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Germany's anticipation of and response to ISIS' rise to power: overview of open-source expert claims and policy responses

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March 2021

Timeline: 1 July 2013 – 9 June 2014

This period is relevant for an understanding of how the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) gradually established itself as a powerful and destructive actor in Iraq and Syria and how it reached beyond its core conflict zone. The chronological overview starts with crucial developments in Syria (ISIS expanding its footprint in northern Syria and tightening its grip on Raqqa while increasingly fighting other rebel groups) and in Iraq (July 2013 marked the successful conclusion of ISIS' "Breaking the Walls" campaign, the beginning of its "Soldier's Harvest" campaign and a sharp increase in violent attacks against predominantly Shia targets). The overview ends with the beginning of ISIS' northern Iraq offensive and on the day before Mosul and its international airport fell to ISIS. By then, Europe had just experienced its first terrorist attack (Jewish Museum Brussels) linked to ISIS and to the phenomenon of returning foreign fighters, highlighting the immense challenges for European intelligence cooperation and counterterrorism.

The Iraqi army's defeat at Mosul and the fall of the city to ISIS on 10 June 2014 are often portrayed as a highly surprising turn of events. Reconstructing knowledge claims and policy responses to the evolving crisis prior to this allows for an investigation of earlier surprises, or the sum of surprises, knowledge producers and decision-makers had experienced by this specific turning point. This overview identifies eight

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notable events after which the situation developed for the worse. Each provided indications that the likelihood of ISIS causing serious harm, based on its capability, intent and exploitation of structural vulnerabilities, was increasing.

Methodology:

This overview is based on a systematic analysis of open-source data published during this time. Three groups of non-governmental experts have been selected as authoritative sources of knowledge:

- researchers at international NGOs (*International Crisis Group/ICG, Human Rights Watch/HRW, Amnesty International*),
- journalists reporting for German media organisations (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung/FAZ, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Welt, Der Spiegel, Die Zeit*),
- analysts at a German think tank (*German Institute for International and Security Affairs/SWP*).

These experts shaped policy debates in Germany during the period under study by writing or being quoted about ISIS' activities and structural vulnerabilities. Examples of the latter were: growing rebel infighting in the Syrian civil war, Sunni-Shia tensions in Iraq and the region, ISIS' appeal to radical Islamists in Europe, and the weakness of the Iraqi security forces and Iraqi government. Overall, almost 400 expert publications have been gathered and evaluated. 236 contained relevant knowledge claims, of which 180 were drawn from press articles, 40 from NGO reports and 16 from think tank analyses. They are considered relevant as they provided knowledge related to the meaning of events, enabling conditions in which ISIS could thrive, likely future developments, and/or offered evidential claims about key facts and/or prescriptive action-focused claims. Some of the claims are contradictory. This was at least partly due to the highly uncertain situation, speed of dynamics on the ground, limited access for knowledge producers, and disinformation by ISIS and the Iraqi and Syrian governments.

A total of 140 policy-relevant documents have been reviewed. These included:

- parliamentary publications (minutes of *Bundestag* debates, motions, answers to opposition inquiries),
- government publications (statements on meetings and summits held, policies adopted, action taken),
- speeches and interviews by decision-makers.

35 sources were useful for an understanding of how German decision-makers were influenced by knowledge claims and how they responded to the evolving crisis. In addition, 28 documents have been selected as background information on Germany's Syria and Iraq policies and for an evaluation of how the perceptions of decision-makers and the opposition evolved.

The keyword search for NGO outputs focused on ‘Syria’ and ‘Iraq’. The keyword search for all other (German-language) documents focused on ‘Syrien’, ‘Irak’, ‘Islamischer Staat’, ‘ISIS’, ‘Al-Qaida/Al-Kaida im Irak’. It should be noted that the Arabic acronym Da’esh was rarely used in German sources under study here and that experts still frequently referred to al-Qaeda in Iraq when discussing ISIS. Also, at times experts failed to distinguish clearly between ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Throughout this document, the acronym ISIS is used. The group had adopted this name in April 2013, after expanding into Syria, and a later name change (Islamic State) only occurred in late June 2014.

| Date | Notable events including turning points | Expert claims about ISIS’ activities, enabling conditions for its rise to power and likely future developments | Impact of claims at decision-making level and broader policy responses |
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| 01/07/2013 | | Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that the Iraqi government had closed the al-Qa’im border crossing in Anbar province in August 2012 due to concerns that ‘al-Qaeda operatives might use it to enter Iraq’. | |
| 02/07/2013 | | Der Spiegel highlights that violence linked to Islamist terrorism in Iraq has sharply increased since January and continues unabated. On 2 July, over 50 were killed and more than 100 were injured in a series of coordinated bombings and shootings across Iraq, especially in Baghdad. | |
| 03/07/2013 | | Florian Peil states in Süddeutsche Zeitung that Islamist groups with vague links to al-Qaeda continue its fight and are particularly successful in Iraq. These groups no longer coordinate their activities with al-Qaeda’s headquarters and do not necessarily follow Zawahiri’s leadership. He claims that while Al-Qaeda disintegrates, its ideology remains a powerful weapon which increasingly motivates individuals in the West to opt for jihad. | |

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| 08/07/2013 | | <p>Süddeutsche Zeitung reports about increased rebel infighting in northwestern Syria, especially between radical Islamists and the Free Syrian Army (FSA).</p> <p>Christoph Reuter reports in Der Spiegel that the small town of Atmeh in northern Syria has become 'the new Mecca for jihadists from all over the world'. He witnessed how the first foreign fighter arrived from Iraq in July 2012 to help overthrow Assad and how more than 1000 jihadists have settled in Atmeh since. Their activities are viewed with suspicion by FSA members and other moderate rebels. The latter wonder why the jihadists who join them are not using looted weapons and ammunition against Syrian regime troops and express concern that they will eventually use their weapons against them or for terrorist attacks worldwide. Based on interviews with jihadists, Reuter reports that Shia Muslims are their true enemies and that they plan to free Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine from Shia influence and unbelievers. He states that at least five Jihadi groups are active in and around Atmeh of which ISIS is the strongest (200 members, growing faster than others due to influx of foreign fighters).</p> | |
| 09/07/2013 | | SWP's Guido Steinberg highlights that Islamist terrorism has become more disintegrated in the West since the spring of 2013, with more individuals and small groups engaging in Jihadi activities. The growing impact of social media and al-Qaeda's | Interior minister Hans-Peter Friedrich highlights that the 60 German citizens who have reportedly joined Jihadi groups in Syria pose a danger upon their potential return to Germany and |

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| | | promotion of individual jihad since June 2011, which constituted a strategic reorientation, have facilitated online radicalisation. | would need to be treated and monitored accordingly. He suggests an EU-wide immigration platform modelled upon the U.S. system. Such a joint database to monitor the movements of non-European foreigners could help mitigate the threat stemming from foreign terrorists. |
| 11/07/2013 | | SWP's Heiko Wimmen warns that weapons deliveries to Syrian rebels could easily fall into the hands of Islamist terrorists due to the lack of leadership among the Syrian opposition and blurred boundaries between various groups. | |
| 12/07/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that ISIS killed a high-ranking FSA commander to expand its influence in northern Syria. ISIS also reportedly announced that it seeks to kill all members of the FSA's military council. Der Spiegel claims that the power struggle between militia groups has escalated and that the assassination marks the end of the FSA and ISIS fighting the Syrian regime together. | |
| 13/07/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that ISIS and the FSA clashed in Idlib and that the opposition is deeply fragmented. ISIS has become more powerful and concentrates its efforts on expanding its control in northern Syria. It also consolidates its influence in occupied areas by establishing Sharia courts and administrative structures. | |

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| | | Der Spiegel reports that the conflict between Sunni and Shia groups in Iraq has escalated further, with more than 100 people killed on 11-12 July in a series of coordinated bombings in Kirkuk, Mosul and next to a Shia shrine in Dujail. | |
| 14/07/2013 | | Der Spiegel highlights that Iraq is at a crossroads and might soon become engulfed in civil war due to tensions between Sunnis, Shia and Kurds running high. In further coordinated attacks on 13 July, 31 people were killed in Kut and Basra. | |
| 16/07/2013 | | Sonja Zekri argues in Süddeutsche Zeitung that tensions are growing between radical Islamist groups in Syria, with ISIS becoming more powerful than Jabhat al-Nusra, and that Assad benefits from rebel infighting. She further reports that fighting broke out between ISIS and other militia groups in southeast Aleppo and that ISIS is regularly looting factories and public facilities. | |
| 17/07/2013 | | | In a detailed response to an opposition inquiry on foreign fighters in Syria, the government reports that more than 70 German jihadists have left for Syria and that German authorities are using social media intelligence to respond to the radicalisation and recruitment of German nationals. |
| 18/07/2013 | | HRW reports that the conflict in Iraq is 'becoming more viciously sectarian than ever' and that 'Syria's civil war has helped fuel the sectarian tensions coursing through the region'. It further warns: | [<i>background on broader Syria policy: the government increases its humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees.</i>] |

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| | | <p>'President Bashar Assad and his cronies exacerbated the sectarian divide by demonizing pro-democracy activists as extremists and jihadists. Now their bogeyman is becoming real. The uprising has morphed into an armed rebellion increasingly co-opted and dominated by armed Sunni Islamist groups, including foreign fighters, some with overtly sectarian agendas.' HRW concludes that sectarianism in Iraq and Syria is 'partly a consequence of upheaval' and partly 'a product of resilient patterns of authoritarianism, discrimination and impunity'.</p> | |
| 19/07/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that a suicide bomber killed more than 20 people in a Sunni mosque in the Iraqi town of Al-Wajihyah.</p> | |
| 20/07/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that at least 30 people were killed in a series of car bombings in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad.</p> | |
| 21/07/2013 | <p>In an attack on Abu Ghraib high-security prison, ISIS facilitates a mass breakout of at least 500 prisoners. Most escapees are senior members of al-Qaeda who have received death sentences. In a simultaneous attack on Taji prison, the escape of inmates can be prevented. A total of 26 Iraqi security forces and over 20</p> | <p>Der Spiegel and FAZ report that at least 65 people were killed in a series of 17 attacks in Baghdad. FAZ highlights that more than 520 people have to date been killed in terrorist attacks in Iraq in July and that al-Qaeda was likely responsible. FAZ warns of a return to the years 2006-2007 when radical Sunni and Shia were fighting each other and argues that the escalation is partly caused by Maliki's anti-Sunni policies and that the Syrian civil war increases mistrust between Shia and Sunni.</p> | |

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| | <p>civilians are killed in both attacks. The prison breaks have been meticulously prepared for over a year and officially end ISIS' "Breaking the Walls" campaign. The attacks highlight that ISIS can successfully carry out sophisticated military operations by exploiting the vulnerabilities of Iraq's security forces and that it has gained manpower.</p> | | |
| 22/07/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel and Die Zeit report that four high-ranking al-Qaeda commanders escaped during the Abu Ghraib prison break and that both prison attacks were started by several car and suicide bombings. Der Spiegel states elsewhere that at least 22 soldiers and 3 civilians died in a suicide bombing on a military convoy in Mosul.</p> | |
| 23/07/2013 | | <p>Rudolph Chimelli argues in Süddeutsche Zeitung that the escalation of violence in Iraq has been facilitated by increased cooperation between Syrian and Iraqi jihadists and that the Sunni-Shia divide is the underlying driver of conflict. Citing the outgoing UN envoy to Iraq, Martin Kobler, Chimelli warns that the 'battlefields in Iraq and Syria are growing together'.</p> | |

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| | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that ISIS claimed responsibility for the recent prison breaks in Iraq and that it had prepared them for months.</p> <p>SWP's Guido Steinberg argues that ISIS exploits tensions between Sunnis and Shia in the Middle East and that these are also exacerbated by Saudi Arabia's anti-Iran stance.</p> | |
| 24/07/2013 | | <p>Rudolph Chimelli reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung that some prison guards cooperated with ISIS during the recent breakouts and that this was a major enabling factor. He considers it a surprising admission by the Iraqi government that its security sector has been infiltrated by ISIS. Chimelli reports that the Iraqi government is facing the most serious terrorist challenge in years and that it underestimated the strength and reach of ISIS. He highlights that ISIS has a broad operational basis due to its expansion in both Iraq and Syria, that it disposes of significant resources and that it poses a clear threat to Assad and Maliki.</p> | |
| 25/07/2013 | | <p>Kurt Pelda reports in Der Spiegel that many jihadist fighting in northern Syria came from Chechnya. He also highlights that foreign sponsors (esp. Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have been supplying ISIS with weapons and that ISIS has acquired a significant number of weapons on the Syrian black market.</p> | |
| 29/07/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that more than 86 people died in a series of 14 bombings in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad and southern Iraq on 29 July.</p> | |

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| 30/07/2013 | | <p>Rudolph Chimelli reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung that a leading Iraqi politician, the speaker of the parliament, has warned for the first time that Iraq could be sliding back into civil war. Shortly after his press conference on 29 July, at least 67 people were killed in 17 car bombings in Baghdad, Tikrit and Anbar province. Chimelli argues that the Abu Ghraib prison breakout allows ISIS to strengthen its ranks and fill leadership positions and that this will have consequences for Syria's opposition and ISIS' terrorist activities in Iraq. He also highlights that ISIS is starting to establish its own control posts in Iraq.</p> <p>Referring to an appeal by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Iraqi political leaders 'to bring the country back from the brink and to leave no space to those who seek to exploit the political stalemate through violence and terror', Christoph Sydow warns in Der Spiegel that Iraq is set to slide back into civil war. He argues that ISIS will do what it can to overthrow Maliki's Shia-dominated government and continuously exploit Sunni grievances. Maliki's non-reconciliatory stance and policies, many of which are failing to address the basic needs of Iraqis, are driving more people to ISIS.</p> | |
| July 2013 | | <p>The International Crisis Group (ICG) reports that July 2013 was the deadliest months in Iraq since April 2008, with more than 1000 people killed in insurgent operations and sectarian attacks.</p> | |

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| 01/08/2013 | | <p>SWP's Guido Steinberg highlights how violence in Iraq has gradually, since April 2013, reached a new level of escalation. He sees Maliki's authoritarian style with his exclusion of Sunni and secular groups as the root cause for this development and emphasises that radical Sunni groups can build upon the support of the Sunni population, especially in the western and northern provinces. He also discusses how it became evident during attacks in late 2011 in Aleppo that AQI/ISI was becoming active in Syria.</p> <p>Der Spiegel warns about growing self-radicalisation in Germany after a prominent German jihadist, Denis Cuspert, who had been influenced by converted Islamist Pierre Vogel and has settled in Syria posted a video in which he encouraged suicide attacks.</p> <p>Alfred Hackensberger reports in Die Welt that the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in northern Syria has declared war against ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra after weeks of intense infighting and after a prominent Syrian Kurdish politician was killed in a car bombing in late July. The PYD is mobilising support amongst the Kurdish population to counter ISIS. Hackensberger claims that other Syrian opposition parties won't turn against ISIS as the latter are better equipped and willing to die as martyrs and are as such needed on the front lines.</p> | |
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| | | He also mentions that ISIS has repeatedly sought to control Kurdish oil fields in northeastern Syria and already controls some near Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria. | |
| 03/08/2013 | | | <i>[background on broader Syria policy: international development secretary Dirk Niebel announces additional humanitarian aid worth EUR 20 million for Syrian refugees, especially those based in Iraq.]</i> |
| 04/08/2013 | ISIS launches a military offensive on Alawite villages in Latakia, Syria, together with four other Jihadi groups. HRW suggests that ISIS was in charge, providing evidence that at least 190 civilians were killed and over 200 hostages seized. The incident highlights ISIS' indiscriminate use of force. | Rainer Herrmann argues in FAZ that while Syria continues to disintegrate, the Levant has become one battle zone. He claims that ISIS and al-Nusra are the most effective Syrian rebel groups. He further holds that the recent escalation of violence in Iraq is also a consequence of the Syrian civil war spillover. | |
| 05/08/2013 | A coalition of rebel groups, reportedly led by ISIS, captures Menagh military air base near Aleppo from Syrian regime troops after ISIS launched a sophisticated suicide attack. Menagh is the biggest helicopter base in the region and as such of | Thomas Avenarius warns in Süddeutsche Zeitung that al-Qaeda's ideology and method continue to pose a very real threat. Radical Islamists all over the world can adopt these without being part of al-Qaeda's structure. Whether they have pledged allegiance to Zawahiri or not is less significant than the common objective they pursue – a Sunni state under Sharia law. Avenarius argues that al-Qaeda has been declared dead prematurely and is | |

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| | <p>high strategic relevance. The incident shows how heavily other rebel groups are relying on ISIS. It also highlights ISIS' military capability and its use of suicide bombings to gain tactical advantage.</p> | <p>benefiting from the situation in Egypt, among others.</p> <p>SWP's Guido Steinberg argues that the Syrian civil war has facilitated the latest escalation of violence in Iraq, but that Maliki's authoritarian style and his anti-Sunni policies are the root of the problem. He suggests that while Iraq will remain unstable for years and while Maliki is set to continue his 'paranoid' course if he gets re-elected in 2014, a new civil war remains an unlikely prospect due to the strength of the Iraqi security forces. Steinberg's analysis also implies that the future of Iraq depends on how ISIS performs as part of the Syrian opposition.</p> | |
| 07/08/2013 | | <p>Die Welt reports that Menagh military air base fell under the control of ISIS-led rebels after intense fighting against Syrian regime troops. The air base had previously been used by Assad's troops for attacks against rebel troops in the north.</p> | |
| 10/08/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that at least 50 people were killed in a series of eight car bombings in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad as people were celebrating the end of Ramadan.</p> | |
| 11/08/2013 | | <p>HRW reports that ISIS has claimed responsibility for the series of attacks in Iraq over the past four months. It argues that ISIS' 'systematic policy of killing civilians' amounts to crimes against humanity and that 'no political goal or grievance can possibly justify this widespread and organized murder</p> | |

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| | | <p>campaign, which is wreaking terrible suffering on Iraqis.’ HRW highlights that the attacks also targeted military installations and state institutions. Referring to figures provided by the UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), HRW reports that 1057 Iraqis were killed during the month of July and that 2326 were wounded, making it the bloodiest month in over five years. Among the dead were 333 police and security forces. HRW also reports that the acting UN Special Representative for Iraq warned that July’s violence may herald a return to civil war.</p> | |
| 12/08/2013 | | <p>Süddeutsche Zeitung reports how Raqqa, the only provincial capital held by rebels (with ISIS being the dominant force and having roughly 1500 fighters in town), has been bombed by Syrian regime troops but how ISIS’ base was not targeted.</p> <p>Florian Flade argues in Die Welt that al-Qaeda had been declared dead prematurely after the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011. While it is doubtful that Zawahiri is as influential within the organisation as his predecessor, al-Qaeda members continue to be driven by the resolve to commit terrorist acts in the West and will use any chance of doing so. Al-Qaeda’s expansion, among others in Iraq and Syria, will continue, among others due to the deterioration of political contexts following the Arab spring. As such, Al-Qaeda is becoming increasingly influential within Europe’s neighbourhood.</p> | <p>Der Spiegel suggests that the coalition is divided over its Syria policy. Deputy chairman of the CDU, Armin Laschet, accused foreign minister Guido Westerwelle of providing non-lethal equipment and humanitarian aid to the wrong rebel groups in Syria by saying: ‘it is absurd that we are supporting the same people in Syria that we are fighting in Mali, namely the terrorist organisations al-Nusra and al-Qaeda, who are being financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who are introducing Sharia courts and fighting religious diversity in Syria’. Laschet calls upon the government to make deliveries conditional upon the respect of human rights by Syrian rebel groups. He also argues for a more active and critical</p> |

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| | | <p>Die Welt reports that at least 24 people were killed in a series of suicide attacks in Iraq.</p> <p>Christoph Reuter argues in Der Spiegel that al-Qaeda has successfully withdrawn to local battlefields and that ISIS has become Al-Qaeda's most powerful affiliate. He emphasises that Zawahiri is unable to control and reunite all affiliates. He claims that the biggest terrorist threat stems from those who commit attacks after self-radicalising and from al-Qaeda affiliates using post-Arab spring conflicts. As such, the Syrian civil war has given fresh impetus to al-Qaeda by becoming the most popular destination for foreign jihadis. Reuter further claims that Turkey is doing nothing to stop foreign jihadists from entering Syria. He also highlights that, due its 'diffuse ideology', al-Qaeda has the tactical advantage over its opponents of taking part in different conflicts simultaneously. In Iraq, ISIS is benefiting from Maliki's anti-Sunni policies. In Syria, it is gradually taking over foreign fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra without letting Zawahiri help settle the conflict between the two al-Qaeda affiliates.</p> | <p>stance to prevent further abductions and help free those who have been abducted by Jihadi groups.</p> |
| 13/08/2013 | | | <p>A foreign office spokesperson responds to Laschet's accusations (see 12/08/2013) by saying that the government supports only those rebel groups who share Western values and</p> |

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| | | | not those who adhere to terrorist ideologies. |
| 14/08/2013 | | The ICG warns that ‘with frustration at a boil, unprecedented Sunni-Shiite polarisation in the region and deadly car bombings surging across the country since the start of Ramadan in July, a revived sectarian civil war is a serious risk’ in Iraq. It traces the origins of the crisis and discusses how it has been escalating since April 2013. The ICG emphasises that ISIS is resurgent, exploits political grievances and has claimed responsibility for coordinated attacks as early as 19 March 2013 – on the 10 th anniversary of the U.S. led invasion of Iraq. It recommends that the Iraqi government and provincial councils prioritise counter-ISIS measures and police the Syrian border to prevent the crossing of Iraqi fighters. | |
| 15/08/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that at least 25 people were killed in a series of bombing attacks in Baghdad and that 17 were killed north of Baghdad the previous day. | |
| 19/08/2013 | | Michael Waltz argues in Der Spiegel that the recent prison breaks in Iraq, Pakistan and Libya were linked and part of al-Qaeda’s tactics. He claims that the organisation has gained strength and acts highly effectively. He warns about prison radicalisation and argues that the U.S. has turned a blind eye to the resurgence of al-Qaeda due to a desire to bring an end to the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. | Foreign minister Guido Westerwelle assesses the situation in Syria as follows: ‘I do not believe that fewer lives will be lost if more arms are sent to Syria. We are only supporting those forces with which we share fundamental values. The fact that an al-Nusra terrorist is fighting against Assad does not make him our friend. |

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| | | | Damascus is just a stop on the road to Jerusalem for these people. That constitutes a threat to open society in Europe too. (...) In a country like Syria, the solution cannot be military; only a political solution can bring lasting peace and stability, as the country comprises various ethnic and religious groups.' |
| 20/08/2013 | | <p>Die Welt reports that Iraqi security forces have launched a major counterterrorism operation in which they have arrested 116 ISIS members, killed five, secured weapons and destroyed two ISIS training camps.</p> <p>Alfred Hackensberger reports in Die Welt how foreign jihadists, among others from Germany, play an increasingly influential role in Syria's civil war and are one of the reasons why three al-Qaeda affiliates (ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar) have become more powerful than moderate forces in Syria. He claims that at least nine journalists have been abducted by jihadists in July and August in Syria and that systematic abductions are a symptom of their growing influence. He quotes an opposition activist in Aleppo as saying that 'nobody can stop the jihadists now' and 'they can do what they want'. Hackensberger reports that jihadists are the dominant force in northern and eastern Syria and</p> | |

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| | | <p>that they have the most money and best weapons among opposition fighters. Jihadists are also often perceived as elite fighters among rebel groups. He refers to the concerns of domestic intelligence analysts that those German citizens who join Jihadi groups as foreign fighters in Syria will be fully radicalised terrorists upon their return to Germany. He further highlights that the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) is the only rebel group to actively counter the influence of jihadists in Syria.</p> | |
| 23/08/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that at least 25 people were killed in a suicide attack in Baghdad while 7 people lost their lives in earlier attacks outside of the capital that day.</p> | <p>Foreign minister Guido Westerwelle urges caution in response to French calls for the use of force in Syria: 'Before speaking of consequences we must first have clarification.' Der Spiegel argues that 'Germany has gone from foot-dragging (...) to putting its foot down against French involvement in Syria', and that 'German obstructionism also reveals the consensus across the German political spectrum that an Islamist regime in Syria is to be avoided.' Der Spiegel also emphasises that 'Germans long refused the French assessment that the occupation of northern Mali by al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) presented a threat against Western interests'.</p> |

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| 25/08/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that at least 48 people were killed in a series of attacks across Iraq that day. | |
| 26/08/2013 | | <p>Die Welt reports that six people were abducted and killed in Tarmiyah, north of Baghdad.</p> <p>Der Spiegel reports how experts warn of heightened risks of Islamic terrorist attacks worldwide, severe implications for regional security in the Middle East, and an escalation of the refugee crisis should Western states decide to launch a military intervention in Syria.</p> | <i>[background on perceptions of decision-makers: foreign minister Guido Westerwelle describes the Arabellions as the biggest challenge for Europe and highlights that the situation is 'at its most dramatic' in Syria.]</i> |
| 27/08/2013 | | | <i>[background on German preferences: German politicians across all parties reportedly prefer a political solution in Syria to participation in a military intervention.]</i> |
| 28/08/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that at least 40 people were killed in a series of car bombings and suicide attacks in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad that day.</p> <p>Süddeutsche Zeitung highlights that al-Qaeda members in Iraq and Syria have merged into one entity and that terrorism in Iraq 'has become almost as bad as during the most severe sectarian strife'. It argues that 'regime change in Syria and victory by jihadists is the last thing Maliki wants'.</p> | Foreign minister Guido Westerwelle highlights that Germany's legal position prevents it from supplying arms to Syrian rebels. He further states: 'We want to support the moderate opposition forces in Syria. Just because a terrorist is fighting against Assad and his regime, that doesn't make him our ally. Arms supplies must not end up in the hands of terrorists and extremists.' When asked whether there are any moderate rebels left, he replies: 'There are, and we can provide them with support. Reducing our whole bag of |

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| | | | <p>foreign policy tools down to military options alone will not do. We have set up a project office on the Turkish side of the border region, for instance, to help with reconstruction – from infrastructure to schools – in the areas under opposition control. We are establishing an international trust fund to collect money for reconstruction and see that it reaches the opposition. All these things are measures that can help improve the moderate opposition forces' standing among the people of Syria. Moreover, Germany is one of the countries doing the most to provide humanitarian aid.' He further argues: 'I have been warning that this conflict could spread and engulf the whole region ever since war broke out in Syria. That danger makes it all the more important to weigh up every decision with great care, looking not only at what seems the right thing to do in the short term but also at what will really serve the long term interests of the Syrian people and peace and stability in the region as a whole. One reason why I am opposed to arming radical opposition forces is that I am afraid those weapons could at some</p> |
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| | | | point end up being turned on us and on our closest ally, Israel. For some jihadists and terrorists, Damascus is just a stopover on the way to Jerusalem.' |
| 29/08/2013 | | <p>Sonja Zekri argues in Süddeutsche Zeitung that Syria has turned into a state which is run by militias, with Jihadi groups being particularly powerful, and that the ousting of Assad's regime would prompt a new war.</p> <p>Alfred Hackensberger claims in Die Welt that Jihadi groups in Syria have moved their headquarters and weapons depots in anticipation of potential Western air strikes against Syrian regime targets out of fear that their positions would also be bombed.</p> | Based on an assessment of ISIS' activities, particularly during its "Breaking the Walls" campaign, the domestic intelligence service concludes in its annual report that ISIS is a powerful actor in Iraq and will continue to launch severe attacks. It states that it is not yet known whether ISIS has active cells in Germany. The report also highlights that ISIS is seeking to exploit the situation in Syria to increase its influence in the region. |
| 31/08/2013 | | <p>Markus Bickel claims in FAZ that ISIS and al-Nusra have become the most powerful forces in northern and eastern Syria, specifically around Aleppo, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, and that Syrian regime troops have largely lost control of the borders with Turkey and Iraq.</p> <p>Süddeutsche Zeitung reports that ISIS claimed responsibility for the recent series of bombing attacks in Iraq and that these have been carried out in retaliation for the execution of 17 al-Qaeda detainees in August.</p> | |

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| | | John Hulsman argues in Süddeutsche Zeitung that U.S. airstrikes against the Syrian regime would strengthen Jihadi groups as the most powerful members of the Syrian opposition. It would be more in line with U.S. interests to let Jihadi groups continue the fight against Assad, Iran and the Hezbollah. | |
| Aug 2013 | | The ICG reports that the security situation has continued to deteriorate in Iraq, that Prime Minister Maliki has linked terrorism in Iraq to the Syrian civil war and warned about further attacks in the broader region. The government launched a counter-terrorism operation on the outskirts of Baghdad in early August in which it made over 670 arrests. The Iraqi foreign minister requested U.S. weapons and intelligence support for counter-terrorism measures. On Syria, the ICG reports that ISIS strengthened its positions along the northern and eastern fronts, which prompted alarm among opposition fighters and political activists amidst 'continued reports of repressive governance in ISIS strongholds Aleppo and Raqqa'. It also estimates that '40,000 mostly Syrian Kurds fled to Iraqi Kurdistan starting mid-Aug due to increased fighting between Kurdish militias and Islamist extremist rebel factions in Kurdish areas of NE Syria'. | |
| 01/09/2013 | | | <i>[background on perceptions of decision-makers: foreign minister Guido Westerwelle expresses deep concern that the Syrian civil war will</i> |

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| | | | <i>spill into the broader region. Germany will continue to support the reconstruction efforts by moderate rebel groups and provide humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees.]</i> |
| 02/09/2013 | | Sonja Zekri reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung that Jihadi groups in Syria prepared themselves for potential U.S. airstrikes by moving bases, weapons and vehicles, and by taking extra precautionary measures to protect their leaders. | <i>[background on broader Syria policy: after meeting with the chairman of the Syrian National Coalition, foreign minister Guido Westerwelle signs a Framework Agreement together with the United Arab Emirates for the Syria Recovery Trust Fund through which Germany and the UAE make an initial contribution of EUR 10 million to the Syrian National Coalition. Westerwelle argues: 'If people in Syria put their trust in moderate elements of the opposition because they are visibly and actively forging ahead with reconstruction in areas that they control, then this will bolster their role in securing a political solution and a peaceful future for Syria.']</i> |
| 03/09/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that at least 40 people were killed in a series of 11 coordinated car bombings in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad. Nine further people were killed in shootings in Baghdad and Mosul. Among those were a member of the (anti-ISIS and pro-government) tribal militia Sahwa together with his wife and children. 12 further | The government expresses its concern about the escalation of violence in Iraq and calls upon Iraqi political leaders 'to work together constructively and responsibly to build stability and thereby deny terrorism any chance to take root and flourish'. |

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| | | Sahwa members were reportedly killed the previous day. | <i>[background on broader Syria policy: the Bundestag discusses the situation in Syria in detail, with Chancellor Angela Merkel providing an overview of Germany's policy and pushing for an intake of more Syrian refugees by Germany (in addition to the planned acceptance of 5000) and other European countries. Leader of the opposition Frank-Walter Steinmeier argues that Germany will need to assume more responsibility and international leadership to help end the Syrian civil war and address broader implications.]</i> |
| 04/09/2013 | | Sonja Zekri claims in Süddeutsche Zeitung that Iraq would fall apart if the Syrian state collapsed, that Iraqi security forces have been unable to protect the population since the withdrawal of U.S. troops and that the desperate situation in Iraq is 'the best argument against any Western interference in Syria'. She argues that ISIS would be the only winner in such a scenario. According to Zekri, the often-brutal response and provocation by Iraqi security forces triggers hatred among the marginalised Sunni population which ISIS exploits. She argues that Maliki is part of the problem and that his policies have failed. | |

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| | | <p>FAZ reports that at least 64 people have been killed in a series of 11 attacks in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad on 3 September.</p> | |
| 09/09/2013 | | <p>Martin van Creveld argues in Die Welt against counter-terrorism in Iraq and Syria with conventional military means and plans (i.e. targeting one centre of gravity). He further suggests that if the West decided to intervene militarily against Assad, this would trigger years of religiously motivated war into which other countries in the Middle East would be drawn as well.</p> <p>Christoph Reuter reports in Der Spiegel about three German citizens who had been taken hostage by jihadists (presumably Jabhat al-Nusra) in northern Syria in mid-May 2013. Two escaped in early July and the third one escaped in early September. Based on an interview with one of them, Reuter provides insights into how the abduction was organised and how powerful Jihadi groups have become in northern Syria. At that point, more than 20 Western journalists and humanitarian workers had been abducted by jihadists since November 2012, in addition to many Syrians.</p> | |
| 10/09/2013 | | | <p>In response to an opposition inquiry, the government confirms that it is monitoring ISIS' involvement in armed clashes in northern Syria but facing many unknowns. It argues that both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra 'pursue al-</p> |

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| | | | <p>Qaeda's goals', that most of ISIS' foreign fighters are from Arab states and that it does not have evidence related to the involvement of German jihadists. It further says to have unconfirmed information that ISIS is seeking to establish a caliphate 'at the local level in Raqqa province'.</p> |
| 11/09/2013 | | | <p><i>[background on broader Syria policy: the government organises a first chartered flight for 107 Syrian refugees to Germany. The decision to give temporary refuge to 5000 Syrians had been taken in March 2012.]</i></p> |
| 12/09/2013 | | <p>Wolfgang Bauer reports in Die Zeit about fragile alliances between jihadists and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and how the former have gradually come to spearhead most efforts by opposition fighters. Bauer highlights that many activists and local fixers of foreign journalists, including the person who helped him during his last three trips to Syria, have been abducted and tortured by ISIS. He reports how the FSA negotiates attacks against Syrian regime troops with ISIS. On his most recent trip to Syria, Bauer joined the FSA commander in Aleppo, Abdul Jabbar Akaidi. They passed the village of Herbel where ISIS fighters had ousted FSA fighters three days earlier and had opened fire on the local population, killing four and arresting 20. He describes the situation as 'a war within a war'.</p> | |

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| | | <p>Bauer emphasises that it is highly uncertain on whose side people are. After spending time at the FSA headquarters in Aleppo, Bauer claims that ISIS is better organised than the FSA and that it has taken over vital areas of public life in Aleppo – controlling the distribution of flour, gas, organising waste collection, establishing Sharia courts, running schools and providing financial assistance to parents whose children attend those. He reports that ISIS has only about 5000 fighters in Syria but that these are better equipped and trained, and more motivated than other opposition fighters. Bauer also claims that the FSA is dependent on ISIS fighters, but that it expects them to leave Syria after the war, and that FSA commanders have repeatedly urged ISIS fighters to spare the civilian population. ISIS fighters are reportedly also killing Syrian regime troops who want to surrender and join the FSA. Bauer reports that ISIS is ousting Jabhat al-Nusra from northern Syria and that some experts see it as ‘the transnational terrorist organisation of the future’.</p> | |
| 13/09/2013 | | <p>Florian Flade reports in Die Welt that a German jihadist has been killed in Syria and that roughly 120 German jihadists have left Germany for Syria since late 2012. As a result, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra have released more German-language propaganda via YouTube, Facebook and Twitter from Syria.</p> | |
| 15/09/2013 | | | <p>In a relatively vague report, the domestic intelligence agency discusses</p> |

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| | | | <p>Islamist tendencies in Germany and the impact of Islamist activities and offers abroad (e.g. participation in training camps), among others by ISIS. It highlights the central role of the internet for the self-radicalisation of predominantly young people and how German jihadists are trying to commit attacks in Germany and how they are supporting Jihadi activities abroad, e.g. by facilitating radicalisation, spreading propaganda or providing logistical support. The report warns especially about those who return to Germany after spending time with jihadists abroad.</p> |
| 18/09/2013 | | <p>SWP's Petra Becker describes how the Syrian regime has used the presence of foreign Jihadi fighters to characterise the Syrian protest movement as organised by radical Sunni from abroad and how the intelligence services have conveyed this message to minorities in Syria – suggesting they have a choice to either opt for Assad or a radical Islamic state. She claims that this propaganda strategy has been successful, and that fear of Jihadi groups has prevented the international community from supporting the opposition. This has led to a vicious circle in which Western states fear the spread of radical Islam if the Syrian regime is ousted and in which Jihadi groups</p> | <p><i>[background on broader Syria policy: foreign minister Guido Westerwelle outlines how Germany seeks to contribute to the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons: by supporting the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons with EUR 2 million and offering technical assistance.]</i></p> |

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| | | will become more powerful if Assad stays in power. She argues that the jihadists are about to seize the Syrian revolution for their own objectives by claiming that the West is indifferent to the fate of those Syrians who hope for a better future. She also highlights how the people of Raqqa had, in vain, been asking for weapons to oust ISIS from their town and how moderate rebel groups cannot gain the upper hand over ISIS due to a lack of money and weapons. | |
| 19/09/2013 | Markus Bickel | Markus Bickel reports in FAZ that tensions among Syrian rebel groups have grown, especially between Jihadi groups and members of the Supreme Military Council, with ISIS and the FSA and al-Nusra and the PYD increasingly clashing. He refers to Charles Lister's warning that moderate Islamist groups in Syria could become increasingly radical. | On Syria, foreign minister Guido Westerwelle argues : 'Some people still believe that a military solution is possible. I don't. A military solution would only lead to more terror and create a failed state. Armed groups would go underground, regardless of who won the civil war. A new wave of terrorism would erupt. These terrorists would threaten Turkey and even us in central Europe. That's a serious concern I have. Iraq has shown us some of what can happen.' |
| 22/09/2013 | | FAZ reports that at least 65 people have been killed in a combined suicide attack and car bombing at a funeral in Baghdad. | Head of domestic intelligence, Hans-Georg Maaßen, reports that roughly 170 German jihadists have left for Syria and that it remains a highly attractive country for jihadists. He expresses concern that those who have been to Syria might carry out terrorist attacks |

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| | | | and spread propaganda upon their return. Maaßen views Islamist extremism and terrorism as the main security threat in Germany and claims that 42.000 German citizens could potentially become radicalised. |
| 24/09/2013 | | Based on the claim that ISIS and al-Nusra were responsible for every major rebel victory in the Syrian civil war over the past year, FAZ predicts that these two will continue to be the most powerful Syrian rebel groups. | |
| 25/09/2013 | | Sonja Zekri reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung how the rift between the political opposition and armed groups has deepened in Syria. 13 militia groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra as well as moderate Islamists and regular units of the FSA, have denounced their loyalty to the Syrian National Coalition and have instead sworn unity under an Islamic framework and agreed to implement Sharia Law. However, ISIS is not part of this fragile alliance and ISIS and the FSA continue to clash in northern Syria. Zekri suggests that moderate groups have been more willing to support Jihadi groups due to the dwindling prospects of a U.S. military intervention against Assad. According to Zekri, it has become obvious that Jihadi groups in Syria are not first and foremost interested in regime change and national liberation, but perceive Syria as stepping stone for the expansion of a transnational Islamic state. | |

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| 26/09/2013 | | HRW highlights that ‘Syrian opposition forces are indeed responsible for serious crimes in their conduct of war, including attacks against civilians, summary executions, kidnappings, torture, and other abuses’, and that the activities of radical Islamists are especially concerning. | |
| 28/09/2013 | | | Foreign minister Guido Westerwelle discusses the escalation of violence and the effects of the Syrian civil war on the security situation in Iraq with his Iraqi counterpart. |
| 29/09/2013 | The capital of Iraq’s autonomous Kurdistan region, Erbil, is hit for the first time in six years by a series of coordinated attacks in which at least six Kurdish security forces are killed. This comes as a shock to many as Kurdistan had largely been spared the violence other regions were experiencing. It had further been considered more stable and prosperous, had attracted substantial foreign investment and had just announced the results of its parliamentary elections. Iraqi government officials and | | |

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| | <p>members of parliament suggest that the attacks are linked to the Syrian civil war where ISIS is battling Kurdish fighters and that it had been carried out by ISIS fighters based in Mosul. According to the NYT, the attacks in Erbil 'demonstrated that no place in Iraq was truly safe, as the war in Syria increasingly spills over its borders and as Iraq's own Sunni insurgent groups accelerate their attacks'.</p> | | |
| 30/09/2013 | | <p>Markus Bickel reports in FAZ about the terrorist attacks in Erbil on 29 September. He links the attacks to clashes between ISIS and the PYD in the Syrian civil war and claims that acts of revenge by ISIS against Iraqi Kurds had been predicted. He also refers to a report by the ICG (see 14/08) and its warning that a renewed sectarian civil war has become a serious risk in Iraq.</p> | |
| Sept 2013 | | <p>The ICG reports that ISIS and the FSA agreed to a fragile truce on 20 September after ISIS had captured the town of Azaz. In mid-September, ISIS killed an aid worker who had been affiliated with the Salafi group Ahrar al-Sham, prompting criticism from Salafi militants. On Iraq, the ICG reports that among the attacks in September with over 660</p> | |

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| | | <p>reported deaths the series of bombings in Erbil on 29 September stood out as the first terrorist attacks in the autonomous Kurdish north since 2007. Further major attacks occurred across Iraq on 20, 21, 24, 25 and 30 September.</p> | |
| 01/10/2013 | | <p>HRW reports how Syrian regime forces dropped fuel-air explosive bombs on Raqqa in an (unsuccessful) attempt to oust ISIS from Raqqa after the latter had strengthened its control of the city. HRW also reports that its staff have not been able to return to Raqqa since April due to security concerns.</p> | <p>Foreign minister Guido Westerwelle responds to the latest series of attacks in Iraq on 29-30 September after violence reached the once-calm area of Kurdistan: 'We condemn the appalling attacks in Iraq in the strongest terms. I appeal to all those with positions of responsibility in Iraq to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to put an end to the wave of terror which has been plaguing the country for several months. A concerted effort is now urgently needed to protect the country and its people and prevent it from descending into civil war.'</p> |
| 07/10/2013 | | <p>Peter Steinbach reports in Die Welt how ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra have been trying to take control of Kurdish areas in northeastern Syria for the past six months and how they regularly clash with Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). The region is of high strategic relevance due to large oil and gas reserves. A YPG commander recalls how 400 Jihadi fighters took control of Alouk one night and how his unit eventually recaptured it after killing 39 jihadists. ISIS and al-Nusra fighters have reportedly</p> | |

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| | | <p>beheaded more than 20 people in Kurdish areas. Steinbach reports that Jihadi groups have overall become stronger than other opposition forces but that the YPG is for the moment still holding its ground. YPG fighters argue that Turkey allows all foreign fighters to enter Syria from its territory and supports Jihadi groups as they are waging war against the Kurds.</p> | |
| 08/10/2013 | | <p>Reiner Burger reports in FAZ how the city of Bonn has long become an arena for Jihadi Salafists in Germany and how the spokesperson of a local Muslim council, who had been invited to help with the launch of a new preventive and integrative programme, had covertly supported Jihadi groups in Syria. Burger further reports that 170 German jihadists have travelled to Syria, 90 of whom were from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), and that German security services are monitoring 1500 Salafists in NRW.</p> | |
| 10/10/2013 | | <p>In a detailed report, HRW presents evidence that at least 190 civilians were killed and over 200 hostages were taken during a military offensive in Alawite villages in Latakia province on 4 August 2013. The offensive had been launched by ISIS and four other Jihadi groups and HRW suggests that ISIS had been in charge. The hostages, most of whom are women and children, are still being held by ISIS and Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar. ISIS has reportedly contacted some family members of the hostages and asked for ransom. Abu Ayman reportedly</p> | |

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| | | commanded ISIS during the offensive and Abu Jaafar was deputy commander. HRW argues that the actions, which were carefully planned and systematically executed, amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. | |
| 11/10/2013 | | <p>HRW's Erin Evers reports that Iraqi officials have executed 42 people on 9-10 October and that violence is sharply escalating on all sides. Terrorist attacks in Iraq have killed over 4950 people in Iraq in 2013 so far and the latest suicide attack targeted a playground, killing 11 children.</p> <p>Der Spiegel's Raniah Salloum and FAZ's Markus Bickel refer to HRW's findings regarding the Latakia massacre in August 2013 (see 10/10). Salloum reports how the perpetrators announced and documented their offensive on social media. Bickel reports that the Syrian National Coalition responded to HRW's report by condemning ISIS and other Jihadi groups and warning that they were becoming increasingly powerful.</p> | |
| 13/10/2013 | | | <i>[background on broader Syria policy: the foreign office and ministry of defence run a training course for 25 civilian OPCW experts who are part of the UN mission overseeing the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.]</i> |

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| 17/10/2013 | | <p>Die Welt reports that at least 66 people were killed in a series of 13 attacks in and around Baghdad and near Mosul.</p> <p>The ICG describes ISIS as the ‘most infamous’ Jihadi group in Syria which ‘has generated strong criticism from activists for its authoritarian tactics, public executions, ideological extremism and vicious sectarianism, and has been accused of firing on peaceful demonstrators, bombing a rival faction’s headquarters and detaining activists for offences ranging from non-violent dissent to smoking cigarettes during Ramadan’. The ICG conducted interviews with Syrian activists who had been abducted by ISIS and emphasises how strong ISIS’ hold of Raqqa has become. It reports that ISIS has become ‘the most powerful group in northern and eastern Syria and was benefiting from control of oil fields it had wrested from Jabhat al-Nusra when it split from the group in April 2013’.</p> | |
| 21/10/2013 | | | <p>Der Spiegel reports how the domestic intelligence service has become increasingly concerned about the influx of roughly 200 German jihadists to Syria, overall radicalisation and the threat this could pose to Germany.</p> |
| 23/10/2013 | | <p>Peter Steinbach reports in Die Welt how ISIS has been attempting to capture the predominantly Christian and Kurdish Hasakah province in eastern Syria for the past six months and how the Sotora, a</p> | <p>The president of the Federal Criminal Police (BKA) describes the internet as the ‘distance-learning university of religiously-motivated terrorism’ and</p> |

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| | | <p>Christian militia, and the Kurdish YPG have jointly been countering the offensives. Steinbach also reports how ISIS fighters are regularly abducting members of the Christian community in an attempt to terrorise the local population and receive ransom. ISIS fighters are also advancing on another predominantly Christian area, Wadi al-Nasara in Western Syria. They are launching daily offensives from their headquarters at the historic Crusader castle of Krak des Chevaliers.</p> | <p>discusses how Jihadi groups have increasingly been using it for propaganda and recruitment in Germany. The BKA has been developing new techniques for structured analysis of foreign-language big data to respond to these challenges and is, among others, able to evaluate information in the Kurdish Sorani dialect.</p> |
| 29/10/2013 | | <p>Karen Krüger reports in FAZ how Denis Cuspert became the poster boy of German-grown jihadism and a highly successful propagandist of ISIS in Syria after becoming radicalised in 2010. She further reports that roughly 200 German jihadists are now in Syria of whom 8 have died.</p> <p>HRW argues that ‘Iraq does face serious security threats, but the government’s failure to make urgently needed reforms and hold officials accountable for terrible abuses like torture has made Iraq less safe, not more. In fact, the government’s heavy-handed approach is contributing to greater instability and exacerbating sectarian tensions’. HRW further describes these tensions due to Maliki’s failed policies as follows: ‘The escalation in executions after trials in which people are convicted on the basis of coerced confessions and secret evidence—for the most part in the name of counterterrorism—have done</p> | |

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| | | nothing to address the crisis. On the contrary, numerous Iraqis, Shia and Sunni, have told Human Rights Watch that authorities' failure to hold perpetrators accountable regardless of their sect has polarized Iraq's population, particularly in Sunni areas where people see the government's failure to hold Shia-dominated security forces accountable as confirmation that policies remain rooted in sectarianism.' | |
| 30/10/2013 | | HRW argues that 'more Syrians will be drawn to the brutality of the Islamic extremists who are in ascendancy among the rebels' should all conflict parties continue to commit atrocities. | |
| Oct 2013 | | <p>SWP's Petra Becker highlights that 'the (Syrian) National Coalition and its Supreme Military Command have faced defections of major rebel forces, which may lead to a major shift towards Jihadi Salafism and the marginalization of moderate forces on the ground'.</p> <p>The ICG reports that ISIS fought rebel groups on 2 October in Azaz and lost the Yaaroubiyeh border crossing to a Kurdish militia on 27 October. But it overall continued its expansion in northern and eastern Syria. On Iraq, the ICG reports that October was the deadliest month since April 2008 with more than 900 people killed. Terrorist attacks led, among others, to 'some 35 killed in 10 car explosions in predominantly Shia areas in Baghdad 27 Oct; at least 19 police and 3 civilians killed 22-23 Oct in</p> | |

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| | | series of bomb attacks in Anbar; 13 children killed 6 Oct in attack on school in Qabak; string of car and roadside bombings 14 Oct killed at least 44.' | |
| 01/11/2013 | | SWP 's Volker Perthes argues that Russia's support of the Syrian regime stems, among others, from a fear of Jihadi groups among the Syrian opposition and concerns that Islamic-inspired revolutions could spill over and reach the Caucasus and Central Asia. Perthes suggests that Jihadi forces in Syria benefit from the loss of credibility by the West as this helps them to strengthen and spread their anti-Western propaganda and to demonstrate that the 'true Jihad does not even lack ammunition'. | |
| 03/11/2013 | | Rudolph Chimelli reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung that 66 people were killed in a series of car bombings in Baghdad and northern Iraq that day and that over 7000 people have so far died in terrorist attacks in 2013. He highlights that ISIS in Iraq has been strengthened by the influx of foreign fighters and that it is operating in Iraq and across the border in Syria from camps in western Iraq. Chimelli claims that corruption within the Iraqi security apparatus facilitates ISIS' activities. Der Spiegel reports that at least 36 people were killed in a series of suicide attacks, car bombings and shootings in Sharqat, Mosul, Baquba and west of Kirkuk. | |
| 04/11/2013 | | | <i>[background on broader Iraq policy: The Bundeswehr is organising a</i> |

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| | | | <p><i>training course for Iraqi chemical weapons experts at its Research Institute for Protective Technologies and NBC Protection, training them to use German technology to destroy chemical weapons stockpiles left over from Saddam Hussein's regime. It further announces the deployment of a mobile laboratory for the detection and analysis of chemical warfare agents to Iraq. Germany had agreed on the assistance following Iraq's accession to the international Chemical Weapons Convention in 2009.]</i></p> |
| 09/11/2013 | | <p>Raniah Salloum reports in Der Spiegel how ISIS has become the most powerful actor in northern Syria and how it plans to establish an Islamic state in its captured areas. Salloum argues that ISIS benefits from other Syrian militia being fragmented, decentralised and under-resourced. She emphasises that ISIS is going to stay in Syria and that it has launched a brutal campaign against anyone who is in its way, among others by assassinating Syrian journalists and activists. Salloum claims that ISIS seemed almost defeated in Iraq, but that Maliki's polarising policies and the Syrian civil war opened a new window of opportunity which allowed for a resurgence in 2013. She argues that ISIS remains popular, especially among foreign fighters, despite Zawahiri's statement that ISIS should be abolished</p> | |

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| | | and that al-Baghdadi should confine his group's activities to Iraq. She claims that ISIS has higher chances of success in Syria than AQI during the previous decade in Iraq as it has learned important lessons – such as providing basic services to the local population and engaging in charitable activities. She argues that these enabling activities are higher on the priority list than the fight against Assad. | |
| 14/11/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that more than 30 people were killed that day in a series of suicide attacks and car bombings targeting Shia pilgrims during the Ashura celebrations. | |
| 15/11/2013 | | HRW argues that the surge in terrorist attacks across Iraq should be deterred with investigations and preventive measures, and not by harassing the Sunni population, e.g. through indiscriminate arrests. The latter would further alienate the Sunni population and spark anger among them which could fuel rather than prevent future attacks by Sunni insurgents. HRW also reports that a suicide bomber targeted another group of Shia worshippers on 13 November, killing eight. HRW highlights that violence by Sunni insurgents against Shia worshippers on holy days is not a new phenomenon and that similar attacks happened on Ashura in 2012, killing 62, or in 2004, killing 180 Shia pilgrims. Yet, compared to previous years, insurgent attacks against predominantly Shia targets have escalated | <i>[background on broader Syria and Iraq policy: The government agency Technisches Hilfswerk, a civil protection organisation, starts supporting the build-up of camps for Syrian refugees in Iraq's Kurdistan region.]</i> |

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| | | drastically after Iraqi security forces attacked a protest camp in Hawija in April 2013. | |
| 19/11/2013 | | HRW documents unlawful killings of civilians during a joint offensive against regime forces by ISIS and five other groups in the Christian village of Sadad, northeast of Damascus, from 21 to 28 October 2013. The insurgents had entered the village claiming not to harm civilians but executed many and used others as a human shield. | |
| 20/11/2013 | | Süddeutsche Zeitung and FAZ report that at least 12 people were killed in a series of attacks in Baghdad. Further, a high-ranking Iraqi official was shot in his house in the Kurdish city of Sulaymaniyah. | |
| 21/11/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports that at least 25 people were killed in a car bombing in Diyala province in eastern Iraq. The previous day, 59 people were killed in a series of attacks across Iraq. | |
| 22/11/2013 | | Markus Bickel reports in FAZ about the 'war within the civil war' due to complex and rapidly changing power structures in northern Syria and the presence of 'thousands of foreign jihadists'. He argues that those moderate Syrian rebel groups who feel abandoned by the West have come under increased pressure to develop a more radical Islamist profile to receive funding for much-needed weapons from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait. Bickel claims that moderate rebels will lose ground to ISIS and al-Nusra unless the West supports them more adequately. | |

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| 23/11/2013 | | <p>Peter Carstens and Christoph Ehrhardt warn in FAZ about the combination of German jihadists easily travelling into Syria and German Jihadi groups such as Millatu Ibrahim becoming better organised. Roughly 220 German jihadists are now reportedly in Syria of whom 9 have died. The authors quote the domestic intelligence agency and SWP's Guido Steinberg as claiming that only few indications suggest that German jihadists engage in armed clashes and become affiliated with ISIS or al-Nusra once in Syria, but that the trend is alarming.</p> | |
| 29/11/2013 | | <p>HRW reports that four journalists have been killed in Mosul since October 2013 and that ISIS has a strong presence there. According to interviews with Mosul residents, 'the central government's policies of conducting mass arrests and unlawful detentions in the area have ostracized the population'. A local journalist told HRW: 'Mosul has two governments ... By day, it's the local government, but at night, it's al-Qaeda.' Another observed: 'Mosul's journalists are caught between two fires ... If they are not targeted by terrorists, they're targeted by the government, which considers all Mosul residents terrorists.'</p> <p>Der Spiegel reports that 28 people were abducted and executed in three different locations in and around Baghdad. At least 23 further were killed in a series of attacks across Iraq.</p> | |

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| 30/11/2013 | | <p>Christiane Schlötzer claims in Süddeutsche Zeitung that young Turks are increasingly joining ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and that Turkish security forces are doing nothing to stop them and others from entering Syria. Facing criticism about its lack of control from German officials, Turkish authorities argue that it is up to Germany to prevent its citizens from leaving and that it proves impossible for Turkey to figure out who is travelling through its territory in order to join Jihadi groups.</p> | |
| Nov 2013 | | <p>The ICG reports that Syrian rebels are divided over the brutality and growing power of ISIS. Seven Islamist rebel groups merged into the “Islamic Front” on 22 November to counter ISIS’ influence. Kurdish militias continued their campaign against ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra in northeastern Syria and managed to gain control over 19 towns and villages. On Iraq, the ICG reports that at least 169 people were killed in a series of bombings and executions between 20 and 29 November. On 25 November, France offered weapons and counter-terrorism training to the Iraqi government.</p> | |
| 01/12/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports how a suicide bomber in Iraq killed at least ten people during the funeral for a member of the Sahwa militia who had been killed in a bombing attack in Baqubah the previous evening.</p> | |
| 03/12/2013 | | | <p>FAZ and Die Welt report how the federal state of Hesse raises the initiative for a nationwide early warning system to better prevent and</p> |

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| | | | detect Salafi radicalisation in Germany. Hesse's interior minister argues that Germany needs to raise more awareness of radical Islamists targeting pupils in secondary schools and calling for jihad on social media. He highlights the necessity of common procedures when dealing with returning foreign fighters. |
| 05/12/2013 | | <p>SWP's Guido Steinberg draws parallels between violence in Iraq in 2013 and the 2005-2007 Iraqi civil war and argues that the current situation has not yet reached the same level of escalation. He traces how protests began in December 2012 in Sunni areas in western and northern Iraq and how the overall situation differs from 2005-2007. He highlights how Sunni insurgents from northern and eastern Syria had been contributing to AQI's activities since 2003 and how they have been cooperating with ISIS more recently. Steinberg argues that the loss of control of security forces in western and northern Iraq enables cross-border cooperation. He predicts that Maliki will likely remain in power due to a weak opposition and that Iraq will remain unstable. But he considers it unlikely that Iraq will slide back into civil war due to the 'superiority of the Iraqi security forces'.</p> <p>Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt and Yassin Musharbash report in Die Zeit about more than 220 German</p> | |

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| | | <p>citizens who have recently travelled to Syria. It is unclear how many have joined Jihadi groups, as only 10 cases and 6 deaths have been confirmed. The authors report about a 26-year old convert who left Germany six months ago and became the first German citizen to pledge allegiance to ISIS in a propaganda video from Syria. They view this as an alarming development which lends new urgency to concerted counter measures. They report how quickly German citizens can become radicalised, how easy it is for them to enter Syria and how challenging it is for German authorities to deal with those who have returned.</p> | |
| 09/12/2013 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports that at least 55 people were killed in a series of attacks across Iraq on 8 and 9 December.</p> <p>Der Spiegel also reports about German jihadist Denis Cuspert who is encouraging German citizens to join ISIS in Syria, and it claims that his radical statements could potentially provoke lone wolf attacks in Germany.</p> | <p>The government confirms that more than 200 German jihadists have left for Syria, of whom 20 were accompanied by their spouses, and that less than 10 of those who were actively involved in armed clashes have returned to Germany. It highlights that it is paying close attention to the media channels of German jihadists in Syria, namely 'ShamCenter' and 'Al Ghurabi media', and monitoring Jihadi propaganda on various websites and online networks.</p> |
| 12/12/2013 | | <p>Sonja Zekri reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung how the FSA, initially the strongest Syrian rebel group, is losing members and territory to ISIS and the Islamic Front.</p> | <p>German authorities arrest a German jihadist upon his return from Syria.</p> |

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| | | Rainer Hermann argues in FAZ that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has become more successful than Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi due to his creation of a transnational Islamic state spanning Raqqa and Anbar province and the expansion of ISIS' presence in Mosul. Citing U.S. officials in Time Magazine and The New York Times, he warns that it is 'only a matter of time until ISIS strikes against the West'. Hermann claims that Baghdadi has also become more powerful than al-Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri since the Abu Ghraib prison break in July 2013 and due to ISIS' appeal to foreign fighters, and that Baghdadi has a proper and bigger caliphate in mind. Herman refers to Joshua Landis' Syria Comment blog as a crucial source of knowledge claims. He concludes that the more stable ISIS' caliphate is going to be, the higher the risks for the West. | |
| 13/12/2013 | | Der Spiegel reports how at least 17 people have been shot dead in an attack on an oil field in Muqadiyah, northeast of Baghdad. | |
| 15/12/2013 | | | <i>[background on perceptions of decision-makers: upon leaving the government, Guido Westerwelle takes stock of his four years in office. He summarises German foreign policy under him as 'policy of peace' given that Germany did not participate in new wars, has been speeding up the withdrawal from Afghanistan and</i> |

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| | | | <p><i>reduced its military presence in the Balkans once political solutions came within reach. According to him, one lesson Germany should have learned from Libya is that one cannot stabilise a conflict zone in a sustainable manner without clear political concepts. He admits that he and other Cabinet members were too optimistic during the Arab spring.]</i></p> |
| 16/12/2013 | | <p>Christoph Reuter argues in Der Spiegel that the FSA, which has been ‘abandoned by the West’ and is demoralised, can do little to counter ISIS. He reports how ISIS abducts and executes hundreds of people from Raqqa and how activists are fleeing to Turkey. Anyone who resists ISIS, or is classified as an unbeliever, disappears. He highlights that ISIS maintains four prisons outside of Raqqa. Reuter argues that ‘Raqqa has only been the beginning’. While ISIS was relatively unknown when it started operating in Syria, it has over the past four months taken control of several towns (Azaz, Jarabulus, Al-Dana, Atarib, Binnish, Al-Bab, Turmanin), parts of Aleppo, strategic roads, oil fields and depots. He claims that recent developments in northern and northeastern Syria could confirm worst fears and contribute to the collapse of Syria as the local population and rebel groups are unable to counter ISIS’ rapid expansion. Reuter recalls how he had warned in August 2012 that the West would pay for</p> | |

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| | | <p>its political ignorance and hesitance vis-à-vis the Syrian civil war and how it would watch while Syria disintegrated and attracted Islamist terrorism. He warned then that the longer the West waited the sooner would others, including al-Qaeda, fill the political vacuum. As a result, the West would be getting all the things it had been hoping to prevent. Reuter argues that the West did not want to support Syrian rebels initially out of fear that al-Qaeda might expand into Syria and that as a result of its inaction, ISIS has become a powerful actor in Syria. He claims that ISIS' success of exploiting disagreement among Syrian rebel groups stems from a combination of a strong central command, brutality and corruption. Reuter also highlights how the power struggle between Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIS and al-Qaeda has strengthened ISIS, with most foreign fighters having joined ISIS since. He claims how ISIS has become better organised and trained, has developed more effective military strength and has as such become more of a serious threat since the autumn. Reuter also argues that ISIS has exploited the uncertain situation and the challenges rebel groups face, and that it benefits from the Syrian regime accepting its presence and not seeking to counter it. He highlights that ISIS' headquarters in Raqqa, which can barely be missed, has not yet been bombed by the regime. Reuter also claims that much remains unknown about the strategists behind ISIS.</p> | |
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| | | <p>Der Spiegel and FAZ report that at least 53 people have been killed in a series of attacks that targeted Shia pilgrim groups, predominantly Shia districts and Iraqi security forces across the country. FAZ reports that ISIS attempted a prison break in Baji in northern Iraq.</p> | |
| 17/12/2013 | | <p>Markus Bickel reports in FAZ that a prominent Syrian human rights lawyer has been abducted, presumably by ISIS, and that 60 Syrian activists and 35 journalist have been kidnapped by ISIS.</p> | <p>During the handover ceremony, new foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier refers extensively to the Syrian civil war. His remarks suggest a more nuanced perception of conflict dynamics than his predecessor: 'Today, we know that the portrayal of a simple confrontation between autocratic regimes and democratic opposition does not always do justice to the complex nature of conflicts in the Arab world. This analysis was already wrong in Libya, and it fails spectacularly to describe the conflict in Syria. There, the longing for a democratic opposition, for freedom predominated at the beginning and it is still alive now. Yet another side of the opposition is growing, one which is no different from the regime in terms of brutality and ruthlessness. In my opinion we have overlooked the fact that from the outset, the conflict in Syria has also</p> |

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| | | | been a proxy war for supremacy in the Islamic world and is a struggle over the expansion of Sunni and Shiite spheres of influence. If that is correct then the debate which took place a few weeks ago on a military solution to the conflict was simply absurd! |
| 18/12/2013 | | <p>Til Biermann reports in Die Welt how U.S. terrorism experts Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman have resumed their quarrel about the strength of al-Qaeda, and now ISIS, and the threat these might pose. SWP's Guido Steinberg sees this as a problematic and attention-seeking debate. He highlights that ISIS is completely independent from al-Qaeda, but that the latter's ideology continues to influence the former and other Jihadi groups, and that chance is a huge factor for the success of Jihadi attacks in the West.</p> <p>Rüdiger Soldt and Reiner Burger report in FAZ about the arrest of two German jihadists who were on their way to Syria. They warn about quick radicalisation and recruitment processes, the return of German foreign fighters and their ability to organise terrorist attacks in Germany. Roughly 240 German jihadists have now travelled to Syria. Referring to a German convert and his video message from Syria, the authors warn about the appeal of ISIS' propaganda.</p> | |

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| 19/12/2013 | | <p>Amnesty International documents serious human rights abuses in ISIS-run detention facilities in northern Syria, including in and around Raqqa, Aleppo and Idlib province. It also sheds light on the rules ISIS has established in the areas it controls, including flogging and summary executions. Based on ten interviews conducted with former detainees who had been held by ISIS between May and November 2013, Amnesty International argues that most abuses, such as abductions, arbitrary detention and torture, amount to war crimes. It reports that children have also been held in ISIS prisons. The former detainees have reportedly 'asked that the world should wake up to the plight of those now suffering under ISIS in northern Syria'. Amnesty International argues that ISIS' power has grown significantly since April 2013. It sheds light on how ISIS consolidated its influence in Raqqa and beyond since the spring of 2013.</p> | <p>Germany introduces the 'Enable and Enhance Initiative' at a European Council meeting, with an emphasis on preventing further conflict and increasing the effectiveness of local security and stability measures in Iraq and four other countries (Mali, Nigeria, Tunisia, Jordan).</p> <p>Discussing the Syrian civil war, a member of parliament (CDU/CSU) says: 'if we are to believe press reports, the opposition is gradually being taken over by radical Islamists'.</p> |
| 21/12/2013 | | <p>Markus Bickel reports in FAZ that ISIS is controlling territory on both sides of the Syria-Iraqi border and that the Assad regime continues to tolerate ISIS' activities in Syria tacitly. Forced into a two-front war, lacking equipment and losing fighters to jihadist groups, moderate Syrian rebels are losing ground. Bickel argues that ISIS' powerful role in Syria is guaranteeing Assad's survival while its cross-border activities are threatening to destabilise the entire region.</p> | |

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| 23/12/2013 | | <p>HRW's Emma Daly reports about the abduction of Spanish journalists Javier Espinosa and Ricardo Garcia Vilanova by ISIS. Both have been held since September 2013, with ISIS refusing to negotiate their release. At least 30 journalists are reported missing in Syria, making it 'the most dangerous country in the world for the media'. Daly highlights that it is 'hard to keep track of numbers, since many outlets and families choose to keep quiet about the missing in the hope of negotiating a return'. The FSA's Supreme Military Council has said 'that most people going after the journalists were outside their control'. Daly concludes that 'the world cannot learn about the horrors in Syria ... when journalists can't do their jobs'.</p> | |
| 25/12/2013 | | <p>Die Welt and FAZ report that at least 38 people have been killed in a series of four attacks in Baghdad. Christians who were leaving church after a Christmas service were among those targeted.</p> | <p>Statement by foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier: 'I utterly condemn the use of terrorist violence against members of religious minorities in Iraq. The situation in Iraq is becoming no easier. And the continuing civil war in neighbouring Syria, with all its extreme brutality, is further increasing the instability in the country. It is therefore all the more important that Prime Minister Maliki's Government meet its responsibility to protect all minorities in the country and to tackle terrorism and violence with every determination.'</p> |

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| 26/12/2013 | | <p>Uwe Schmitt reports in Die Welt that the U.S. is supporting the Iraqi government with more effective weapons, specifically 75 hellfire missiles, in its fight against ISIS and that additional deliveries of drones and F-16 fighter aircraft are scheduled for 2014. He discusses the dilemma in which the U.S. finds itself with the escalation of violence and Maliki's policies, and how a high-ranking U.S. security official had described the situation in Iraq in March 2013 as 'the least violent in years'. He highlights how the U.S. is facing competing priorities with the organisation of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Schmitt further reports that the commander of Iraq's 7th division as well as two of his staff had been killed in a suicide attack the previous week.</p> <p>HRW's Erin Evers argues that new U.S. weapon deliveries won't address Iraq's challenges, namely the fight against ISIS. These measures are 'missing the point' as there is 'little evidence that Iraq's failure to improve security in the country stems from a lack of weapons, but rather from its short-sighted approach to corruption and sectarian politics, and a counterterrorism strategy that targets Sunni Iraqis amounting to collective punishment.' She further highlights how corrupt the Iraqi security forces are, how this has facilitated prison breaks by ISIS and how aptly the latter exploits Shia-Sunni tensions.</p> | |
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| 28/12/2013 | <p>Iraqi security forces arrest a Sunni member of parliament, Ahmad al-Alwani, after killing his brother and five of his guards during a raid on his home in Ramadi. Alwani had backed anti-government protests and was a prominent supporter of Sunni activists who had set up a camp near Ramadi. In response, 44 members of the Iraqi parliament submit their resignations over the next two days and call upon the army to release Alwani and withdraw from Anbar's cities. The arrest and the demolishing of protest camps across Anbar province by Iraqi security forces on 30 December trigger widespread unrest which gives ISIS a chance to launch its Anbar campaign. The Iraqi government's offensive on Sunni militants in Anbar was 'a disaster waiting to happen', given that Shia-Sunni tensions had long been</p> | | |
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| | stoked by Iraqi PM Maliki's polarising policies and exploited by ISIS. | | |
| 30/12/2013 | | <p>SWP's Volker Perthes argues that Syria needs a truce in order to contain the influence of ISIS and allow civil society to regroup. He claims that the Syrian civil war is not a war between Sunnis and Shia but a fight for power which also includes a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Explaining the rise of ISIS in Syria, he argues: 'Basically that's down to the fact that alternatives were lacking or were too weak. After studying all the groups embroiled in the conflict, an astute observer of developments would say that the Syrian conflict is no Islamist revolution. But the uprising is funded by radical Islamists, and groups like al Qaeda, the Nusra Front, and ISIS received a lot of money from private sources in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The moderate, democratic and only partially secular opposition was left more or less isolated by those who pledged support, including the European states.'</p> <p>Der Spiegel reports about an escalation of tensions between the Iraqi government and Sunni groups in Anbar: at least ten people were killed when Iraqi police broke up a Sunni protest camp in Fallujah on 30 December. The police also found and defused two car bombs there. Other protest camps, among others in Ramadi, were also broken up. Der Spiegel</p> | |

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| | | also reports about Ahmad al-Alwani's arrest by Iraqi security forces on 28 December (see key event). | |
| 31/12/2013 | <p>ISIS uses the explosion of violence between Sunni tribes and security forces in Anbar's cities and the brief withdrawal of the Iraqi army to surge into Fallujah and Ramadi from the Western desert. It seizes control of several police stations in Fallujah and Ramadi the next day. However, it does not fully capture Fallujah in early January, as often claimed. ICG reports that these claims were 'greatly exaggerated' by ISIS and Iraqi PM Maliki (see knowledge claim 28/4/2014). More than 100 people are killed on 3 January in clashes between ISIS, government forces and local tribes. ISIS' Anbar campaign shows how it is exploiting Sunni-Shia tensions and a security vacuum in Anbar province.</p> | | <p>In its annual report, the domestic intelligence agency highlights that Islamic terrorism has become increasingly globalised and individualised, and much more complex while staying true to its ideological foundation. The agency argues that self-radicalisation and individual jihadism make it challenging for German authorities to counter preparations for attacks at an early stage, that Germany remains a target of Jihadi activities, and that an emotionalisation of the Syrian civil war has been promoting Islamic terrorism in Germany. It reports that more than 270 German jihadis have left for Syria. On ISIS, the agency claims that it is unclear how many members are based in Germany or whether it has any formal structures there, that it remains the most active terrorist group in central and southern Iraq, and that ISIS also trains children for fighting in the Syrian civil war.</p> |
| Dec 2013 | | The ICG reports that increasingly powerful Jihadi groups have marginalised Western-backed rebel | |

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| | | <p>groups in Syria. On 5 December, ISIS abducted more than 50 Kurdish civilians from Jarabulus and Manbij near Aleppo. The month of December saw significant clashes between ISIS and the Ahrar al-Sham Islamist coalition. ISIS reportedly beheaded at least three Alawites in Adra, near Damascus, during a joint offensive with Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front. On Iraq, the ICG reports that daily violence continued with over 700 killed in December. Attacks continued to target Iraqi security forces (e.g. on 21 December when 18 were killed in an ambush) and Shia neighbourhoods (e.g. a series of bombings in Baghdad on 30-31 December which killed 23). The Iraqi government closed its border with Syria on 25 December prior to the launch of an operation to counter ISIS in Anbar province. The ICG reports that 44 Iraqi members of parliament resigned over the demolishing of Sunni protest camps and arrest of al-Alwani. According to UN reports, 2013 became the deadliest year since 2008 with at least 7818 civilians killed.</p> | |
| 02/01/2014 | | <p>Die Welt reports that Iraq's Anbar province has devolved into chaos due to ISIS re-establishing it as stronghold of Jihadi terrorism after al-Qaeda had done so a decade earlier. ISIS has gradually managed to control points of strategic interest in Ramadi, Fallujah and Al-Karmah. Fighting between Iraqi security forces and ISIS in Anbar is intensifying. The Sunni governor of Niniveh province in northern Iraq has accused Maliki of consciously provoking</p> | |

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| | | <p>chaos in Anbar. Meanwhile, residents of Fallujah are trying to wage a two-front war against ISIS in its town centre and the Iraqi army which is seeking to advance from the east.</p> <p>Der Spiegel reports that Iraqi security forces have withdrawn from Fallujah while tribal fighters have clashed with ISIS in Ramadi and have managed to expel ISIS from certain areas. It claims that ISIS exploited the unrest and chaos in Anbar following the demolishing of Sunni protest camps and the arrest of al-Alwani to advance on key cities.</p> <p>Rainer Hermann discusses in FAZ how ISIS has been exploiting Sunni-Shia tensions in Iraq and argues that ISIS' territorial gains in Anbar province could have been prevented.</p> | |
| 03/01/2014 | | <p>Rudolph Chimelli warns in Süddeutsche Zeitung of a new Iraqi civil war, with Fallujah and parts of Ramadi falling under ISIS' control. He claims that ISIS has freed more than 1000 prisoners in both cities. Chimelli argues that it has now become impossible for Maliki to try and find an agreement with the Sunni minority after Anbar province has descended into chaos. He predicts that Sunni members of parliament will further distance themselves from Maliki ahead of the planned parliamentary elections in April while Maliki will seek to deepen the divide.</p> | |

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| | | <p>HRW calls for an investigation of violence in Anbar province during the demolishing of Sunni protest camps and the arrest of al-Alwani on 30 December. HRW argues that ‘government statements before the clashes and the deployment of the army seemed intended more to provoke violence than prevent it’. HRW also highlights that this was not at all an unexpected development as Iraqi authorities ‘had repeatedly threatened to remove the protesters in Ramadi and other largely Sunni areas’. On 23 December, the commander of Iraq’s Counterterrorism Service had reportedly referred to government operations against ISIS in Anbar on his Facebook page with “I swear to God I will kill those dogs and those who are with them. I will wipe them out.” The Iraqi state news agency had also reported two days before the incident that 30 armoured vehicles had been deployed outside of the protest camp in Ramadi which has existed for about a year.</p> | |
| 04/01/2014 | | <p>Rania Salloum reports in Der Spiegel how ISIS has been exploiting the chaos in Syria and Iraq by seizing control of several strategic points in both countries including the border region and how it has been enjoying the support of the Syrian regime. She warns of its extremely violent nature, strong organisational capability and intention to turn Iraq and Syria into a transnational theocracy.</p> <p>SWP’s Guido Steinberg argues: ‘If the situation does not change, there will be areas in Iraq and Syria</p> | |

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| | | <p>where different jihadist groups can act without any form of control. Neither the Iraqi, nor the Syrian, governments will be able to control these areas effectively and long-term. Already today, Iraq's northwest, Syria's northeast and portions of some Syrian cities are essentially inter-connected operation areas for Iraq's al Qaeda groups. (...) We are witnessing a slow but steady destabilization of Iraq. Today's level of violence resembles the level in 2008 when many observers spoke of a civil war. On the other hand there is a central government that has a lot of money from oil exports at their disposal. Al-Maliki's government can pay the country's security forces with that money. That's why I don't see a realistic chance for sub-state actors to shake this state. (...) I think the most likely scenario is that the current situation - outbursts of violence, but a stable government - is going to continue for a long, long time in Iraq; at least as long as the civil war continues in neighboring Syria.'</p> <p>Rudolph Chimelli reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung that 8000 people had been killed in terrorist attacks in Iraq in 2013.</p> <p>FAZ reports that roughly 9000 families have fled Fallujah in recent days and that ISIS has tightened its grip of the city.</p> | |
| 05/01/2014 | | Alfred Hackensberger argues in Die Welt that ISIS won't be able to keep up the occupation of Fallujah | |

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| | | <p>and that this was simply a propaganda stunt. He considers it surprising that ISIS became such a powerful actor in the Syrian civil war and claims that ISIS' 'success story in Syria appears to be over' after it lost some territory in Aleppo and northern Syria. In contrast, Michael Stürmer argues elsewhere in Die Welt that ISIS' Anbar offensive was only the beginning.</p> <p>Christoph Ehrhardt and Andreas Ross report in FAZ that tribal fighters have managed to oust ISIS from most parts of Ramadi.</p> | |
| 06/01/2014 | | <p>Rainer Hermann and Christoph Ehrhardt argue in FAZ that ISIS is – for the first time ever – on the defensive in Syria and Iraq. They report that heavy fighting erupted between ISIS and other rebel groups in northern Syria and the surroundings of Aleppo and that rival rebel groups stormed ISIS' headquarters in Raqqa and freed 50 detainees. Rival rebel groups reportedly see ISIS as 'agents of the Syrian regime who are seeking to undermine the revolution'. While Iraqi security forces have suffered their worst defeat since the withdrawal of U.S. troops, they are now winning the upper hand in Anbar.</p> <p>FAZ reports that 19 people were killed in a series of attacks in predominantly Shia districts in Baghdad on 5 January.</p> | |

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| | | <p>Die Welt cites a tribal leader in Fallujah as claiming that ISIS has abandoned Fallujah and that the city is under the control of tribal fighters.</p> | |
| 07/01/2014 | | <p>In a profile of al-Baghdadi in Die Welt, Florian Flade argues that ISIS is the most powerful Jihadi group in Syria and that its gradual exploitation of the power vacuum in Anbar province went largely unnoticed. Flade claims that al-Baghdadi became so powerful as he knew how to exploit the lack of external attention to developments in Iraq since the beginning of the Syrian civil war and especially after the US withdrawal.</p> <p>Die Welt reports that, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), 71 ISIS members (including many foreign fighters) have been killed by other rebel fighters between 3 and 6 January in Syria but that this claim could not be independently verified. If true, this would provide further evidence of how tensions between ISIS and other rebel groups have increased.</p> <p>Die Welt reports that the Iraqi Army delayed its plan of ousting ISIS from Fallujah due to a heightened risk of civilian deaths.</p> <p>Rudolph Chimelli discusses in Süddeutsche Zeitung how ISIS has been exploiting the physical geography of Anbar province, the porous Iraqi-Syria border, the corruption of local officials and shifting loyalties</p> | |

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| | | <p>of Iraq's tribes to expand its territorial base to include key strategic points such as Fallujah. He argues, however, that ISIS won't be able to hold Fallujah and Ramadi in the long run due to the superiority of the Iraqi security forces.</p> <p>FAZ reports about the successful recruitment of ISIS foreign fighters in German schools and how teachers raise the alarm about the increasing influence of Salafist propagandists among their pupils and complain about the lack of resources to prevent and counter this trend.</p> <p>Raniah Salloum claims in Der Spiegel that ISIS has abducted more activists and journalists in recent weeks and that it is increasingly executing them rather than holding them for ransom. She refers to reports according to which ISIS killed up to 50 Syrians in its detention facility in Aleppo on 6 January. Four activists, who had been abducted by ISIS on 26 December, have so far been identified. Salloum reports that these executions happened in response to high tensions between Syrian activists and ISIS, especially after a call for resistance against ISIS by the Syrian opposition on 3 January, and once Syrian rebels were approaching ISIS' detention facility in Aleppo.</p> | |
| 08/01/2014 | | <p>Die Welt claims that Syrian rebels have killed 34 Jihadi fighters in Idlib province most of whom were ISIS members.</p> | <p><i>[background on broader Syria policy: the Government seeks to extend the mandate for Germany's participation in</i></p> |

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| | | <p>FAZ claims that tribal fighters have ousted ISIS from Fallujah and Ramadi (and indeed from the entire province) and that the situation in Anbar is calming down.</p> <p>Die Welt claims that fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi between ISIS and the Iraqi Army continues and that more than 13.000 families have fled Fallujah.</p> <p>Raniah Salloum claims in Der Spiegel that fighting between ISIS and tribal fighters continues in Fallujah. Meantime, the Iraqi Army has surrounded the city but is hesitant to launch an offensive. Its efforts are more successful in Ramadi where it has joined forces with tribal fighters, regained some territory and reportedly killed 25 ISIS fighters. Salloum also reports about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Fallujah.</p> | <p><i>NATO's Operation Active Fence to protect Turkey's territory along its southern border from potential missile attacks from Syria. It views Germany's participation as part of broader efforts to contain the regional implications of the Syrian civil war.]</i></p> |
| 09/01/2014 | | <p>Based on witness statements, HRW describes the situation in Fallujah and Ramadi in detail. It reports how Anbar's residents are trapped in a three-front war and exposed to 'unlawful methods of fighting by all sides'. 25 Fallujah residents have reportedly been killed by army mortar shelling and 13.000 Anbari residents have fled to the Erbil area. Based on witness statements, HRW reports that ISIS entered Fallujah and Ramadi on 1 January. 'In Fallujah, witnesses said, they went to each of the city's five police stations, where they released</p> | |

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| | | <p>prisoners and took weapons from police, who immediately surrendered. The fighters set the police stations and city government building on fire. The fighters then headed to Fallujah's main checkpoint in the eastern part of the city, manned by the army and local police, and based themselves in an industrial area close to the checkpoint. When SWAT and army forces returned to Anbar, they surrounded Ramadi and Fallujah. They controlled entry and exit points, and prevented fuel and food from being taken into the cities, but allowed several hundred people to flee areas of heavy fighting.' On 6 January, Maliki ordered the army not to fire on residential neighbourhoods in Fallujah. He announced on 8 January that the army will launch no further military operations in Fallujah as long as tribal fighters continue to fight ISIS. According to witness statements, 500-600 ISIS fighters were present in five of Ramadi's neighbourhoods on 5 January where they were fighting local groups and SWAT fighters while the army remained outside of the city. HRW reports that 'infighting between tribal armed groups over whether to cooperate with government security forces' was hampering the fight against ISIS in Ramadi.</p> <p>Süddeutsche Zeitung reports that ISIS has withdrawn from Fallujah and Ramadi after the Iraqi government and provincial tribal leaders reached an agreement on how to provide security in both cities.</p> | |
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| 13/01/2014 | | <p>Based on interviews with Syrian refugees in Kurdistan and Turkey, HRW reports how ISIS is violating women's rights in areas under their control in northern and northeastern Syria.</p> <p>Christoph Reuter and Birgit Svensson argue in Der Spiegel that ISIS is on the defensive in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, rebels have reportedly ousted ISIS from most of its bases within a week, including its headquarters in Aleppo. According to the authors, this happened because ISIS had gone too far with the abductions and executions of Syrian activists and rebels and the imposition of strict laws in its controlled areas. Rebel groups fought ISIS in northern Syria in 'unprecedented unity', 'depriving it of its tactical strength'. As a result, ISIS fighters fled to the Syrian mountains and across the Turkish border. Roughly 100 ISIS fighters were reportedly seen in the Turkish border town of Reyhanli. On 9-10 January, ISIS and other Syrian rebels clashed in Raqqa, with ISIS fighters entrenching themselves plus roughly 30-40 foreign hostages there. In Iraq, Sunni groups have been unwilling to join forces with ISIS, engaging them in a two-front war. The authors argue that the demolishing of the protest camp in Ramadi was a sudden move which paved the way for ISIS' Anbar campaign. The authors claim that ISIS is not as powerful in Anbar as claimed by Maliki but that it continues to pose a serious threat in Iraq's cities.</p> | <p>A member of parliament (CDU/CSU) refers to press reports about ISIS' practices in Syria and the involvement of German jihadists to warn of ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks in Europe and call for closer European intelligence cooperation.</p> |
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| 15/01/2014 | | | [background on broader Syria policy: the government announces to increase its humanitarian assistance for the victims of the Syrian civil war by 80 million euros, and interior minister Thomas de Maizière confirms that a total of 10.000 Syrians will be given temporary refuge in Germany.] |
| 21/01/2014 | | <p>In its annual report, HRW discusses how sectarian tensions have deepened in Iraq, with ISIS carrying out ‘nearly daily attacks against civilians, making 2013 the bloodiest of the last five years’. It accuses the Iraqi government of responding to ‘largely peaceful demonstrations with violence and to worsening security with draconian counterterrorism measures’.</p> <p>Florian Flade reports in Die Welt that a 19-year old German convert to Islam who had travelled to Syria to join ISIS had been killed in armed clashes between ISIS and the FSA. Flade further reports that at least 17 people have been killed in a series of five car bombings in Baghdad.</p> | |
| 22/01/2014 | | | Speech by foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Syria peace conference in Switzerland: ‘The ongoing violence has created spaces for terrorism which has become a serious problem in Syria. We commend the efforts of the Syrian opposition |

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| | | | groups to fight groups linked to al-Qaida, such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. We expect the government in Damascus to also take a strong stance against these groups.' |
| 23/01/2014 | | <p>Yassin Musharbash reports in Die Zeit that another German jihadist has been killed in Syria, raising the number of German jihadists who have been killed in Syria to 15. More than 270 German jihadists have now reportedly travelled to Syria.</p> <p>Alfred Hackensberger reports in Die Welt how ISIS has been ousted from Idlib province and Aleppo but continues to control Raqqa, surrounding villages and the road to the Iraqi border. He argues that ISIS is concentrating its efforts on expanding its control of eastern Syria and western Iraq (from where it gets most supplies), and that ISIS is the first Islamic terrorist organisation to control such a vast territory on both sides of the border.</p> | |
| 29/01/2014 | | | <i>[background on perceptions of decision-makers: statement by foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier: 'as correct as the policy of military restraint may be, it must not be misunderstood as meaning standing aloof as a matter of principle. We are, also in Europe, a bit too big and a bit too important for that. We are not a small state on the edges of Europe, but</i> |

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| | | | <p><i>the largest, most populated state in the European Union, with the strongest economy. If a country like that refuses to become involved in efforts to resolve international conflicts, then they will not be resolved, and no viable proposals will be made. That is why one of the first decisions Mrs von der Leyen and I suggested in the Cabinet was to change our approach to the removal and destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. This case is a plausible illustration of the role we play. I think we were right when we said that dropping bombs on Damascus in such a situation would be the wrong course, and probably more of a stumbling-block if we want to arrive at a political settlement at some point. But one cannot speak out against military options and then also keep out of things when it comes to the remaining alternatives.'</i></p> <p><i>[background on perceptions of the opposition: during a Bundestag debate, a member of parliament (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) reports about the humanitarian situation in Iraq, including Kurdistan, based on a recent</i></p> |
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| | | | <p><i>trip and calls for a strong German response. Members of Die Linke call for a protection of Kurdish groups in northern Syria.]</i></p> <p><i>[background on broader Syria policy: the Bundestag extends the mandate for Germany's participation in NATO's Operation Active Fence to protect Turkey's territory along its southern border from potential missile attacks from Syria.]</i></p> |
| 30/01/2014 | | | <p><i>[background on perceptions of decision-makers: foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier argues: 'Germany is too large to merely comment on global issues. It is all about taking foreign policy action: We are rightly expected to become involved and to do what we can to address conflicts as early as possible. (...) The big conflicts have moved closer to Europe, with direct effects also being felt in Germany. (...) If we don't manage to calm the situation, all state order in Syria, Iraq and even Lebanon could disintegrate. Three failing states and an ensuing endless series of ethnic and religious civil wars would be a catastrophe whose effects would not</i></p> |

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| | | | <p><i>be limited to the Near and Middle East.']</i></p> <p><i>[background on broader Syria policy: In a meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Chancellor Angela Merkel calls for a humanitarian corridor in Syria without elaborating how this could be implemented.]</i></p> |
| Jan 2014 | | <p>The ICG reports that more than 100.000 Iraqi civilians were displaced during the month due to the fighting in Anbar province. According to UNHCR reports, 65.000 fled fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi during the week of 18-24 January alone. ICG claims that after local groups reportedly regained control of Fallujah, the government no longer distinguished between residents and militias, announced Fallujah to be in the hands of ISIS and called for national and international support to fight ISIS. It claims elsewhere that Iraqi government forces 'regained control of areas west of Baghdad' on 29 January. According to Iraqi government estimates, 1013 people were killed in January which amounts to the highest death toll since April 2008. The Iraqi government also reportedly executed 26 on terrorism charges on 21 January. On Syria, ICG reports that clashes between ISIS and other rebel groups intensified after 1 January, when the Islamic Front accused ISIS of killing a rebel commander and 'being worse than the Assad regime'. While ISIS lost</p> | |

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| | | control of its bases in Idlib and west of Aleppo, it consolidated its presence east of Aleppo and in Raqqa province. On 27 January, ISIS rejected a reconciliation initiative by other Syrian rebel groups. According to the SOHR, ISIS and other rebel groups suffered a high number of casualties (estimated 1400) in rebel infighting between 1 and 23 January. ICG also reports that ISIS claimed responsibility for a deadly car bombing in Beirut on 2 January. | |
| 01/02/2104 | | | <i>[background on perceptions of decision-makers: In a speech at the Munich Security Conference, foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier refers to the situation in Iraq and Syria and anticipates that these and other conflict hot spots will keep German foreign and security policy busy in 2014.]</i> |
| 03/02/2014 | | <p>FAZ and Der Spiegel report that al-Qaeda formally cut all ties with ISIS and reiterated that Jabhat al-Nusra is the only legitimate al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria.</p> <p>Der Spiegel reports that, according to ISIS propaganda, a 26-year old German convert to Islam and ISIS member carried out a suicide attack in Syria. Der Spiegel highlights that, if the report can be confirmed, this would be the first time a German citizen conducted a suicide attack in Syria.</p> | |

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| | | FAZ reports that the German domestic intelligence agency is particularly concerned about those German jihadists who return from Syria and about their ability to carry out terrorist attacks in Germany. | |
| 05/02/2014 | | According to HRW , ISIS claimed responsibility for the execution of four Iraqi SWAT members near Ramadi. It also reports how SWAT forces reportedly ousted ISIS from one of Ramadi's neighbourhoods on 30 January but how fighting was continuing in other parts of Ramadi and how 'accounts of fighting in and around Fallujah have been inconsistent'. | |
| 10/02/2014 | | FAZ reports how the speaker of the Iraqi parliament narrowly escaped an assassination while visiting Mosul, how five people were killed in attacks in Baghdad, Musayib and Balad, and how 21 ISIS members accidentally killed themselves while preparing propaganda with a suicide bomb north of Baghdad. | |
| 12/02/2014 | | Der Spiegel reports that ISIS still controls Fallujah and parts of Ramadi and that 300.000 people have been displaced by the fighting in Anbar. | |
| 14/02/2014 | | Die Welt reports that ISIS took over parts of the northern Iraqi town of Sulayman Beg and is about to take full control, after laying siege to the town hall and prompting residents to leave their houses. | |
| 15/02/2014 | | Die Welt confirms that ISIS assumed full control of Sulayman Beg. It also reports that at least 16 Iraqi security forces have been killed in a series of attacks across Iraq. | |

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| 18/02/2014 | | | <p>Head of domestic intelligence, Hans-Georg Maaßen, reports that 240 German jihadists have left for Syria and that the terrorism threat level in Germany remains high. He explains that German authorities have successfully prevented the departure of more than 12 German jihadists. Further, domestic intelligence agencies at the federal and state level are closely cooperating with the foreign intelligence service, military counterintelligence, Federal Criminal Police and Federal Prosecutor General to monitor, assess and act upon online activities by jihadists.</p> |
| 19/02/2014 | | <p>Die Welt reports that a German jihadist, who was reportedly commanding an ISIS brigade in Manbij, has been killed in Aleppo province.</p> <p>Tomas Avenarius reports in Süddeutsche Zeitung that ISIS is considering introducing its own currency in the areas it controls. He claims that Iraqi security forces have so far failed to oust ISIS from the 'vast areas' it has seized. Avenarius reports that the Iraqi government has won the support of Anbar's Sunni tribes in the fight against ISIS.</p> | |
| 24/02/2014 | | <p>According to the FAZ, the German government anticipates a continuing influx of German jihadists to Syria and unofficial estimates are much higher</p> | |

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| | | than official numbers. 50 German jihadists have reportedly returned to Germany from Syria. | |
| 26/02/2014 | | Majid Sattar reports in FAZ that the official estimate for German jihadists in Syria is 300 of whom more than 20 are estimated dead. 10 percent of German jihadists in Syria are reportedly converts to Islam and 40 percent are younger than 25. The growing number of female jihadists travelling solo to Syria is a new phenomenon when compared to earlier Jihadi tourism to Afghanistan or Pakistan. Sattar highlights the central role of online social networks for the radicalisation of German citizens. The federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia has announced criminal investigations for those returnees who are suspected of having committed crimes in Syria. | One of Germany's most prominent Salafist preachers, Sven Lau, was detained on the suspicion of supporting ISIS in Syria under a humanitarian aid cover, inciting German jihadists to travel to Syria, and preparing a terrorist attack. |
| 27/02/2014 | | Der Spiegel refers to 'a new dimension of brutality by German jihadists' who have joined ISIS in Syria. The authors trace the radicalisation of a German citizen who had travelled to Azaz in Syria in the summer of 2013 and posed on social media with severed heads in mid-February 2014. | |
| 28/02/2014 | | Alfred Hackensberger reports in Die Welt about a German jihadist who encouraged German nationals per video from Syria to join ISIS. Hackensberger further reports that ISIS left its former stronghold near the Turkish border, Azaz, on the morning of 28 February. Azaz was a significant base as it was close to the Bab al-Salam border crossing. | |

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| Feb 2014 | | <p>The ICG reports that ISIS executed senior figures in Syrian rebel groups (Liwa al-Tawhid, Suqour as-Sham) affiliated with the Islamic Front in two separate suicide bombings on 1 February. On 23 February, ISIS killed a senior Ahrar al-Sham commander who had been appointed by al-Qaeda to mediate between Jihadi groups in Syria. This came after Jabhat al-Nusra had given ISIS a deadline (1 March) to accept mediation or face expulsion from Syria. ICG refers to the SOHR's estimate (27 February) that 3300 had been killed in rebel infighting since January. On Iraq, ICG reports that the army continued to besiege Anbar, continued the shelling of Fallujah and Ramadi, that ISIS brought down an army helicopter on 22 February and that government forces regained control of Sulayman Beg and surrounding areas on 22 February after more than a week of fighting. Car bombings across Iraq continued. In and around Baghdad, at least 114 were killed in three attacks on 5, 18 and 27 February.</p> | |
| 08/03/2014 | | <p>Markus Wehner reports in FAZ about a growing number of female German jihadists, including a 15-year old girl, who travel to Syria alone to become ISIS fighters. He also reports how on two occasions police officers at the Cologne-Bonn airport did not prevent the mother of two German jihadists from transporting Kalashnikov magazines and other suspicious equipment to Turkey.</p> | |

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| 09/03/2014 | | Der Spiegel and Die Welt report that at least 34 people were killed in a suicide attack in the predominantly Shia city of Hillah in southern Iraq. | |
| 10/03/2014 | | HRW reports about human rights abuses by Iraqi security forces, especially against prisoners and in retaliation for ISIS' "Breaking the Walls" campaign. HRW claims that 'as many as 1000 prisoners escaped' during the Abu Ghraib and Taji prison breaks in July 2013. HRW further reports that severe fighting is ongoing in Anbar which has caused a humanitarian crisis and prevented the delivery of humanitarian aid to residents of Fallujah and Ramadi and to internally displaced persons. | |
| 20/03/2014 | | Süddeutsche Zeitung claims that Fallujah is entirely controlled by ISIS and that heavy fighting broke out after the Iraqi army launched a fresh offensive. | |
| 22/03/2014 | | SWP's Guido Steinberg reports that he and others who have monitored the influx of foreign fighters into Syria have known for two years how easily new Jihadi recruits enter Turkey and are brought across the border and how recruitment works. | |
| 23/03/2014 | | SWP's Guido Steinberg argues that German jihadists may well intend to launch attacks in Germany upon their return, but that it is generally not easy for them to leave their units in Syria. He claims that German authorities lack personnel to monitor all those who could return. | |
| 26/03/2014 | | Die Welt reports that a Swiss foreign fighter with ISIS launched an attack at a security control point in southern Turkey, killing three. | |

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| 27/03/2014 | | Boris Kálnoky reports in Die Welt how ISIS is now seeing Turkey as a legitimate target for deadly attacks after tensions have grown (see also Die Zeit). | The government briefs the Bundestag about the capacity of the Iraqi security forces (p. 76). It highlights capability shortfalls, corruption, limited loyalty to the Iraqi government, infiltration by militant opposition forces and broader structural weaknesses as key challenges. It states that the Iraqi security forces have to date failed to deal a decisive blow to terrorist groups in Iraq. |
| 31/03/2014 | | Der Spiegel reports about the radicalisation of young German jihadists in Bremen prior to leaving for Syria. | German authorities arrest two suspected ISIS members upon their return from Syria and one suspected ISIS supporter. The Federal Prosecutor General emphasises that the Syrian civil war has ‘an immediate effect on Germany’, that Jihadi returnees pose a danger to Germany and that German authorities need to counter the threat resolutely. |
| Mar 2014 | | On Syria, the ICG reports that ISIS rejected al-Nusra’s ultimatum to accept mediation and that it withdrew from Idlib and Latakia provinces, concentrating its fighters in eastern Aleppo and Raqqa. ISIS seized a town in Al-Hasakah province in northeastern Syria on 30 March where it reportedly killed 50 rebels. On Iraq, ICG reports about the ongoing fighting in Anbar, with ISIS still controlling Fallujah. It also reports about criticism that the Iraqi | |

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| | | <p>government is not seriously trying to solve the crisis – with MPs claiming that Maliki is not waging war on terrorism but against Anbar and its people. According to UN reports, 400.000 have been displaced in Anbar since the beginning of ISIS' campaign. ICG further reports that bombing attacks across Iraq continued: among other deadly incidents, at least 80 were killed on 25 March including 41 soldiers.</p> | |
| 08/04/2014 | | | <p>Foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier expresses deep concern about 'the increasing degree to which religious minorities, including Christians, are being targeted by Islamist terrorists' in Syria and calls 'for the immediate release of representatives of Christian churches who have been abducted'.</p> |
| 11/04/2014 | | <p>FAZ reports how ISIS has seized control of a dam five kilometres south of Fallujah to use water as a strategic weapon against the Iraqi army: ISIS closed most of the locks and flooded parts around Fallujah to hinder the Iraqi army's offensive on Fallujah. Maliki announced a fresh offensive against ISIS to regain control of the dam.</p> | |
| 12/04/2014 | | <p>Der Spiegel reports how prominent German jihadist Denis Cuspert disseminates an ISIS propaganda video from Raqqa in which he encourages German jihadists to join ISIS in Syria.</p> | |

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| 17/04/2014 | | <p>Süddeutsche Zeitung reports that, according to the SOHR, ISIS killed al-Nusra's Idlib commander together with three family members on 15 April.</p> | |
| 18/04/2014 | | <p>FAZ reports that ISIS formally cut ties with al-Qaeda and is concentrating its efforts on 'proper jihad' and establishing a caliphate. It also reports that at least 14 people were killed in a bombing attack on a mosque in Homs, Syria.</p> <p>SWP's Guido Steinberg discusses ISIS' rise to power as an independent actor in Syria, rather than an al-Qaeda affiliate, and its likely intention to engage in jihad beyond its core conflict zone. He reports that most Jihadi foreign fighters joined ISIS, rather than al-Nusra, after April 2013. Steinberg highlights how hard it is to estimate the strength of ISIS which may have between 5000 and 15.000 fighters. According to him, the rise of Jihadi groups in Syria has strengthened Assad's position and reality on the ground has come to match Syrian regime propaganda. He argues that Germany needs to prepare itself for ISIS' reach into Europe and that counter-terrorism cooperation with Turkey remains the biggest challenge for Berlin.</p> | |
| 28/04/2014 | | <p>FAZ interviews Saleh al-Mutlaq, a prominent Iraqi Sunni politician and one of the three deputy prime ministers, who warns about the weakness of the 1.5 million-strong Iraqi army – evidenced by its failure to recapture ISIS-held territory in Anbar including the dam south of Fallujah. al-Mutlaq claims that the</p> | |

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| | | <p>Iraqi state has de facto collapsed and will become ‘a second Syria’ unless it defeats ISIS.</p> <p>ICG reports in detail about the situation in Fallujah since December 2013 and argues that ‘the potential for miscalculation, or calculated escalation, is enormous’. It argues that ISIS’ rise is a symptom, not the cause, of poor governance in Iraq which is driving instability. According to ICG, ISIS’ initial claim in early January 2014 that it had seized control of Fallujah ‘was greatly exaggerated: while it raised its black flag above some administration buildings in the city centre, locals blocked most of their forays and forced them to retreat to the outskirts.’ ICG claims that by mismanaging the crisis, the Iraqi government gave Fallujah residents little choice but to form an alliance of convenience with ISIS. The army’s siege of Fallujah allowed ISIS to renew its support base in Iraq: ‘with a high profile from the fighting in Syria and superior weaponry, they once again have become a magnet for the country’s disaffected’. ICG also suggests that by initially exaggerating the threat to Fallujah, exacerbating tensions and allowing the crisis to escalate, Maliki rescued his chances in the 30 April parliamentary elections.</p> | |
| 29/04/2014 | | <p>Die Welt’s Alfred Hackensberger reports from Erbil how Mosul has long been an ISIS stronghold and that Kurdistan remains the only safe region for Europeans in Iraq due to strong security measures.</p> | |

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| 30/04/2014 | | <p>In a detailed report, ICG analyses growing tensions between ISIS and Turkey. Regarding the situation along the Syrian-Turkish border, ICG claims that ISIS 'gained control of two thirds of the (Syrian) border towns and gates' in early 2014. It reports that ISIS 'has attacked Turkish NGO workers inside Syria and killed their Syrian employees'. Many of its kidnappings of foreign journalists have not been made public for security reasons, and Turkish intelligence negotiated the release of a Turkish journalist in early January. Further, ISIS 'has gained ground to the east, including through attacks on the Syrian Turkmen town of Çobanbeyli'. The report also discusses how Turkish authorities have become much more sensitive to the transnational threat ISIS poses after tensions between ISIS and Turkey heated up in March 2013. ISIS fighters and Turkish soldiers engaged in border clashes in October 2013 and January 2014, and Turkish security forces were wounded in a raid on a suspected ISIS safehouse in Istanbul in late March 2014.</p> | |
| Apr 2014 | | <p>ICG reports that rebel infighting continued in eastern Syria where ISIS launched an unsuccessful attack on the town of Abu Kamal near the Iraqi border on 14 April. On Iraq, ICG reports that ISIS tightened its grip on Fallujah and started providing basic services. In early April, ISIS pushed eastwards towards Baghdad and established a presence in Abu Ghraib city. ICG accuses the government of continuously using the Anbar crisis to marginalise</p> | |

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| | | Sunni opposition and gather domestic and international support. ISIS' suicide bombings continued, among others at a Shia political rally in Baghdad on 25 April, killing 33. | |
| 03/05/2014 | | HRW reports that ISIS has claimed responsibility for deadly attacks on a Shia election campaign rally and on polling centres in Iraq. On election day, suicide bombs were also launched in Tikrit and Kirkuk. HRW argues that the Iraqi government is exacerbating a humanitarian crisis in Anbar and indiscriminately targeting civilians. It reports that ISIS remains in and around Fallujah and on the outskirts of Ramadi. | |
| 04/05/2014 | | FAZ reports that al-Nusra ousted ISIS from Abriha in Deir ez-Zor province. | |
| 07/05/2014 | | HRW reports that the Iraqi army has not yet entered Fallujah but on 6 May, 3500 Iraqi soldiers and 750 pro-government militia began an offensive on surrounding towns. HRW reports that journalists are blocked from entering Anbar and that it is relying on Facebook messages by residents and hospital employees. | <i>[background on perceptions of the opposition: in two separate motions, the CDU/CSU + SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen parliamentary groups call on the government to step up its humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees and pay special attention to the situation in Kurdistan and ISIS' activities in Anbar as a deterioration would further destabilise the region.]</i> |
| 08/05/2014 | | | <i>[background on perceptions of the opposition: Members of parliament (CDU/CSU + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) call on the government to step up its support of Kurdistan given the Iraqi</i> |

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| | | | <i>conflict and growing influx of Syrian refugees.]</i> |
| 12/05/2014 | | Süddeutsche Zeitung reports that ISIS has seized control of strategic areas in Deir ez-Zor province after heavy fighting with al-Nusra. | |
| 21/05/2014 | | | <i>[background on perceptions of the opposition: an inquiry by Die Linke focuses on atrocities committed by ISIS against Yazidi groups in Mosul province and northern Syria.]</i> |
| 24/05/2014 | A French-born jihadist who spent over a year fighting for ISIS in Syria opens fire at the Jewish museum in Brussels, killing four people. This is the first ISIS-inspired terrorist attack carried out in Europe by a returning foreign fighter. The attack highlights that ISIS is stepping up its external operations and that foreign fighters who return from Syria to Europe pose a concrete, rather than abstract, threat. | | |
| 27/05/2014 | | Drawing on reports by Fallujah residents, HRW claims that 'ISIS has planted improvised explosive devices along the main highway and other parts of city, and is operating prisons in Fallujah and elsewhere'. Further, ISIS has reportedly taken over | |

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| | | parts of Fallujah's hospital. HRW also reports that ISIS claimed responsibility for nine car bombings in Shia areas of Baghdad which killed at least 34. | |
| 29/05/2014 | | FAZ reports that at least 54 people were killed in a series of attacks across Iraq the previous day. One major attack, killing 12 security forces and 7 civilians, was carried out at a control point in Mosul. | |
| May 2014 | | ICG reports that ISIS gained ground in eastern Syria (Deir ez-Zor province) throughout the month of May. It also reports that deadly bombings across Iraq continued which killed at least 172. According to ICG, the Iraqi army escalated the fight against ISIS and local militia in and around Fallujah by using indiscriminate force (barrel bombs). ISIS reportedly clashed not only with previously allied local militia in Fallujah, after being accused of kidnapping, beating and disarming local fighters, but also with other local groups in eastern Anbar over the sale of gas and other commodities. | |
| 01/06/2014 | | FAZ reports that a 29-year old French citizen and ISIS member has been arrested in connection with the terrorist attack at the Jewish museum in Brussels on 24 May. Police found an ISIS flag, a video in which a masked man claimed responsibility for the attack, weapons and 'an impressive amount of ammunition'. The suspect had been imprisoned five times, became radicalised during this time and spent a year in Syria after being discharged from prison. FAZ reports that roughly 700 French jihadists have travelled to Syria. | |

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| 02/06/2014 | | <p>Michaela Wiegel reports in FAZ that German officials had noted the Brussels terrorist suspect upon his return from Syria in March 2013 and had informed French authorities, but that French intelligence officials and police were overwhelmed with the monitoring of Jihadi returnees. The arrest of the Brussels suspect was pure coincidence during a routine control at a bus station in Marseille.</p> <p>Reporting about the Brussels attack and the failure to monitor the suspect upon his return from Syria, Javier Cáceres argues in Süddeutsche Zeitung that one of the worst nightmares for European security officials has become reality.</p> | |
| 04/06/2014 | <p>ISIS begins its advance on Mosul as part of its northern Iraq offensive, and also launches parallel attacks on Samarra (125 km north of Baghdad) and Tikrit over the next days. These developments highlight ISIS' military capability and the challenges for the Iraqi security forces.</p> | | <p><i>[background on perceptions of the opposition: Die Linke questions the government about its assessment of ISIS' activities and pushes for stronger measures to protect the Syrian Kurds.]</i></p> |
| 05/06/2014 | | <p>Amnesty International reports about a raid on a northern Syrian village on 29 May in which 15 civilians, including 7 children, were summarily executed. The executions, likely carried out by ISIS, happened after nearby clashes between ISIS and</p> | <p>A member of parliament (CDU/CSU) claims that 320 German jihadists have left for Syria.</p> |

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| | | <p>YPG forces had escalated. Amnesty International fears that 'these civilians were killed as retribution for their perceived support of the YPG, either directly or indirectly through their Yezidi Kurdish landowners, or because they were mistaken for Yezidi Kurds'. It further reports: 'The fighting between ISIS and YPG is believed to have been sparked by a disagreement over the control of large amounts of grain stored in the village of Tell Halaf, which is under YPG control. On the same day as the summary killings took place, crops belonging to Yezidi Kurds in al-Tleiliye and its vicinity were set on fire.'</p> <p>Die Zeit reports that 320 German jihadists have left for Syria.</p> | <p>At an EU Justice and Home Affairs meeting, German interior minister Thomas de Maizière states that the threat posed by ISIS foreign fighters returning to Europe is no longer abstract but concrete.</p> |
| 06/06/2014 | | <p>Die Welt reports that federal criminal police, domestic intelligence and the ministry of the interior have long been warning about the risk of Jihadi returnees committing attacks in Germany. 20 German jihadists have so far returned from Syria and are being closely monitored.</p> | |
| 07/06/2014 | | <p>FAZ reports that 25 ISIS members stormed a university in Ramadi and took dozens of students hostage, before Iraqi security forces freed them, killed the suspected leader of the ISIS unit and regained control of the campus. Further, at least 59 people were reportedly killed in armed clashes between ISIS and Iraqi security forces in Mosul, in addition to at least 36 killed in and around Mosul</p> | |

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| | | the previous day. In Baghdad, at least 60 people were killed in a series of car bombings on predominantly Shia areas. | |
| 08/06/2014-09/06/2014 | | <i>Note: no relevant knowledge claims were found on these two days</i> | |