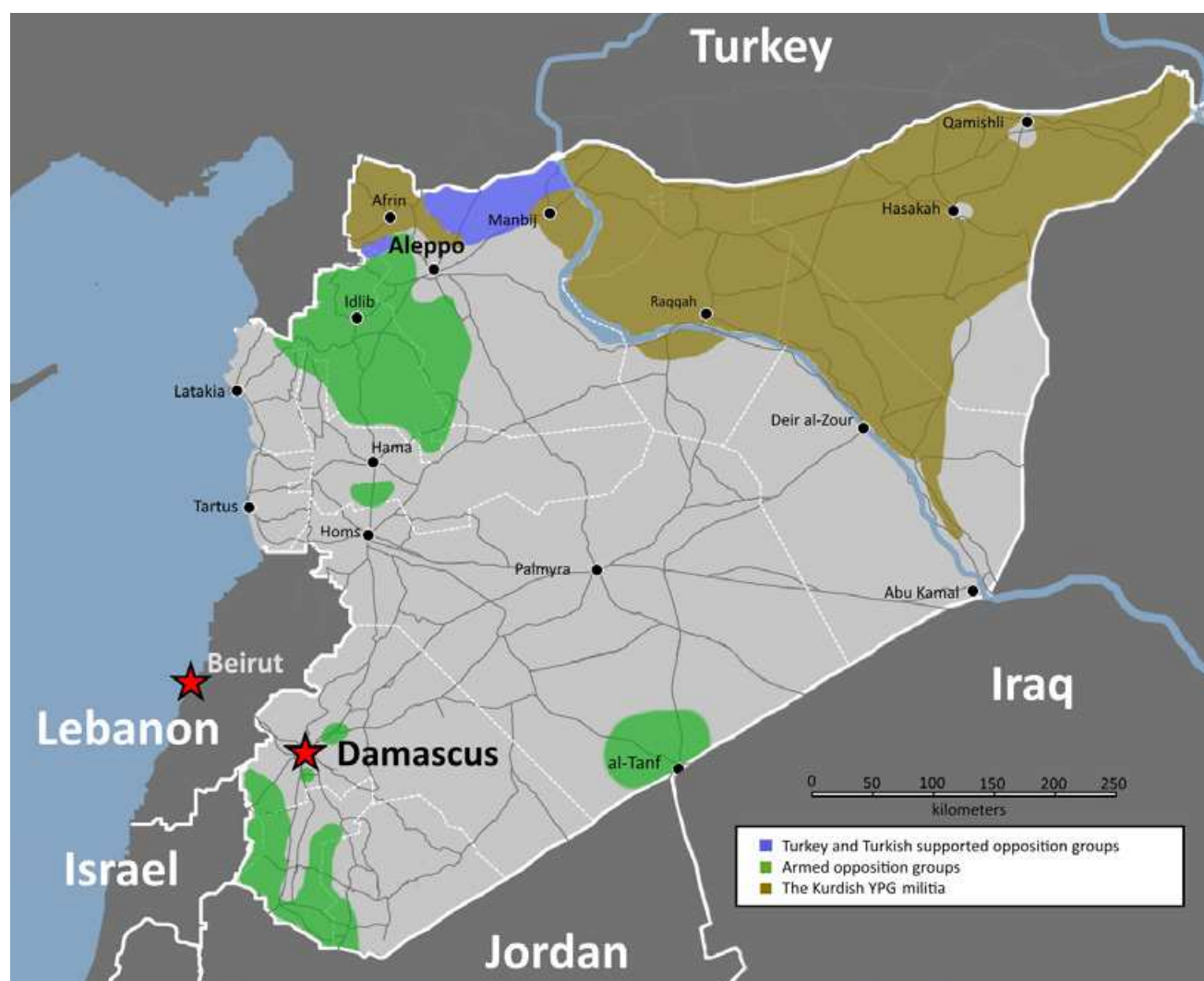Iran's strengthened position will intensify the regional power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia will bolster its efforts to weaken Iran's increasing regional power, including, in particular, in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, though its efforts might prove futile.

ISIL

Though ISIL has lost its territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIL or the organization's successors will continue to be hold major destabilizing potential, even in the long term. ISIL's scope for recruitment of new extremists from the region and from the West will decline as a result of the loss of its territory.

ISIL has lost virtually all its territory in Iraq and Syria, and it now only controls a few small pockets. Overall, the pressure on ISIL has intensified to the point where ISIL will also lose control over these areas within a very short time span, preventing it from claiming the narrative of controlling unbroken territory or ruling a people.

Mid-November 2017 military situation snapshot

The military campaign has inflicted heavy losses on ISIL and killed several of its key leadership figures, destroying its main sources of income and significantly reducing its overall number of fighters. ISIL has lost so many fighters that the organization is no longer able to carry out major, coordinated military operations inside Iraq and Syria.

ISIL will morph back into a regular terrorist and insurgent movement without territorial control

Despite its military defeat, ISIL has not been definitively neutralized, and the organization will still have a presence in several locations in Iraq and Syria. The loss of territorial control will force ISIL to return to its former strategy, acting exclusively as a terrorist and insurgent movement that operates in smaller clandestine networks. The proliferation of these networks will be most pronounced in the Sunni-dominated areas in Iraq and Syria.

ISIL will preserve its capacity to launch asymmetrical attacks and terrorist attacks, and it will be able to win short-lived control over isolated villages and small towns in Iraq and Syria. Unlike in recent years, ISIL will be unable to hold on to captured territory. In the immediate aftermath of losing territory, ISIL will likely intensify hit-and-run operations and terrorist attacks in the region to show that it has not been defeated.

ISIL will thus maintain sufficient capacity to underpin a long-term asymmetrical campaign in both Iraq and Syria. ISIL, or the group's successors, will thus be regional actors with a significant destabilizing potential, even in the medium to long term.

Deep structural problems in Iraq and Syria will ensure continued influence for ISIL

ISIL's extremist ideology and ethnic-sectarian agenda likely still resonate well with parts of the politically and economically marginalised Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria. ISIL or its successors will pursue a strategy aimed at enhancing ethnic and sectarian tensions to provoke armed clashes and undermine future stability.

Diminishing ability to recruit external extremists

ISIL's ability to recruit new extremists and to attract backing from regional and Western supporters will diminish. ISIL will struggle to retain external fighters once the organization goes into hiding after losing its territory. Many will flee the area and return home, while others will remain to support ISIL or other extremist groups in or outside the region.

However, ISIL will continue an active propaganda campaign through the Internet and social media in an attempt to preserve its status as the leader of global militant Sunni extremism and to recruit new supporters. At the same time, external ISIL branches such as those in North Africa and Asia will be able to expand ISIL's ideology either as part of local ISIL branches or under new names.

SYRIA

President Bashar al-Assad will highly likely remain in power, and, within a few years, the regime will manage to regain formal control over most parts of the country. Still, the armed conflict is far from over, and Syria will remain riddled with instability for years to come. The country is in ruins, the central power will be weak, and the Assad regime will continue to rely heavily on its allies.

The conflict between the Assad regime and the Syrian armed opposition in western Syria is entering a new phase characterized by less intensive insurgency in contained pockets. The Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian allies have managed to stabilize the situation in the vital populous western part of the country to the point where the regime has been able to redirect its focus to an offensive against ISIL in eastern Syria.

The progress to the east has bolstered the regime sufficiently to demand control of the areas that the anti-ISIL coalition and its Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) allies have captured from ISIL, including Raqqah. This raises the risk of armed clashes between the regime and the Kurdish YPG militia, the dominant member of the SDF. In the short term, the regime may try to negotiate a settlement with the YPG without it coming to a major confrontation. Still, in the medium term, it seems highly unlikely that the Assad regime will tolerate anything beyond cultural autonomy for the Kurds in north-eastern Syria. Consequently, the regime will try to re-establish its authority over the Kurdish-controlled areas.

Assad regime will strengthen control with Idlib

Russia's cooperation with Turkey and Iran on the establishment of so-called de-escalation zones in the western part of Syria will enhance the Assad regime's military scope for action. The regime gives priority to consolidating its control of the populous western part of Syria. If the de-escalation zone proves successful, the regime will be able to liberate resources to focus its military efforts elsewhere.

In the short term, the Assad regime will re-direct its focus to north-western Syria where it, backed by Russia and Iran, will launch large-scale operations around the currently insurgent-controlled Idlib. Despite continued support from key regional donors to the armed insurgents, these groups will highly likely lose control over the area. However, radical Islamist groups will subsequently continue their armed struggle against the Assad regime through asymmetrical warfare.

Turkey will try to maintain control over an insurgent-dominated pocket in north-western Syria to secure its long-term influence on Kurdish issues, in particular to prevent the Syrian Kurds from establishing an unbroken autonomous belt along the southern border into Turkey. Despite Turkey's current cooperation with Assad regime allies on the de-escalation zones, it is highly unlikely that the Assad regime would accept sustained Turkish influence in these areas.

President Assad poised for victory

President Bashar al-Assad will highly likely hold on to power in Syria, and he will continue to enjoy backing by Russia and Iran. The probability of an overall international political solution to the Syrian conflict appears less likely. Conversely, it is likely that the Russian-initiated Astana negotiations will expand from merely including truce agreements to increasingly involving models for political transition.

Facilitated by sustained Russian and Iranian support, the progress of the Assad regime has bolstered its position in the international negotiations on a solution to the conflict. Russia will continue its efforts to add impetus for a political solution, though it will only encourage solutions that are no threat to the power of the Assad regime. The regime itself has no ambitions to enter into real negotiations before the military objective of controlling most parts of Syria has been fulfilled.

Syria will remain unstable for years to come

The Assad regime will not be able to re-establish pre-conflict levels of control over and stability in Syria. Regime governance will rely on relations with a number of powerful local warlords and militias. Also, economically and politically, the Syrian regime will come to rely even more heavily on Russia and Iran and be the object of continued regional and international interference for years to come.

The fundamental political, social and economic conditions that triggered the popular revolt against the Assad regime have not been resolved. Quite the opposite; six years of civil war with armed quelling of the revolt, high human death tolls and immense damage have served to exacerbate these problems, increasing the likelihood that Syria – in addition to experiencing continued armed insurgency – will be marked by recurring outbursts of political and social unrest.

IRAN AND THE GULF

Over the last decade, regional developments have served to strengthen Iran's influence, most recently in connection with the fight against ISIL in Iraq and the conflict in Syria. Iran aims to preserve and expand its close relations with Syria, Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran's missile programme and the nuclear agreement will remain two key points of contention in relations between Iran and the United States.

Iran will likely be able to sustain and expand its influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon in the short to medium term. In Syria, Iran will maintain its support for the Assad regime and will keep up its military commitment, in particular in the eastern part of the country, to ensure access over land from Iran across Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. Iran will increasingly focus on strengthening and expanding its role in the Syrian economy and thus its influence in the country. In Iraq, the fight against ISIL and the military mobilization of the Shiite militias have strongly bolstered Iranian influence.

Iran and Saudi Arabia will remain on a collision course, with Iran maintaining military support for the Houthis in Yemen and attempting to expand its economic and political relations with Qatar, a conduct that will reinforce divisions among the Arab kingdoms in the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia will continue its efforts to weaken Iranian dominance. Rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel is possible over their shared interest in weakening Iranian influence in Lebanon. Overall, it is less likely that Saudi Arabia will be able to reduce Iran's regional influence. Similarly, the probability of a direct military confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia seems less likely.

Iran's increasing regional influence is facilitated in part by strengthened pragmatic relations between Iran, Russia and Turkey to forge solutions to a number of security policy challenges in the region. In the short term, the three countries will continue mutual cooperation, for instance, in trying to solve the Syrian conflict and preventing Kurdish autonomy efforts in Syria and Iraq. Also, relations between the three countries will be strengthened by several long-term cooperation agreements, in particular in the fields of energy and military affairs, and increased trade among the three.

The nuclear agreement and the Iranian missile programme will continue to constitute two key points of contention in relations between Iran and the United States. Iran will likely challenge its relations with the United States by strengthening its ballistic missile programme and continuing to test new missiles.

The nuclear agreement will be challenged by both the United States and Iran, and the formal agreement may collapse in the short term. If, however, the financial incentives of the agreement remain intact, the Iranian leadership may likely deem it opportune to comply with the key elements of the agreement in the short term, even if the United States should choose to withdraw unilaterally. The nuclear agreement will thus constitute a pivot point in the power struggle between President Hassan Rouhani and his moderate supporters who negotiated the agreement on one side, and the conservative forces in Iran that vehemently oppose the agreement on the other.

IRAQ

Iraq will continue to be riddled with internal division and conflict, even following ISIL's loss of large unbroken belts of territory and the ensuing demise of the self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria. The deep-seated rifts between the different ethnic and religious communities in Iraq will continue to provide fertile ground for extremism and revolt against the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad.

Continued disputes locally and nationally among the various Iraqi communities will hamper real national conciliation and will keep the country in a state of de facto division. As a result, though ISIL has lost control of its unbroken territory and cities, Iraq will continue to be marred by low-intensity conflicts, not just between Arab Sunnis and Shiites, but also by conflicts involving the Iraqi Kurds.

The parliamentary elections slated for 2018 will likely ensure the instalment of a Shiite-dominated government once again. Despite promises of greater inclusion and conciliation, the Iraqi Arab Sunnis will remain politically and economically marginalized. They will thus continue to constitute a potential recruitment pool for ISIL or other Sunni insurgent or terrorist groups.

Ahead of the parliamentary elections, several of the Shiite leaders in Iraq will likely adopt more nationalist rhetoric, thus distancing themselves from the Iranian influence on the country. However, a future Shiite-dominated central government in Iraq would continue to be weak and strongly influenced by, in particular, Iran and the Iranian-backed Shiite militias.

The Iran-affiliated Shiite militias will continue to exist and thus contribute to upholding Iranian influence in Iraq. As ISIL is gradually losing its territory, some of these militias will likely react with hostility and possibly violence towards Western forces and interests in Iraq. Some of the Shiite militias show strong resentment against Western and, in particular, US troops.

The Iraqi Kurds' efforts at independence will fail. Like the Baghdad central government, Iran and Turkey, which both have large Kurdish communities, will actively fight the establishment of an independent Kurdistan inside Iraq. In

addition, the Kurdish autonomy efforts will be hampered by internal divisions among the Iraqi Kurds on the issue of independence.

The central government in Baghdad will likely regain control over the areas captured by the Kurdish autonomous

forces when the Iraqi security forces collapsed in the 2014 battles against ISIL. It will do so through negotiations, use of power, or a combination of the two, as was the case in the Kirkuk region in the autumn of 2017. Relations between the various ethnic-religious communities will remain tense, leaving Iraq prone to conflict in the medium to long term.

LIBYA

In the medium term, Libya will be riddled with instability and conflict. The country's warring militias are individually supported by rivalling regional powers whose support serves to protract the conflicts. As a result of the absence of stable state structures and the presence of conflict, Libya will continue to be the main transit point for migration from Africa to Europe.

The UN-endorsed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli will remain weak, existing as an authority exclusively by virtue of the backing provided by major leading militias in Tripoli and Misrata. Commanded by Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan National Army (LNA) militia in eastern Libya will continue to undermine the GNA.

Ghassan Salamé, the new Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, has introduced an Action Plan for Libya. The plan has added new impetus into the peace process, but the main bone of contention as to who will be in charge of Libya's armed forces is still unresolved. In the absence of an agreement which includes the LNA and is accepted by Khalifa Haftar, the Action Plan will not move forward.

The conflicts in Libya are sustained by support to the warring militias from rivalling regional powers, despite the international weapons embargo. The Islamist-dominated militias in Misrata are supported by Turkey and Qatar, while Khalifa Haftar is supported by Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

ISIL will continue to contribute to instability in Libya by leading a clandestine and asymmetrical insurgency in the major cities of Libya and attacking infrastructure, patrols and checkpoints along the Libyan roads.

As a result of instability, conflict and the absence of stable state structures, Libya will remain the main transit hub for migration from Africa to Europe. Across Libya, many local communities are involved in migration for financial gain, and in some areas large, local economies have emerged based on the migrants. Several militias and tribes in Libya are making a lot of money from migration and from the exploitation of migrants for slave work. Most migration is illegal, and the major financial interests at stake undermine the prospect for establishing a central authority structure for Libya and will continue to destabilize the country.

Migration through Libya will continue unless the leading Libyan militias join efforts to fight it and work together to find alternative sources of income for the local communities that now have economies based on people smuggling.

Africa

Since 2010, the conflicts in Africa seem to have worsened compared to the previous decade. Several ongoing conflicts have spread across borders, and new alliances between internal and external actors have added new complexity to the conflicts. In the medium term, it is highly unlikely that the situation in the Sahel belt across the entire continent will improve significantly. Several large and influential countries such as Nigeria, Sudan and Ethiopia are likely facing a turbulent political future. This may result in increased unrest and conflicts in one or more of the countries in the short to medium term. Other countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Tunisia and Libya are struggling with growing problems of Islamist radicalization. At the same time, there is no real prospect of decisive improvement in conditions in the continent's most vulnerable countries such as South Sudan and Somalia.

Though the African continent will see economic growth, the improvement will, in many places, be unevenly distributed and precarious. Civilians continue to pay the highest price in the numerous armed conflicts. Deliberate attacks on civilians will continue to have an impact on refugee flows and on internally displaced persons in the already struggling countries.

Religious factors will likely begin to figure more strongly in the conflicts. Areas of instability, conflict and militant Islamist activity will emerge, potentially adversely affecting security for Danish interests in the continent and in the surrounding waters. Overall, these factors and insecure living conditions will continue to generate migration flows towards Europe. The large and increasing number of refugees and migrants in the North African countries may contribute to further destabilization in these countries.

Many of the African countries will not be able to resolve national or regional security challenges without external support. Economic and military support from the West to many Sub-Saharan countries will remain in high demand. China and other non-Western actors will bolster their presence in key geostrategic areas in Africa in the medium term.

The Horn of Africa
The geostrategic importance of the Horn of Africa for its neighbouring regions and China will likely increase in the short to medium term. The Gulf states, Egypt and China, in particular, will become increasingly interested in the region, and their involvement will grow proportionally. It is likely that the Chinese leadership's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will contribute to tighter regulations of Chinese investment projects in Africa. This will force China to focus its presence there on the trade routes in the countries close to and north of the Horn of Africa in a bid to facilitate increased trade between China and Europe.

Long-standing alliances between the countries in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf states will likely strengthen, and new, conflicting alliances will be forged in the short to medium term. These factors will contribute to continued tensions nationally as well as regionally, as evidenced by the situation in Somalia, where Ethiopia, the federal state Somaliland and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have forged an agreement on the use of the Berbera port in Somaliland. The agreement strengthens Ethiopia's position vis-à-vis Egypt, the region's other great power. Moreover, it has given Somaliland an edge in its efforts to gain independence from Somalia. Such alliances add to political unrest in the region.

Countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia will continue to be fraught with insecurity and uncertainty in the medium term, and the conflict in South Sudan will remain unresolved in the short term. Even though Ethiopia is relatively peaceful at present, the political conflict is far from resolved due to the absence of reforms. This led to popular protests in 2016 and a heavy-handed response by the country's security force. Sudan's next general elections are slated for 2020. It is uncertain how much power the government will be left with following President Omar al-Bashir's expected resignation. According to plan, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) will be in the process of implementing its exit strategy in the medium term. It is less likely that the Somali national security forces will be able to handle security in the country following AMISOM's exit.
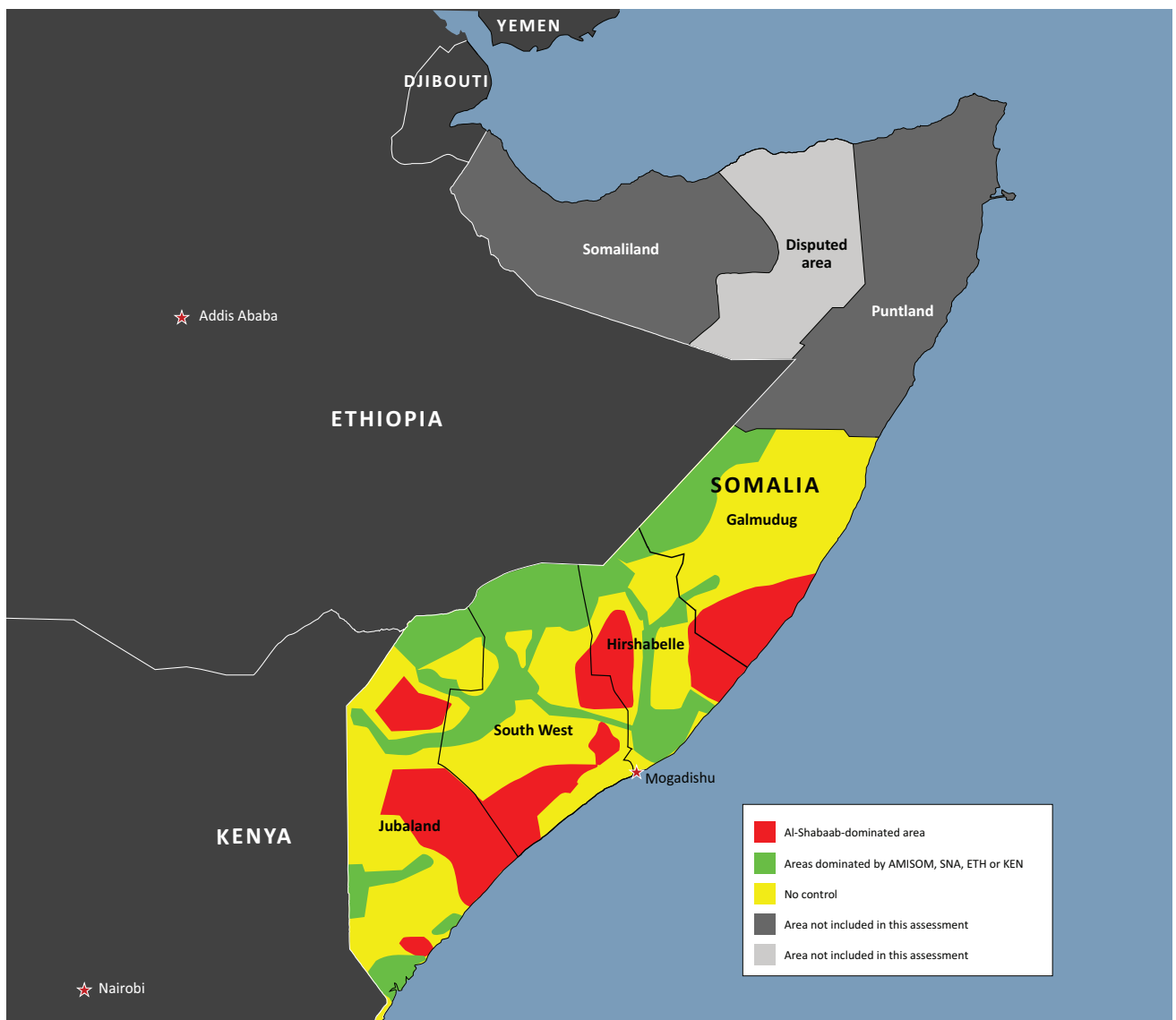
Al-Shabaab still poses a threat in the Horn of Africa
The threat of militant Islamist terrorism against Danish and international interests in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia and Kenya, will remain at the current level. The conflict in Somalia will continue to have an adverse effect on security in the Horn of Africa in the short to medium term. Terrorist and insurgency movement al-Shabaab will maintain its stronghold in southern and central Somalia. AMISOM and the Somali National Army (SNA) control the largest cities and roads, whereas al-Shabaab typically

controls the rural areas and smaller towns. Al-Shabaab wants to create an Islamic state in Somalia, and it considers AMISOM and the Somali government its main enemies. In addition to attacks on military targets in Somalia, al-Shabaab carries out frequent attacks on civilians. The capital of Mogadishu, in particular, has been the scene of numerous terrorist attacks. Al-Shabaab regularly targets hotels and restaurants frequented by people affiliated with the Somali government. Al-Shabaab will highly likely remain a destabilizing factor in Somalia in the years to come. Al-Shabaab also poses a terrorist threat in the other

countries in the Horn of Africa. The north-western part of Kenya bordering Somalia has experienced numerous attacks on civilians and government officials.

Following a decade of costly efforts in Somalia, the international community now demands that AMISOM and the SNA make progress in the fight against al-Shabaab. However, it is less likely that the SNA and the Somali police will be able to take over security following AMISOM's planned withdrawal in 2021-2022. The lack of Somali police locally and local civilian administrations will continue to

Large parts of Somalia are outside government control. SNA = Somali National Army, ETH = the Ethiopian Army, KEN = the Kenyan Army. However, al-Shabaab may be operating in the green areas as well

hamper improvements in security. The SNA does not have sufficient troops to simultaneously defeat al-Shabaab and maintain law and order in the liberated areas.

Political division and weak state apparatus hamper reconciliation in Somalia

The reconstruction of the Somali state will likely progress very slowly. The upcoming amendment of the constitution and the reconciliation process will be important milestones, but as a result of decades of conflict, they will take time to implement. In the short term, powerful actors in the parliament and federal states will seek to overthrow the government. Political rivalry and the president's limited power outside the capital will continue to significantly challenge any real progress.

In the long to very long term, Somalia might become more stable. However, bilateral efforts by China, Turkey, the Gulf states, the EU and the UN might have conflicting effects on progress. China wants to increase its involvement in Somalia and is offering Somalia military equipment in exchange for agreements aimed at promoting Chinese interests. The balance between the international actors involved in Somalia might likewise shift if the EU and UN reduce or adjust their respective efforts. Turkey and the Gulf states are eager to take over efforts in Somalia from the EU in a bid to strengthen their own positions in the country. The different bilateral arrangements often pursue different overall agendas, and key issues such as coordination and Somalia's own priorities are often overlooked.

Piracy in the Gulf of Aden will remain at a low level

In the short term, despite a modest increase in the number of attacks in the spring of 2017, piracy in the Gulf of Aden will not reach the same level as in 2011, when it flourished. It is less likely that piracy in the Horn of Africa will increase significantly, although a small number of attacks may take place. The pirates have encountered strong resistance at sea as well as on land in Somalia.

Several known pirate networks have been weakened, making it difficult for them to launch new attacks in the short term. However, the pirates still have the capacity and intent to launch attacks on international shipping in the Gulf of Aden and on marine traffic off Somalia's shorelines. The precarious situation in Somalia and the poor social and economic conditions in the country have made it difficult for some Somalis to get by legally, prompting them to turn to crime, including piracy. As a result of the security forces'

increased efficiency, local resistance against piracy and the merchant ships' adoption of the recommended best management practices against piracy, pirates will have a hard time resuming piracy activities.

West Africa

Over the past year, militant Islamists in the central Sahel area have strengthened their position, and they continue to pose a security problem in the Sahel region, especially to Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. In addition, armed groups, smugglers and militant Islamists will be able to move relatively freely across the borders in the medium term.

Countries such as Niger, Burkina Faso and Nigeria will be fraught with increasing insecurity in the medium term, and the conflict in Mali will remain unresolved in the short term. Mali's military cross-border cooperation with Mauritia, Algeria, Niger and Burkina Faso will gradually expand in the short term, though not to the extent that it will have any decisive impact on illegal cross-border movements.

Mali, Mauretania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad have established a special regional anti-terrorist force (G5) in the Sahel region. G5's headquarters are located in central Mali. G5's first anti-terrorist operations were launched in late 2017 in Mali. In the short to medium term, it is highly unlikely that these operations will significantly improve the security situation in the region in general and in Mali in particular. G5 operates on a narrow anti-terrorism mandate and thus does not focus on reconstruction, and it is not responsible for law and order or protection of civilians.

In Niger, social, political and religious tensions are simmering. The opposition in Niger has voiced strong criticism of the president's heavy-handed approach to resistance and riots. Also, Niger is in a precarious position due to its central location in the Sahel region. It shares long borders with countries where militant Islamists have established local safe havens.

In Nigeria, the president's ailing health has rekindled old and new militant factions, which the armed forces have a hard time quelling. Political uncertainty in Nigeria will likely generate increasing insecurity ahead of the 2019 elections. Burkina Faso has become increasingly challenged by the growing presence of militant groups along the border with Mali. The security situation will thus remain precarious in the short term, preventing the security forces in Burkina Faso from containing and neutralizing the threat from

militant Islamists and other armed groups in the area bordering Mali or in the rest of Burkina Faso.

Militant Islamists in the Sahel region increasingly move unrestricted across borders
In northern Mali, militant Islamists continue to launch attacks against local security forces and international UN troops. In addition, militant Islamists have established a presence in central Mali, providing them with access to southern Mali and Burkina Faso, where they have launched attacks on the capital of Ouagadougou, among other places. Niger has also seen regular attacks. The country is used as a transit area, particularly between northern Mali and Libya.

In north-eastern Nigeria, militant Islamist groups continue to launch attacks from their hideouts. Militant Islamists have maintained a presence in north-eastern Nigeria, southern Niger and northern Cameroun. They remain divided over whether to align with the new ISIL-affiliated faction named Islamic State in West Africa or remain loyal to the original group named Boko Haram. It is likely that militant Islamists will be able to continue their terrorist attacks in north-eastern Nigeria and the areas bordering Niger, Cameroun and Chad.

No prospect of Mali peace agreement implementation
The violent conflicts between state and non-state actors in Mali will continue despite formal political progress. Further implementation of the peace agreement will continue to be characterized by a lack of political commitment from all signatories as long as they have strong financial interests in the conflict. Profitable smuggling of, for instance, drugs and arms is a key aspect of the conflict. At the same time, ethnic tensions and radicalization of youngsters in particular in central Mali continue. In the short term, the presence of the UN forces, French forces and Malian forces will fail to create an enabling environment for both the peace process and implementation of the peace agreement. The security situation in northern and central Mali will likely deteriorate further in the short term. The conflict in Mali's northern and central regions and the attacks by militant Islamist will dictate the overall development in the country.

The 2018 presidential elections in Mali are facing numerous challenges. The incumbent president will likely be re-elected if he, as expected, chooses to run again. The opposition is deeply divided, and it is doubtful whether new serious contenders will join the presidential race. However, the president has faced popular resistance, and he is in ill health

and has been absent for much of 2017. In late 2017, however, he appeared at several events both in and outside Mali. Re-election to the presidency figures high on the president's agenda, though it is uncertain whether his health will be strong enough to allow him to last until the election, let alone serve a new term in office. If presidential elections are not held, this will be a cause for major political and social unrest all over Mali. In addition, the precarious security situation in the country will make it difficult to hold elections.

Piracy off the Niger Delta continues
Overall, the threat of piracy in West Africa will likely not change significantly. The most serious piracy threat will still emanate from the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria. Here, years of conflict and instability have yielded fertile ground for widespread organized crime. Powerful criminal networks are deeply rooted in the Niger Delta and are responsible for most of the frequent and often violent piracy attacks off Nigeria. The primary goal of the pirates operating in the Niger Delta is to kidnap crew members and exchange them for ransom. Throughout the rest of the region, local small-time criminals make regular attempts to loot from ships anchored off larger ports. However, these pirates pose a relatively limited danger to the ships and their crews. Several of the economic and social problems that are at the root cause of piracy in West Africa will remain unresolved. Many of the region's countries will remain fraught with inequality, poverty and high unemployment. In addition, weak and corrupt state institutions in several of the countries will make it difficult to keep law and order effectively.

It is less likely that Nigeria will take decisive steps towards combating piracy in the Niger Delta. The central government is weak, and efforts to combat criminal networks have to be weighed against the risk of destabilizing the delta, as such a scenario could potentially lead to partial or full suspension of the important oil and gas production. At sea, piracy only poses a minor threat to Nigeria compared to other and more menacing problems. Consequently, it is doubtful that Nigeria will give priority to patrolling its waters.

It is less likely that the West African coastal states will unite in coordinated anti-piracy efforts. Nevertheless, the states express political will to address maritime security issues through national as well as regional initiatives. However, in reality, the initiatives lack financial backing, severely hampering their implementation. Thus, progress in the regional anti-piracy efforts will depend on international contributions.

The Arctic

Russia defines itself as the leading Arctic power and continues to focus on three large Arctic projects with international impact: maritime border demarcation, military expansion and development of the Northern Sea Route. The prospect of shorter shipping routes to Europe and North America and the opportunity to gain access to raw materials in the Arctic have also served to bolster Chinese interest in the region. China wants to increase its influence in the Arctic through trade and research cooperation with the Arctic states, including Denmark.

Russian politics in the Arctic

Russia and the Arctic countries share a strong common interest in maintaining stability and peace in the Arctic, in part to be able to attract investments for the planned projects in the region, in part to ensure that the Arctic countries reach consensus on the issue of maritime border demarcation. Thus, Russia has pursued a cooperative Arctic foreign policy strategy and has adopted a constructive approach to solving shared challenges in the region. In addition, Russia has adopted a cooperative stance on issues related to border demarcation, environment, commercial fishing, indigenous peoples and also search and rescue.

In addition, Russia is pursuing several security policy ambitions in the Arctic, such as maintaining and strengthening its defence capabilities to ensure Russian control of the territory north of Russia and keep NATO out of the Arctic.

Several key Russian security and defence experts inside the leadership and civil administration remain sceptical of the intentions Arctic NATO countries have regarding the north and believe that the West will exploit the cooperation track to counteract Russian interests in the Arctic. Consequently, they are pushing for a more assertive Russian policy in the Arctic. This other, more confrontational track deviates from the cooperative track and has primarily manifested itself in military muscle-flexing so far. If Russia finds that it cannot meet its strategic objectives through cooperation, then the assertive track will likely come to the fore and lead Russian Arctic policy in a different direction.

Maritime demarcation in the Arctic Ocean

The five Arctic coastal states have declared that they will rely on the international laws of the sea to resolve maritime border demarcation and administrative issues in the Arctic region. Russia and Denmark have submitted overlapping Arctic seabed claims to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). Over the course of the next year, Canada will also submit claims to the Commission which are expected to partly overlap with the Danish and Russian claims.

Originally, Russia expected that its updated claims would be processed by the CLCS during 2017. However, due to the complexity of the claims, it will likely take years before the CLCS is able to deliver its recommendations. Denmark's claims, submitted in December 2014, are expected to be finalized within the next approx. ten years, whereas the Canadian claims will likely take even longer to process. However, demarcation negotiations between the three countries may begin before the CLCS has delivered its recommendations.

Russia is unhappy with the extent of Denmark's claims, which reaches as far as Russia's 200 nautical mile limit. Russia will likely disregard any CLCS recommendations that support Danish claims over key Russian claims. However, if the CLCS rules in favour of the Russian claims, parts of the Russian leadership may push for Russia's right to the area, citing the CLCS recommendations and disregarding the fact that consensus with Denmark and Canada on the matter is still pending. In both cases, disagreements over rights to the seabed and regional control could intensify.

Though defensive in nature, military expansion in the Arctic conveys an aggressive political message

Russia will continue to prioritize the strengthening of its Arctic military capabilities. Over the past few years, Russia has rebuilt and expanded six forward bases on the Russian islands in the Arctic Ocean. Russia's military expansion in the region is primarily defensive in nature and aimed at pushing Russia's forward line of defence as far north as possible. The Arctic is home to a large part of the Russian strategic submarines patrolling the Arctic seas. These strategic submarines form a vital part of Russia's nuclear deterrence towards the United States. As a result of global warming, the ice cap is retreating, leaving the submarines increasingly vulnerable and expediting the need to protect them against air attacks in particular. As a result, the waters north of Russia have become high-priority areas of operation for the Northern Fleet, though it still also operates in the North Atlantic.

The six forward bases also play a vital role in Russia's capability to control and support shipping along the

Northern Sea Route. As a result of global warming, the Northern Sea Route is gradually developing into an attractive alternative to the Suez Canal. Increased navigation along the Northern Sea Route will expedite Russia's need to establish full control over it. Also, the Northern Sea Route is becoming an integral part of the infrastructure for the evolving Russian oil and gas projects in the Arctic. As a result, Russia is trying to make the Northern Sea Route a safer and more attractive alternative by developing new infrastructure and installations along the passage.

Even though Russia's military expansion in the Arctic is primarily defensive in nature, it involves elements that could be used for offensive purposes, not least the ongoing preparations for deploying tactical combat aircraft to the forward bases. At the same time, the initiatives contain elements that are politically aggressive, as Russia is using them to flag its strategic intentions. By expanding its Arctic military capabilities and activities, Russia is sending a strong political signal that it considers large parts of the region to be Russian territory and that it is ready and able to defend its Arctic interests. For instance, in 2015 and 2016, amidst great media attention, Russia used the civilian Barneo research station for paratrooper exercises close to the North Pole. In 2017, however, Russia decided not to launch similar exercises, focusing instead on hosting the "Arctic: Territory of Dialogue" conference, a Russian prestige project which was held in Arkhangelsk with the participation of several foreign ministers and heads of state from the Arctic countries. Russia will likely continue to alternate between engaging in Arctic military muscle-flexing activities and activities demonstrating the country's readiness to cooperate.

Chinese interest in the Arctic
China's interest in the Arctic continues to grow, and the Arctic has been on the agenda of several of Xi Jinping's foreign visits in 2017. China's primary interests in the Arctic are still raw materials and access to northern sea routes as well as increased influence on the political development in the region.

China's interest in the Arctic shipping lanes is mainly commercial: an opportunity to transport Chinese-produced goods to the US East Coast and Europe and raw materials extracted in the Arctic to their markets. China has included the Arctic shipping lanes in its Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the Silk Road Initiative, whose purpose is to promote trade between China and Europe.

By connecting the Arctic shipping lanes with the maritime part of the Belt & Road Initiative, China is raising its focus on the potential of the Arctic shipping lanes.

The Arctic shipping lanes are still only navigable during the summer months. Consequently, the North-East Passage will only become attractive to China once the route is open for extended parts of the year.

China's demand for energy and raw materials for its production industry will continue to grow in the long term. In addition, China is eager to secure access to resources without relying exclusively on one country or region. Even though the raw material markets have been characterized by low growth for some time now, China has maintained its interest in resources that do not necessarily yield any profit in the short term. It has done so to preserve its access to vital raw materials in the anticipation that increasing market prices in the future will make extraction of Arctic raw materials a lucrative business.

China has a strategic interest in positioning itself as an influential actor in the Arctic and will thus continue to focus on gaining a more prominent role in Arctic cooperation. China is making efforts to ensure that non-Arctic countries gain influence in the region as well. China participates in Arctic Council meetings and is increasingly giving priority to meetings in the more commercially oriented Arctic Circle forum in Iceland, while at the same time bolstering bilateral cooperation, including cooperation with Denmark. China uses Arctic knowledge and expertise to increase its relevance as a partner to the Arctic countries.

Even though China's interest in the Arctic has grown, the Arctic is still not high on China's foreign policy agenda. China's interest and involvement in the Arctic are primarily rooted in its resource and diversification strategy.

Chinese interest in investments in Greenland
China's ambition to strengthen bilateral ties with the Arctic countries also applies to Denmark and Greenland. Here, as in the rest of the Arctic, China is mainly making efforts to strengthen bilateral ties and to enhance its prospect of exercising influence through increased cooperation in research and trade.

Several Chinese state and non-state actors have shown persistent interest in becoming involved in Greenland. Their interests mainly apply to raw materials such as iron,

zinc and rare earth minerals, but also to tourism and fishing. China believes that Greenland holds vast deposits of critical minerals that may become scarce in the future. China's current interests in Greenland are mainly linked to its demand for minerals for its industrial production, but potential Chinese investments in Greenland will likely not be part of a central state-run plan.

However, it is likely that China on a political level has an interest in maintaining a commercial presence and involvement in Greenland despite the limited prospect of

short-term profit. This approach is a key element in China's overall resource security strategy and also applied to other raw material exporting countries.

As a result of close connections between Chinese companies and China's political system, there are certain risks related to large-scale Chinese investments in Greenland due to the effect that these investments would have on an economy of Greenland's size. In addition, the risk of potential political interference and pressure increases when investments in strategic resources are involved.

Afghanistan

The political and security development in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Over the next year, the Taliban will continue its military progress despite the efforts of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). However, the Taliban's cohesion is weakened by internal division among its senior leadership. ISIL's franchise in Afghanistan, Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISKP), maintains its presence in eastern Afghanistan and attracts the most radical Taliban elements while also fuelling already brewing ethnic conflicts. Cohesion within the Afghan national unity government is also under pressure as the ethnic divides harden and as Afghanistan's neighbours and Russia step up their involvement in the conflict.

Afghan politics is increasingly fragmented, and the inability of the political factions to cooperate has served to deepen ethnic tensions. In response, the leading Tadjik, Uzbek and Hazara parties have forged an alliance against President Ghani, making it increasingly difficult to bridge the gap between Pashtun and non-Pashtun Afghans.

The Taliban's insurgency will remain intensive, weakening the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. The Taliban will particularly strengthen its position in the southern, northern and north-western provinces, possibly resulting in short-term capture of vulnerable provincial capitals. In addition, the Taliban will see increased scope for action in terms of levying taxes on locals, exploiting natural resources locally, recruiting new members, launching military operations, bolstering its shadow governance and generally stepping up its propaganda activities.

Taliban Emir Haibatullah Akhundzada will likely maintain his position, though he will be increasingly weakened by internal discord. His conflict with the Taliban military leader in south-western Afghanistan, Abdul Rahim, in particular has curbed the Taliban leadership's access to financial resources. As a result, the leadership's cohesion and leverage in the southern part of the country will weaken, in turn making the insurgency more locally anchored. Still, this will only have a marginal impact on the Taliban's military capabilities.

Fighting between the Taliban and the ISKP continues
The Taliban will generally stick to its uncompromising line towards ISIL's Afghan franchise, Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISKP), due to their differing ideologies. They will thus remain at odds, though pragmatism and a budding understanding between the groups may allow the ISKP more latitude locally. Especially in the central and northern part of Afghanistan, this may lead to local truces and cooperation between the Taliban and the ISKP. The ISKP will maintain its anti-Shiite line and try to exploit ethnic and sectarian tensions, possibly increasing the potential for conflict between the various Afghan ethnic and religious groups.

In the medium term, the enduring sympathy for the ISKP among extremist Taliban insurgents may force the Taliban into accepting more radical internal trends to prevent the ISKP from successfully poaching the most radical Taliban members and attracting resources from external sympathizers and donors at the expense of the Taliban.

The ISKP will maintain its presence in parts of the Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, benefitting from Afghanistan's porous border with Pakistan. Still, the ISKP will find it hard to control larger areas in Nangarhar and Kunar as it faces fierce opposition from the Taliban, Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and US drones and Special Forces. Thus, the ISKP will also launch spectacular attacks against the Afghan national unity government, Western troops present in the country and Shiites to demonstrate its relevance.

The number of attacks launched in Kabul will likely increase in 2018, and the majority of them will be directed against Afghan targets. In the course of the next two years, attacks with large improvised bombs will likely be launched in the Kabul area.

Major problems despite Afghan National Defense and Security Forces reforms
The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces play a key role in the outcome of the conflict in Afghanistan. The ANDSF struggles with perpetual problems of weak leadership, poor exploitation of resources and capacities, and continuous politicisation of security tasks.

A comprehensive programme to reform the ANDSF aims at strengthening the Afghan Air Force and doubling the number of the effective, but hard-pressed, Special Forces. Both the Air Force and the Special Forces are struggling to find qualified personnel, though the extent and intensity of coalition support, including training, are also vital ingredients for success.

It is less likely that reforming the ANDSF will be sufficient

to decisively improve the ability to establish security in Afghanistan over the next two years. Providing security for the potential upcoming elections will absorb significant ANDSF resources. Though local truces may be forged between the ANDSF and the Taliban, they will not be enough to improve the overall security situation.

The Afghan national unity government will likely increasingly avail itself of militias to solve security tasks, as this would enable the government to deploy ANDSF to more high-priority tasks such as securing control of vital supply lines and provincial capitals. However, increased use of militias would deepen the government's dependence on local warlords, weaken its legitimacy and undermine the status of the ANDSF among the locals.

No prospect of political stability
Afghan politics are characterized by increasing fragmentation. President Ashraf Ghani is accused of centralizing power and favouring the Pashtun community. The president has failed to master the art of political compromise, and many of the government's non-Pashtun backers are turning their backs on Ghani. The inability of the government's political factions to cooperate has served to deepen ethnic tensions in the country.

In response, the leading Tadjik, Uzbek and Hazara parties have forged an alliance against President Ghani, a cooperation forum that has been boosted by the re-entry of Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) on the political scene. Since the 2016 peace agreement between HIG and the Afghan national unity government, HIG has had some measure of success in mobilizing increased support among the Pashtun community. HIG's success is a threat to the non-Pashtun political leaders, and an intense struggle for power has erupted between HIG and Jamiat-e Islami in northern Afghanistan. Combined with the progress of the Taliban, this power struggle has prompted the non-Pashtun political leaders to start mobilizing their militias, making it still harder to bridge the divide between Pashtun and non-Pashtun Afghans.

Elections for the Afghan lower house, Wolesi Jirga, and the district council are scheduled for 7 July 2018. Moreover, the Afghan constitution requires the country to hold presidential elections every five years, and Afghanistan's next presidential elections are thus to be held in 2019. However, the July 2018 elections will, in all likelihood, be postponed until the autumn of 2018 or held alongside the 2019 presidential elections due to extensive problems with security, voter registration and the setting up of 7,000 polling stations. The increasing fragmentation of Afghan politics makes it less likely that the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections will deliver a clear and widely accepted winner, though. Election rigging and accusations of rigging will likely weaken the legitimacy of the elections to a considerable extent.

The international diplomacy surrounding the conflict in Afghanistan will intensify in 2018. The United States will try to pressure Pakistan into terminating its support for the Taliban and try to persuade India to step up its economic involvement in Afghanistan. Russia, Iran and Pakistan will cluster together under the US pressure, just as they will maintain their contacts within and support for the Taliban. China will also join their cooperation, though it is more bent on stability than are Russia, Iran and Pakistan.

De facto peace discussions are highly unlikely in the short term. Great powers and Afghanistan's neighbours may possibly force the Taliban to participate in a few mediation meetings but will hardly be able to make the Taliban sit down for real negotiations that may eventually cost Haibatullah Akhundzada his grip on the movement. The Taliban's military success provides little incentive for the group to join discussions. The Afghan government and its political groupings are also deeply divided on the issue of peace negotiations with the Taliban. In the short term, they will find it difficult to agree on a common platform for negotiations with the Taliban.

The key militant Islamist groups in Afghanistan

The largest concentration of militant Islamist groups can be found in Afghanistan, especially in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan:

The Taliban is a nationalist Islamist insurgent group. The Taliban is mainly Pashtun and has historically been strongest in southern and eastern Afghanistan, though it operates all over the country and is gaining a foothold among the Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north. The Taliban cooperates with several minor insurgent and terrorist groups in the area but maintains its uncompromising line towards other groups, especially the ISKP, as the Taliban has rejected the ISKP caliphate and supremacy.

The Haqqani network (HQN) comprises Pashtuns from the Zadran tribe in Paktia, Paktika and Khost, but it has also established a wide presence in eastern Afghanistan. The HQN cooperates closely with the Taliban, occasionally supports Taliban operations in other parts of the country, and poses a great threat in Kabul. The HQN follows a more radical interpretation of jihadi insurgency than the Taliban and cooperates with several minor and radical militant groups in the area, especially al-Qaida.

The **Loya Rahbari Shura (LRS)** Taliban network comprises Pashtuns from the Noorzai tribe in western Afghanistan. The LRS was formed by Mohammed Rasoul in 2015 in response to the election of then Taliban Emir Akhtar Mohammed Mansour. The LRS has been significantly weakened after alternating between fighting and cooperating with the Taliban but has made it apparent that the Taliban is struggling with increasing discord and growing fragmentation.

Al-Qaida (AQ) has established a limited presence in Kunar and Paktika, in particular, and provides limited support to the Taliban's and HQN's insurgency. AQ remains intent on attacking targets in the West but lacks the capabilities to launch large-scale attacks.

Islamic State in Khorasan province (ISKP) has a significant presence in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan, though it has sympathizers in central and northern Afghanistan and regularly launches spectacular attacks in Kabul and Jalalabad. The ISKP finds its recruits among discontented and radical Taliban members and promotes an anti-Shiite course, while also fuelling ethnic tensions in the country. Former members of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and dissatisfied Afghan Taliban members were the driving forces behind the establishment of the ISKP in 2015.

Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) was formed based on a Pashtun nationalist Islamist ideology like the Taliban's. HIG has long been a marginal insurgent group, and numerous former HIG members have joined the Taliban. HIG's steps towards reconciliation with the national unity government have raised doubts as to its loyalty, resulting in fighting between Taliban and HIG sympathizers all over Afghanistan.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) has long operated out of Pakistan's tribal areas, but Pakistani counter-terrorism operations in the tribal areas in 2014 forced the movement to take refuge in northern Afghanistan. In 2015, the IMU joined the ISKP, thereby breaking the long-standing alliance with the Taliban and AQ. This move led to clashes, and the IMU ended up as the losing party, leaving it weakened and divided over whether to stay affiliated with the Taliban or with the ISKP.

The Pakistani anti-Indian terrorist group **Lashkar-e Taiyba (LET)** has also been forced to seek refuge in eastern Afghanistan in connection with Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations. LET has likely established a certain degree of cooperation with several other militant groups in Afghanistan.

Pakistan Taliban (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP) has also widely been forced to flee to eastern Afghanistan and has split into numerous smaller groups as a result of internal discord and Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations. The TTP has, to a certain degree, returned to Pakistan's tribal areas, using these areas as well as its safe havens in eastern Afghanistan to attack targets in Pakistan, further souring relations between the two countries.

China

China's foreign policy influence will continue to grow under President Xi Jinping, and China will become increasingly self-confident on the global scene. China's Belt and Road Initiative will also affect Europe and Denmark. The Chinese leadership uses uncertainty and confusion over US foreign policy to promote its own interests. China will continue its South China Sea policy, and Chinese involvement in Central Asia generates challenges in relations with Russia.

In the coming years, China's regional and global foreign policy influence and clout will continue to expand under President Xi Jinping, who has further consolidated his political sway following the 19th Party Congress, elevating him to the level of previous leaders such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. The Chinese leadership will behave confidently and insistently in international forums, and China will seek to further bolster its role in international politics.

The Chinese leadership will actively and ambitiously chart the course for economic and financial development in Asia in an effort to consolidate China's position as the financial and political centre of the region. China will seek to set the rules and framework for commercial and financial integration for many of the less developed countries in the region in a way that further promotes Chinese interests. Also, the Chinese leadership will seek to expand its control over Chinese foreign investments in inter-regional road systems and railways as well as regional electricity, oil and gas supply systems so as to ensure that they align with and strengthen China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims at promoting ties and trade between China and Europe.

China's economic and financial development initiatives in the region, including the Belt and Road Initiative, extend beyond the region and are aimed at linking the countries involved closer to China's strategic objectives and development needs. The Chinese investments and initiatives linked to the Belt and Road Initiative will also increasingly have an impact on Europe and Denmark.

China exploits uncertainty over US involvement in the region

Uncertainty related to the current US administration's foreign policy course and its withdrawal from the regional multilateral free trade agreement, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), has undermined confidence among countries in the region concerning the level of the United States' future economic and political involvement in Asia. China's leadership is exploiting this perceived vacuum by promising more Chinese investment in the countries that have officially extended full support to China's Belt and Road

Initiative while disregarding those that have not. However, the United States will continue to bolster its regional ties, especially its security ties, prompted by regional concerns over China's intentions.

China continues its South China Sea policy

The South China Sea will remain among China's top foreign policy priorities. The Chinese leadership has announced billions of dollars' worth of loans and investments in the countries around the South China Sea, potentially leading to a softening of the territorial disputes. However, China will maintain its territorial claims and increasingly exercise its military and civilian authority in the disputed areas, possibly igniting renewed tensions with other countries in connection with resource extraction, including fishing. Even though the United States will continue to use its military presence to dispute the legitimacy of the Chinese claims, this move may not necessarily result in a deterioration of US-China relations.

In the long term, China will be able to use the artificial islands in the South China Sea as operating bases for the Chinese coast guard as well as naval activities. China will likely continue the build-up of military installations on the Spratly artificial islands.

Chinese involvement in Central Asia sparks tensions

China sees Russia as an important partner in regional and global affairs. The two countries will likely make concerted efforts to further strengthen their formal military, political and economic cooperation, although mutual scepticism over their respective foreign policy priorities and strategy will hamper the formation of a stronger alliance.

China and Russia both recognize that they may have diverging and conflicting interests in Central Asia. However, it is likely that the leaders of the two countries have reached a mutual understanding that it is not in their best interest to challenge each other's key strategic interests in Central Asia. Both China and Russia will try to avoid tensions that may set these two countries on a collision course in Central Asia, but there is a growing risk of increasing tensions between them.

North Korea

North Korea will continue efforts to establish itself as a nuclear weapons state with long-range ballistic missiles. New North Korean nuclear tests are a possibility, and additional missile tests are highly likely. North Korea will neither succumb to the pressure of sanctions nor abandon its missile and nuclear weapons programme.

North Korea's nuclear tests and missile launches challenge the international community. North Korea's nuclear weapons programme is among the United States' top foreign policy priorities and has raised political and military tensions in North-East Asia.

China has increased its pressure on North Korea. However, even though relations between North Korea and China are tense, it is less likely that China will launch initiatives that may threaten the stability of the North Korean regime.

North Korea uses its missile and nuclear weapons programme both as a deterrent and as a guarantee against attacks as well as a negotiation tool to facilitate dialogue with, in particular, the United States. North Korea regards its missile and nuclear weapons programme as its only means to get the attention of the United States and force the US to the negotiating table.

At the same time, the missile and nuclear programme is essential to Kim Jong-un's legitimacy as a leader, currently a well-consolidated position. In this context, Kim Jong-un is likely more dependent than Kim Jong-il was on the nuclear and missile programme as an instrument for ensuring internal political legitimacy among members of the country's top political and military echelon.

Regardless of sanctions and international pressure, North Korea is highly unlikely to abandon its missile and nuclear weapons programme in the short to medium term.

North Korea continues to develop its nuclear weapons programme
North Korea will continue to systematically develop nuclear weapons, and new nuclear tests may be launched in the short to medium term. North Korea's nuclear development efforts will likely include hydrogen bombs that can be delivered by ballistic missiles.

The aim of the hydrogen bomb technology is to generate a very powerful explosive yield in a lightweight warhead. Hydrogen bomb designs may have variable yield options, allowing a single design to be used in different situations.

Hydrogen bomb technology can be designed with (almost) arbitrarily large yields.

North Korea's sixth nuclear test on 3 September 2017 produced a greater yield than any of the country's previous tests, but it is less likely that the nuclear test included a fully developed hydrogen bomb. The test likely involved a so-called boosted nuclear weapons design that may improve the compactness of the warhead or increase the explosive yield. Whether or not a hydrogen bomb was tested, the powerful explosive yield indicates that North Korea has made significant progress towards developing nuclear weapons.

North Korea's missile programme developing rapidly
North Korea will continue to focus on the development of operational intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The Hwasong-14/15 ICBMs were successfully tested in July and November 2017, with a likely maximum range of 10,000 km and 13,000 km, respectively, thereby able to reach the entire continental USA. It is unclear whether the missile is capable of delivering nuclear warheads at these distances, and, if so, what the explosive yield would be. North Korea will continuously need to further develop, improve and test its ICBMs, making additional tests in the short term possible.

It is likely that North Korea will test other intermediate-range ballistic missiles of the same type as it launched over Hokkaido in northern Japan in August and September 2017. The Hwasong-12 missile has a likely maximum range of 4,500 km. It is unclear how large a warhead the missile can carry and whether it can carry a nuclear warhead.

Questions remain about North Korea's ability to produce a re-entry vehicle (RV) capable of safely returning a missile warhead through the Earth's atmosphere. An operational RV is a prerequisite for viable long-range missiles.

Proliferation of WMD technology is difficult to uncover
North Korea still poses a serious obstacle to the international community's nuclear non-proliferation efforts. North Korea continues to produce the fissile material plutonium,

and the country has developed the capabilities to use gas centrifuges to enrich uranium. This technology can also be used to produce weapons-grade uranium. It remains very difficult for the international community to detect potential export of centrifuge technology. Compared to reactors generating plutonium, centrifuge facilities can be much smaller, making them more difficult to detect.
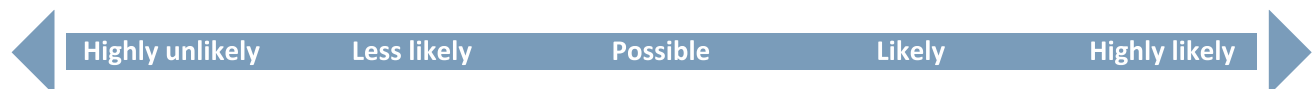
Terms and definitions

In order to facilitate the reading of this risk assessment, we have prepared a brief outline of the special terms and definitions used in our assessments.

Intelligence assessments almost always contain elements of doubt. The level of probability in assessments must thus always be made clear. To facilitate this and to ensure that all analysts express levels of probability consistently, we use standardized phrases to indicate probability, in particular when making key assessments.

Probability levels, terms and definitions used in this risk assessment are as follows:

The scale does not express precise numeric differences but merely informs the reader whether something is more or less probable than something else. In other words, this scale shows whether we assess the probability to be closer to 25 per cent than to 50 per cent. This is the best way for us to ensure consistency between analyst intention and reader interpretation.

Probability levels are not an exact science but are intended to give the reader an indication of our level of certainty. Probability levels, terms and definitions used in this risk assessment are as follows:

Highly unlikely	Less likely	Possible	Likely	Highly likely

Degrees of probability
- **Highly unlikely.** We do not expect a certain development. Such a development is (almost) not a possibility.
- **Less likely/doubtful.** It is more likely that something will not happen than vice versa.
- **Possible.** It is a likely possibility, however, we do not have the basis to assess whether it is more or less possible that something will happen.
- **Likely.** It is more likely that something will happen than vice versa.
- **Highly likely.** We expect a certain development. It has (almost) been confirmed.

Time frames
- Few months   Very short term
- 0-2 years: Short term
- 2-5 years: Medium term
- 5-10 years: Long term
- Over 10 years   Very long term

Photo credit list

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Page 16   *Kirill Kudryavtsev/ Scanpix/AFP:* Victory parade on the Red Square, May 2017

Page 24   *Alejandro Garcia/ Scanpix:* Terrorist attack in Barcelona

Page 31   Youssef Rabih Youssef/ Scanpix: Syrian Democratic Forces capture Raqqah, October 2017

Page 38   *Daphne Benoit/ Scanpix:* French soldier on patrol in Mali, November 2017

Page 46   *Hedayatullah Amid/ Scanpix:* Police guard in Kabul in Afghanistan, September 2017