



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

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FEATURE ARTICLE

## The Dusit Hotel Attack and the Evolving Terror Threat in East Africa

MATT BRYDEN AND PREMDEEP BAHRA

A VIEW FROM THE CT FOXHOLE

## Catherine De Bolle

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EUROPOL

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## FROM THE EDITOR

In our cover article, Matt Bryden and Premdeep Bahra trace the evolution of the jihadi terrorist threat in East Africa over the last three decades. They argue that al-Shabaab's January 2019 attack on the Dusit D2 luxury hotel compound in Nairobi, Kenya, "brought together three strands of al-Shabaab's organizational DNA: its Somali provenance, its ideological affiliation with al-Qa`ida, and its growing cohort of trained, experienced East African fighters. The successful combination of these traits in a single operation suggests that al-Shabaab's longstanding ambition to transcend its Somali origins and become a truly regional organization is becoming a reality, representing a new and dangerous phase in the group's evolution and the threat that it poses to the region."

Our interview is with Catherine De Bolle, the Executive Director of Europol, who previously served as Commissioner General of the Belgian Federal Police between 2012 and 2018.

Graham Macklin outlines what is now known about the Christchurch terrorist attacks. He writes: "In the space of 36 minutes on March 15, 2019, it is alleged that Brenton Tarrant, an Australian far-right extremist, fatally shot 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch in the deadliest terrorist attack in New Zealand's history. What was unique about Tarrant's attack—at least insofar as extreme-right terrorism is concerned—is that he livestreamed his atrocity on Facebook and in doing so, highlighted the Achilles heel of such platforms when faced with the viral dissemination of extremely violent content." Joana Cook and Gina Vale provide an updated assessment of the numbers of foreign men, women, and minors who traveled to or were born in the Islamic State, examine the proportion that have returned 'home,' and outline the continuing challenges foreign women and minors affiliated with the Islamic State pose to the international community. Robin Simcox assesses the terrorist threat from "frustrated travelers" in Europe by examining the 25 plots (eight of which resulted in attacks) by such individuals since January 2014.

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*Cover: Members of security forces are seen at the scene where explosions and gunshots were heard at the Dusit hotel compound, in Nairobi, Kenya, on January 15, 2019. (Thomas Mukoya/Reuters)*

# East Africa's Terrorist Triple Helix: The Dusit Hotel Attack and the Historical Evolution of the Jihadi Threat

By Matt Bryden and Premdeep Bahra

On January 15, 2019, a group of al-Shabaab terrorists carried out a deadly attack against an office complex in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, that also hosts the Dusit D2 luxury hotel. During the course of the overnight siege 21 people were killed and at least 28 injured. Although al-Shabaab has struck Kenya several times previously, and with more deadly consequences, the D2 attack, as it came to be known, represented a disquieting milestone in al-Shabaab's evolution. In the past, the group had relied almost exclusively on ethnic Somalis to carry out its 'martyrdom' operations both inside and outside Somalia. The terrorist cell that conducted the assault on the Dusit compound, however, comprised Kenyan nationals of non-Somali descent, including a suicide bomber from the Kenyan port town of Mombasa. In the aftermath of the attack, al-Shabaab issued a statement claiming that it had staged the operation in accordance with an al-Qa`ida edict demanding retaliation for the relocation of the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. The raid on the D2 compound brought together three strands of al-Shabaab's organizational DNA: its Somali provenance, its ideological affiliation with al-Qa`ida, and its growing cohort of trained, experienced East African fighters. The successful combination of these traits in a single operation suggests that al-Shabaab's longstanding ambition to transcend its Somali origins and become a truly regional organization is becoming a reality, representing a new and dangerous phase in the group's evolution and the threat that it poses to the region.

**O**n January 15, 2019, a group of terrorists carried out a deadly attack against 14 Riverside Drive, an office complex in Nairobi's upscale Westlands neighborhood that also hosts the Dusit D2 luxury hotel. During the course of the overnight siege, 21 people

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were killed and at least 28 injured.<sup>1</sup> In contrast with the shambolic response to al-Shabaab's 2013 attack on Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall, Kenya's security forces reacted with alacrity and professionalism, assisting some 700 people in the compound to reach safety. By mid-morning the following day, the siege was over and the terrorists dead. The Somali jihadi group Harakaat al-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin, commonly known as al-Shabaab, claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>2</sup>

The D2 operation, as it came to be known, bore the classic hallmarks of an al-Shabaab complex attack: the tactics, techniques, and procedures employed by the assailants were all too familiar, tried and tested dozens of times over the past decade by al-Shabaab in Somalia. Nor was it the first time that the group has conducted mass casualty 'martyrdom' operations beyond Somalia's borders. Only the successful deployment of a suicide bomber—something the group has managed to do in Uganda and Djibouti—distinguished the operation from previous al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya.<sup>3</sup> But the Dusit attack was unique in one important respect: it was the first successful al-Shabaab martyrdom operation planned, led, and carried out primarily by Kenyans not of Somali descent.<sup>4</sup>

Although one operation does not in itself indicate a trend, key aspects of the D2 operation suggest that this is a new phase in the evolution of the terrorist threat in East Africa and the Horn. The reasons are twofold: first, the coming of age of al-Shabaab's East African fighters, gradually transforming a predominantly Somali organization into a more inclusive regional avatar of al-Qa`ida in East Africa; and second, the faltering of Somalia's political reconstruction under the administration of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire,<sup>5</sup> offering al-Shabaab ample time and space to plan and prepare new operations.

Historically, the threat of terrorism in the region has been at its most acute when three main strands of jihadism—Somali, East African, and global—have intertwined in a kind of 'triple helix': Somalia serves as the geographic and organizational host; East African extremists provide the foot soldiers who can operate most effectively across the wider region; and al-Qa`ida provides the ideological legitimacy and global appeal. The 1998 suicide bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing over 220 people and wounding thousands more, were the work of just such a triad: al-Qa`ida, the Somali jihadi group al-Ittihad al-Islami, and a network of Kenyan extremists that later came to be known as al-Hijra. So, too, were the bombing of a tourist resort near Mombasa and attempted shooting down of an Israeli passenger jet in 2002.<sup>6</sup>

After 2002, the remnants of al-Qa`ida East Africa (AQEA) and al-Ittihad bound together out of necessity, giving rise to al-Shabaab. Their East African comrades-in-arms entered a mutually supportive relationship with al-Shabaab, but initially pursued an independent path. In 2009, however, that trajectory began to shift, and in recent years, al-Hijra's identity has been steadily subsumed by al-Shabaab:<sup>7</sup> the terrorist 'triple helix' that once posed such a danger

to the entire region is now re-emerging.

This article, therefore, begins by revisiting the genesis of the jihadi presence in East Africa in the early 1990s, from al-Qa`ida building a presence in the region to its intersection with the first Somali jihadi organization, al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), to the nexus between it and extremist fringe of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), and responsibility for the spate of terrorist attacks that shook the region between 1998 and 2002. Part two of the article then traces the emergence of al-Shabaab, first as a successor to AIAI and host of residual al-Qa`ida elements in Somalia, then as a jihadi movement in its own right and full-fledged affiliate of al-Qa`ida with their sights set on regional jihad. This section also examines the evolution of al-Hijra from a gaggle of Kenyan militants left ideologically adrift by the disintegration of the IPK's demise into an organized, clandestine movement that became progressively affiliated with al-Shabaab until it was ultimately assimilated as an integral part of al-Shabaab's regional ambitions. Lastly, the article describes how these discrete strands of jihadi activity have become fused in the threat network that attacked the D2 compound and why this potentially represents a dangerous new phase of al-Shabaab activity across East Africa and the Horn.

The Dusit hotel attack was by no means the most deadly or destructive al-Shabaab terrorist action in Kenya: the raids on Westgate shopping mall (2013), Mpeketoni (2014), and Garissa University College (2015) all claimed more victims. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the Dusit attack as simply another atrocity perpetrated by Somalia's preeminent terrorist organization: several key aspects of the operation suggest that it represented a milestone in the realization of al-Shabaab's longstanding ambition to become a genuinely regional jihadi movement. The assault on Riverside Park not only featured al-Shabaab's first suicide bombing on Kenyan soil, but also the first Kenyan al-Shabaab suicide bomber to attack his home country, and it was the first major al-Shabaab attack in Kenya

carried out by terrorists of non-Somali origin.

To understand why these characteristics matter and the degree to which they represent a potential shift in the nature of the al-Shabaab threat, it is necessary to revisit nearly three decades of jihadi activity across the region and to unravel the 'triple helix' of genetic material from which al-Shabaab inherited its unique configuration of ideological, strategic, and operational DNA: Somali, internationalist, and East African, respectively.

Al-Shabaab's Somali provenance provides it with a vulnerable population to exploit, vast ungoverned spaces across which to operate, and a conflict environment in which to train its forces and expose them to combat. The movement's al-Qa`ida credentials permit al-Shabaab to transcend its Somali identity, frame its mission in global terms, and appeal to regional and international audiences. And al-Shabaab's expanding contingent of trained and experienced East African fighters enables the group to operate more discreetly across the region, establishing new cells, gathering intelligence, and planning fresh strikes. The D2 attack showcased the fusion of these three organizational traits and signaled the advent of a new phase in al-Shabaab's regional campaign.

## Part One: The Genesis of the Jihadi Presence in East Africa, 1992-2002

### *The Emergence of al-Qa`ida in East Africa*

Al-Qa`ida first made its debut in East Africa in 1992, when Usama bin Ladin and his entourage settled in Sudan.<sup>8</sup> With the support of his Sudanese hosts, notably the ideologue Hassan al-Turabi, bin Ladin set to work amassing resources, building a network of alliances, and training a new generation of jihadis. At the time, AQEA was indistinguishable from al-Qa`ida Core. Operations in the region were led and orchestrated by Egyptian members of bin Ladin's inner circle, including his deputy, Abu Ubaidah Al-Banshiri; al-Qa-



*The Dusit D2 hotel complex is seen on January 16, 2019, after security forces had killed all four militants who stormed the upscale hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. (Baz Ratner/Reuters)*

`ida's military chief, Mohamed Atef (aka Abu Hafs Al-Masri); and Saif al-`Adl.

The deployment of U.S. troops to Somalia in December 1992 prompted bin Ladin to stage his first operations,<sup>9</sup> bombing two hotels in Aden, Yemen,<sup>10</sup> where U.S. troops were believed to be staying, and sending instructors to provide training, strategic guidance, and even some tactical leadership to anti-U.S. Somali militias, including the nascent jihadi organization al-Ittihad al-Islami.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, however, al-Qa`ida's Somali operations fizzled as its local allies failed to unite, the Somali jihadi movement stumbled, and U.S. forces withdrew in 1994. The last remaining al-Qa`ida toehold, a shared training camp with al-Ittihad in Somalia's remote Gedo region, was destroyed by Ethiopian forces in early 1997.<sup>12</sup>

More importantly, however, al-Qa`ida had established a robust regional infrastructure to support its Somalia operations, including charities and shell businesses to facilitate the movement of people and money around the region.<sup>13</sup> When, in 1996, bin Ladin was expelled from Sudan and relocated to Afghanistan with most of his senior leadership, he left behind an extensive, well-developed network and enough senior operatives to sustain al-Qa`ida's mission in the region.<sup>14</sup> In 1998, suicide bombers struck the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing over 200 people and wounding thousands more. In the aftermath of the attacks, many of those responsible—notably those from outside the region like Wadih El-Hage and Mohamed Sadiq Odeh<sup>15</sup>—either fled the region, were captured, or were killed, leaving behind a diminished al-Qa`ida presence.

The remaining AQEA cell was then led by and composed almost exclusively of nationals from East Africa and the Horn. Tariq Abdallah (aka Abu Talha al-Sudani), the group's coordinator and financier, was a Sudanese based in Mogadishu. Fazul Abdallah Mohamed (commonly known as Harun Fazul), a cerebral al-Qa`ida veteran from the Comoros Islands who was simultaneously involved in setting up bin Ladin's diamond business in West Africa, emerged as the team's operational leader.<sup>16</sup> Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, a senior operational leader from Mombasa, was believed to have been the owner of the vehicle used to bomb the Paradise Hotel; in Somalia, he was allegedly responsible for the management of jihadi training camps.<sup>17</sup>

It was this leaner, more local AQEA team that planned and carried out the next round of terrorist attacks in Kenya. To prepare the next phase of their operations, they established a base in Mogadishu, where they blended in easily and could travel freely between Somalia and Kenya. Two junior members of the team settled near Kismayo to set up a lobster fishing business, while Fazul acquired a second home in the Kenyan village of Siyu, near Lamu, where he married and set up a local madrassa while recruiting and planning for the next round of attacks.<sup>18</sup>

On November 28, 2002, two Kenyan gunmen drove a vehicle loaded with explosives through the gate at the Paradise Hotel in Kikambala, near Mombasa—a beach resort frequented by Israeli tourists—killing 15 people and wounding approximately 80 others. At roughly the same time, Nabhan and a Kenyan-Somali named Issa Osman Issa took up a position near Moi International Airport, Mombasa,<sup>19</sup> and fired two SA-7 Strela man-portable surface-to-air missiles at an Israeli charter flight with 246 passengers on board. Both missiles, which had been smuggled into Kenya by boat between Kismayo and Siyu, missed their target, and the flight arrived in Tel Aviv safely.<sup>20</sup> Immediately after the operation, the surviving members of the team fled to Somalia<sup>21</sup> where, together with their

Somali jihadi hosts, they would begin laying the foundation for al-Shabaab.

#### *Al-Ittihad al-Islami—al-Qa`ida's Original Partner in Somalia*

Al-Qa`ida's original partner in Somalia had been the jihadi organization al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), but by 2002, when Fazul and his associates fled to Somalia in the wake of the Mombasa and Kikambala operations, AIAI was long defunct. All that remained of the movement were small clusters of die-hard extremists waiting for the opportunity to revive their 'jihad.' Their most prominent leader was Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former deputy chairman and military commander of AIAI, and it was to Aweys and his acolytes that al-Qa`ida's remaining East African cell turned for support.

AIAI had started out as an underground salafi organization founded in Somalia in the 1980s, but which openly materialized as a jihadi movement following the collapse of the Siyaad Barre regime in January 1991. Several of AIAI's early leaders, including Hassan Abdullah Hersi 'Turki' and Ibrahim Haji Jama 'Al-Afghani' (himself a veteran of the 'jihad' in Afghanistan) enjoyed close ties with al-Qa`ida.<sup>22</sup>

In 1991, al-Ittihad grew rapidly and attracted a cross-clan following,<sup>23</sup> fueled in part by support from Saudi charitable foundations and other Gulf sponsors.<sup>24</sup> Better organized and more disciplined than other Somali militias, AIAI nevertheless struggled to gain traction in Somalia's clan-based society. In mid-1992, it launched an unsuccessful bid to establish an Islamic emirate in northeastern Somalia but was defeated and expelled by local clan-based militias. For several months, AIAI forces migrated from region to region in search of new bases, but were met with mistrust and, in several cases, military defeat.<sup>25</sup> But as 1992 drew to an end, following the deployment of U.S. forces to Somalia, al-Ittihad found a new ally in bin Ladin and his al-Qa`ida network.<sup>26</sup>

With al-Qa`ida's support, between 1992 and 1995, al-Ittihad fought alongside other factions opposed to the U.S. and U.N. presence in Somalia. But it continued to meet with hostility from various clans and their militias, and in 1995, when U.N. forces finally withdrew, the movement had little effective presence beyond northern Gedo region in southwest Somalia.<sup>27</sup> From its main base in Luuq, it sustained forward operating bases inside Ethiopia, engaging in raids against Ethiopian security forces and conducting a series of terrorist attacks, notably in Addis Ababa.<sup>28</sup> In late 1996, the Ethiopians lost patience, and conducted a series of raids across the border, dismantling al-Ittihad's camps, and dispersing its membership. While most of its members returned to civilian life and others established a non-violent salafi political movement named Al-I'tisaam b'il Kitaab wa Sunna, a handful of die-hards remained committed to the cause of jihad.<sup>29</sup>

By 2002, small numbers of these AIAI veterans had congregated around an emerging network of Islamic courts in Mogadishu, the most influential of which was named Ifka Halan, whose patron and unofficial leader was Hassan Dahir Aweys.<sup>30</sup> Another group of jihadis established itself in Somalia's Lower Juba region, near the Indian Ocean, near the Kenyan border. Its leader was another former AIAI commander suspected of longstanding ties to al-Qa`ida: Hassan Turki.<sup>31</sup> After a long period of relative inactivity, the arrival of al-Qa`ida's East African leadership in Somalia would serve as a catalyst for AIAI's scattered remnants, together with a new generation of extremists, to coalesce as a unified movement with renewed commitment to the cause of jihad.

### *The Islamic Party of Kenya*

Islamist activism in Kenya, especially in the coastal areas, has existed in various forms since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, primarily as a progressive movement to protect and promote the interests of the Muslim community in the context of growing Western influence during the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. In 1973, the Moi government established the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) as a way of harnessing Muslim leaders to the ruling party and containing any potential unrest. But in the early 1990s, the advent of multiparty democracy fueled heated debate amongst Kenyan Muslims about their status not only in Kenya but also as part of an imagined global Muslim community.<sup>32</sup>

At the heart of this debate stood the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), which was set up in 1992 to lobby for the betterment of the Muslim community, but whose overt challenge to the legitimacy of SUPKEM and whose youthful radical wing made the establishment uneasy. Although most supporters of the IPK were non-violent activists seeking only to promote and protect the rights of Kenyan Muslims, a militant fringe sought to re-interpret their own grievances in the context of jihadi narratives of global Muslim victimization and the need for armed resistance.<sup>33</sup>

This militant minority tainted the reputation of IPK's broader constituency and provided the Kenyan government with a sufficient pretext to deny the party registration in 1994. Many observers went so far as to accuse the movement of inciting 'jihad' against the government,<sup>34</sup> and a convicted member of al-Qa`ida who associated with IPK members in the mid-1990s described them as "serious jihad types."<sup>35</sup> The banning of the IPK led to a period of protest and political turmoil, followed by a splintering of Islamist activism on the coast. New Islamist associations and organizations proliferated, some seeking to take advantage of new political space for activism, while others, in lieu of a formal political platform, turned to mosques, informal groupings, and self-published media to articulate more militant, populist messages.<sup>36</sup>

Masjid Musa and Masjid Sakina were among a small number of religious institutions involved in propagating Islamist activism. Among the most popular and charismatic of the emerging activists were sheikhs Abdul Aziz Rimo, Aboud Rogo, and Abubakar Shariff Ahmed 'Makaburi.'<sup>37</sup> The followers of these men included the future leaders of the Kenyan jihadi group that would become known as al-Hijra, as well as several key members of AQEA. In 1996 and 1997, Rogo's madrasa regularly hosted meetings of young militants, including Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, Haruni Bamusa, Fumo Mohamed Fumo, and Ahmed Salim Swedan.<sup>38</sup> Nabhan's future status as an al-Qa`ida icon, including his leading role in al-Qa`ida's 2002 Mombasa operation, has become a matter of historical record. Haruni Bamusa and Fumo Mohamed Fumo drove the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) into the Paradise Hotel in 2002.<sup>39</sup> And Swedan, who was accused of involvement in the 1998 embassy bombings, fled to Pakistan where he was reportedly killed in a drone strike in 2009.<sup>40</sup>

In the aftermath of the 2002 attacks at Kikambala and Mombasa, police arrested hundreds of suspects, most of whom were subsequently released.<sup>41</sup> Among those who actually faced trial were Aboud Rogo, Fazul's father-in-law Kubwa Muhammad, brother-in-law Muhammad Kubwa, neighbor Said Saggaf Ahmed, and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan's brother, Mohamed.<sup>42</sup> All were subsequently acquitted for lack of evidence (although some were immediately re-arrested),<sup>43</sup> but it would be more than a decade before al-Qa`i-

da's East African offspring would manage to stage another major attack in Kenya.

In the meantime, the center of gravity for Kenyan jihadism shifted from Mombasa to Nairobi where Ahmed Iman Ali, one of Rogo and Makaburi's promising young acolytes, was being groomed for the leadership of the Muslim Youth Center (MYC). Ostensibly a self-help group affiliated with Nairobi's renowned Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque,<sup>44</sup> under Ali's leadership and Rogo's guidance, the MYC would soon emerge as the nucleus of al-Shabaab's new Kenyan affiliate, al-Hijra.<sup>45</sup>

### **Part Two: Al-Shabaab and its Evolution into a Regional Terror Threat, 2003-2013**

For a decade, between 1992 and 2002, these three jihadi groups—al-Ittihad al-Islami, al-Qa`ida East Africa, and the nebulous network of Kenyan militants that later coalesced as al-Hijra—had operated as mutually supportive fellow travelers. The lines between them had not always been distinct: their aims, membership, and activities often overlapped, working as close allies, providing one another with mutual support, and collaborating in terrorist attacks. But between 2002 and 2018, their objectives, membership, and loyalties became intertwined to such an extent that their identities fused within a single entity: al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab has long been regarded as a Somali jihadi organization with essentially nationalist objectives: it seeks to establish an Islamic Emirate in Somalia founded on its own draconian interpretation of sharia law.<sup>46</sup> This perception of al-Shabaab is justified to the extent that the movement originated in Somalia, is still based there, and its membership is predominantly of Somali origin. But since the very outset, al-Shabaab has included elements from the wider region, and in line with its al-Qa`ida affiliation, the movement has persistently demonstrated its determination to broaden its horizons beyond Somalia proper.

In the wake of the 2002 Mombasa attacks, the remnants of AQEA and AIAI regrouped in Somalia to rebuild the shattered jihadi movement in East Africa and the Horn. The key al-Qa`ida leadership consisted of al-Sudani, Nabhan, and Fazul; their counterparts from AIAI included Ahmed Abdi Godane and Adan Hashi Ayrow, who had trained and fought alongside al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> Under the umbrella of the embryonic Islamic Courts Union (ICU), al-Ittihad veterans began assembling militias and raising funds. Most had either fought or trained side-by-side with al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan. Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former vice chairman and military commander of al-Ittihad who had reinvented himself as the driving force behind the emergent Islamic Courts, provided space and protection for this terrorist nucleus to mature.<sup>48</sup> The U.S. government, tracking the AQEA fugitives from Kenya, monitored this confluence of actors and organizations with concern, initially labelling it as the "Special Group."<sup>49</sup>

Between 2003 and 2006, the group established a number of clandestine training camps, mainly in Lower Shabelle region, where small groups of recruits—not more than a dozen at a time—could train in secret.<sup>50</sup> A small bomb-making cadre, reportedly led by an Afghanistan veteran known as Hassan 'Afgooye,' began to develop an explosives team.<sup>51</sup> And teams of jihadi assassins from the same group traveled from Mogadishu to the relatively stable, self-declared state of Somaliland to murder foreign aid workers and disrupt the emergence of a multi-party electoral system, which the extremists considered haram (forbidden).<sup>52</sup>

The U.S. government responded by backing Somali militia leaders in Mogadishu to hunt down suspected members of al-Qa`ida and their associates.<sup>53</sup> Al-Qa`ida's Somali protectors, who would later become known as al-Shabaab, responded by assassinating anyone they believed worked for the warlords or might otherwise threaten their survival.<sup>54</sup> When open war erupted in early 2006 between the warlords and the ICU, the jihadis were the primary beneficiaries.

The dramatic ascendance of the ICU across southern Somalia in 2006 had a galvanizing effect and triggered a first wave of foreign fighters, including East Africans, to join the movement.<sup>55</sup> In 2007, recruiting surged even further as Ethiopia's military intervention (launched in December 2006), backed by the United States, cast the conflict in the context of a much wider, global struggle.<sup>56</sup> As the ICU's mainstream leadership fled Somalia to establish a new opposition alliance based in Asmara, Eritrea,<sup>57</sup> al-Shabaab remained on the battlefield, positioning itself as the standard bearer for the resistance, the main beneficiary of external contributions, and a magnet for foreign fighters—including young ethnic Somalis from the United States, Canada, and elsewhere.<sup>58</sup>

Given the key role of AQEA leaders in the inception of al-Shabaab, it is not surprising that al-Shabaab offered its allegiance to al-Qa`ida on multiple occasions, such as the 2009 video *Labayk ya Osama* ("At your Service Osama").<sup>59</sup> Al-Qa`ida reciprocated with expressions of support, including a message from bin Ladin himself entitled "Fight On, Champions of Somalia,"<sup>60</sup> but discouraged a formal alliance between them primarily on the grounds that it would give Western powers the excuse to attack al-Shabaab.<sup>61</sup> Following bin Ladin's death, Ayman al-Zawahiri changed course and announced an official merger with al-Shabaab in a video message released in February 2012.<sup>62</sup>

Al-Zawahiri's endorsement, however, coincided with a decline in al-Shabaab's fortunes. In 2011, a combination of AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) military pressure and infighting between al-Shabaab's senior leaders forced the jihadis to conduct a 'tactical withdrawal' from Mogadishu, ceding the capital to pro-government forces. Then, in September 2012, the Kenyan Defense Forces, together with a Somali militia known as the Ras Kamboni forces led by a former al-Shabaab leader named Ahmed Madoobe,<sup>63</sup> seized the port town of Kismayo, weakening the jihadis' presence in the Kenyan border region and depriving al-Shabaab of its principal source of revenue.<sup>64</sup>

Al-Shabaab's formal merger with al-Qa`ida also served to bring simmering tensions within the movement to a head. In June 2013, 'Amir' Ahmed Abdi Godane had brought to an end nearly two years of discontent and division in the movement's senior ranks with a bloody purge of his critics and rivals.<sup>65</sup> The move consolidated Godane's control over al-Shabaab, centralizing power in his hands and resolving longstanding ideological disputes in favor of the movement's extremist faction. Al-Shabaab would retain its al-Qa`ida affiliation, but nationalists and strategic pragmatists had been silenced, leaving the organization to be defined by a *takfiri* ethos that legitimized the killing of other Muslims, including civilians, and a renewed commitment to international jihad in pursuit of an Islamic caliphate.<sup>66</sup>

Godane's coup had also enhanced the importance of the Amniyat, which now served both to enforce his *diktat* within al-Shabaab and project 'jihad' beyond Somalia's borders.<sup>67</sup> Al-Shabaab was in the process of reinventing itself in ways that would not only trans-

form the insurgency inside Somalia, but also redefine the terrorist threat for the region as a whole.

#### *Al-Hijra and Jihad Beyond Somalia*

In July 2010, al-Shabaab staged its first major terrorist attack outside Somalia. Suicide bombers struck two pubs in Kampala, Uganda as revelers gathered to watch the World Cup. As the largest and longest-serving troop-contributing country to AMISOM, Uganda was a natural target. Although planned and directed from Somalia,<sup>68</sup> and one of the suicide bombers was subsequently identified as an ethnic Somali,<sup>69</sup> the major figures in the plot, including the main attack planner, were found to be Ugandans and Kenyans.<sup>70</sup> Despite its overwhelmingly Somali membership, it appeared that al-Shabaab had made significant progress in expanding its membership from East Africa and developing networks capable of staging attacks beyond Somalia's borders.

In a video recorded shortly before his departure from Somalia, one of the Kampala suicide bombers, identified as Salman al-Muhajir,<sup>a</sup> warned of the group's plans to expand the scope of its 'jihad' to other countries in East Africa:

*"Also beware because soon we are also going to come into your countries to attack you there. And it's going to be very soon. The Mujahideen who are coming to undertake this operation are not of Somali origin, unlike what you think. We are your citizens! We are neither Somalis, nor do we have any Somali lineage and we are coming to undertake this operation in your country; a country that we know inside out. We will be in your neighborhoods while you are in your homes and busy conducting your daily activities, so don't be surprised when the operation takes place ... Don't be deceived. The fact that we could reach Burundi or Uganda doesn't mean that we have forgotten about Nairobi. Passing through Nairobi on our way to Burundi or Uganda (without carrying out an operation in Nairobi) doesn't mean that we have forgotten you, rather be forewarned of an imminent operation in the making! Insh'allah ..."*<sup>b</sup> *Yesterday, the war was in Mogadishu; tomorrow, it is going to be in Nairobi, Kampala, and Bujumbura."*

Al-Shabaab was already in the process of becoming a truly transnational organization, attracting a growing number of followers and recruits from across East Africa and elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> As a United Nations monitoring team observed at the time, the planning and organization of the Kampala attacks suggested "not only that Al-Shabaab possesses the will and capability to conduct such attacks but that it is giving rise to a new generation of East African jihadi groups that represent a new security challenge for the region and the wider international community."<sup>72</sup>

In the years that followed the Uganda bombings, al-Shabaab continued to strike neighboring countries with deadly attacks, but such operations were conducted almost exclusively by ethnic Soma-

a Possibly an individual referred to by United Nations monitors as 'Kakasule.' The other suicide bomber is described as "an unknown male of Somali origin." See Matt Bryden, Jörg Roofthoof, Ghassan Schbley, and Babatunde Taiwo, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 1916 (2010)," United Nations Security Council (S/2011/433), p. 137.

b 'Al-Muhajir' may be referring to the fact that the IEDs employed in the Uganda bombings were assembled in Somalia and dispatched to Uganda via Kenya. See *Ibid.*, pp. 136-139.

lis operating at the direction of the Amniyat. The group's apparent inability to deploy non-Somali, East African operatives throughout this period appeared to contradict al-Muhajir's dire predictions of East African 'Mujahideen' wreaking havoc across the region. But inside Somalia itself, East African fighters among al-Shabaab's ranks were steadily gaining in skills and experience that they would eventually employ elsewhere in the region.

In the three years prior to the Kampala bombings, al-Shabaab's East African contingent was rapidly emerging as the largest group of foreign fighters,<sup>73</sup> estimated at between 200-500.<sup>74</sup> Many of these were deployed to an area of operations near the Kenyan border known as the 'Majimmo' sector, under the command of Titus Nabsiwa 'Mwalim Khalid' (also known as 'Mwalim Kenya').<sup>75</sup> Ahmed Iman Ali, the MYC leader from Nairobi, relocated to Somalia in 2009, from where he inspired an aggressive campaign of radicalization and recruitment for 'jihad' through MYC supporters and sympathizers in Kenya.<sup>76</sup> Even Rogo was spurred to visit his former protégé in late 2009 and returned to Kenya several months later, determined to transform the MYC into a 'gateway' for al-Shabaab into Kenya.<sup>77</sup>

While other foreign fighters in al-Shabaab's ranks were falling out of favor with their hosts, al-Hijra and al-Shabaab continued moving ever closer. In 2010, al-Shabaab made its first public overture to its East African brethren, releasing a propaganda video entitled "Message to the Umma: And Inspire the Believers."<sup>78</sup> The film featured nine foreign fighters with al-Shabaab in Somalia, six of them from East Africa.<sup>79</sup> Subsequent propaganda videos would show al-Shabaab trainees speaking in Swahili and drilling to chants of "*Sisi ni Al-Shabaab*" ("We are al-Shabaab").<sup>80</sup> In January 2012, the convergence of the two organizations was consummated by the announcement that Ahmed Iman Ali 'Abu Zinirah' had been named al-Shabaab's 'emir' for Kenya.<sup>81</sup> Soon after the merger, MYC renamed itself Al-Hijra.<sup>82</sup>

The appointment of an al-Shabaab figurehead for Kenya came just as al-Hijra faced a renewed onslaught from the Kenyan security services and other, unidentified adversaries. In April 2012, two clerics accused of supporting al-Shabaab disappeared while visiting Mombasa together. The body of Samir Khan was found dumped and mutilated 200 kilometers away; his companion, Sheikh Mohammed Kassim, was never found.<sup>83</sup> The following month, an active al-Hijra 'emir' named Sylvester Opiyo (aka "Musa Osodo") disappeared, followed by two senior figures known as Jeremiah Onyango Okumu and Steven Mwanzia Osaka (aka "Duda Black" and "Duda Brown," respectively) in June.<sup>84</sup> In August 2012, less than a month after being designated for U.N. sanctions, Rogo was gunned down by unknown assassins.<sup>85</sup> One week later, having been designated for U.N. sanctions and facing new charges in Kenya for allegedly instigating violent protests against Rogo's murder, Makaburi handed himself in to the Kenyan authorities to stand trial.<sup>86</sup>

Al-Hijra's depleted ranks struggled to remain operationally relevant. Between 2012 and 2014, the group and its sympathizers were suspected of involvement in a spate of attacks against churches, bars, and public minibuses, employing grenades and IEDs that caused dozens of casualties.<sup>87</sup> But their methods were crude and amateurish; the targeting lacked strategic focus, messaging around the explosions was absent, and the absence of 'martyrs' willing to deliver the devices and to die in the attempt appeared to demonstrate a lack of genuine commitment among the Kenyan 'mujahideen'.<sup>88</sup> In September 2013, when al-Shabaab staged its first complex attack on Kenya, the assault on the Westgate Shopping Mall, the Amniyat

led the operation while al-Hijra was relegated to a supporting role.<sup>89</sup>

The atrocity at Westgate brought a fierce reaction from the Kenyan government and its international partners. During the course of 2014, a string of police raids on Mombasa mosques suspected of fomenting militancy, including Masjid Musa and Masjid Sakina, resulted in hundreds of arrests and reported seizures of weapons.<sup>90</sup> In April 2014, Makaburi was gunned down by unknown assassins.<sup>91</sup>

The clampdown enraged the Muslim community, dismayed many other observers, and fed al-Shabaab with a steady diet of material for its propaganda machine, but it also placed al-Hijra's remaining cadres under intense pressure. Most opted for exile, either in Somalia to join the fighting front<sup>92</sup> or in Tanzania<sup>93</sup> where they could rest, regroup, and plan to fight another day. More junior adherents of the group, including recent recruits, were dispersed throughout Kenya, away from extremist hotspots in parts of Mombasa and Nairobi, to serve in more remote communities, often with small Muslim populations, where a small mosque or madrassa was unlikely to come to the attention of the authorities.<sup>94</sup> While lying low, operatives and sympathizers were fed a steady diet of motivational lectures by al-Hijra 'emirs' like Ahmed Iman Ali,<sup>c</sup> Ramadhan Kufungwa, and Sheikh Abu Ismail Ibrahim.<sup>95 d</sup>

Al-Hijra's misfortunes coincided with the protracted and turbulent transition within al-Shabaab's core leadership that culminated in Godane's purge. But unlike al-Hijra, whose leadership was dispersed and in disarray, Godane deftly transformed crisis into opportunity, centralizing the power of the emir while decentralizing operational authority to build strategic depth and resilience.<sup>96</sup> And even as al-Shabaab ceded ground to its enemies inside Somalia, Godane breathed new life into the movement's international aspirations and its ability to strike beyond Somalia's borders.<sup>97</sup>

The Westgate shopping mall attack in September 2013 was the organization's first major external operation since the 2010 Kampala bombings. A team of four gunmen stormed the upscale mall in Nairobi, leaving 67 people dead.<sup>98</sup> An attempted suicide bombing of a soccer game the following month in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, went awry when the bombers decided at the last minute that security was too tight, returned to their apartment, and accidentally blew themselves up.<sup>99</sup> But in May 2014, a suicide bombing claimed by al-Shabaab killed three people and wounded 11 more at La Chaumière restaurant in Djibouti.<sup>100</sup>

The death of al-Shabaab 'emir' Ahmed Abdi Godane in a drone strike in September 2014 made no apparent impact on the group's operational tempo or its determination to conduct attacks across the region. A September 2014 plot to attack Kampala was foiled by a joint Ugandan-U.S. operation that resulted in 19 arrests and the seizure of explosive materials.<sup>101</sup> The following month, a second attempt to strike Ethiopia by bombing a popular shopping mall in the capital was detected by Ethiopian security services and disrupt-

c According to news media, Kenyan security services believe Ahmed Iman Ali was killed in an airstrike on the Somali town of Bu'aale on March 22, 2019. See Nyaboga Kiage, "Al-Shabaab's Kenyan commander suspected to have been killed in airstrike," *Nairobi News*, March 25, 2019. However, a former al-Hijra member interviewed by the authors claimed that Ahmed Iman Ali was still alive and in communication with other members of al-Hijra in April 2019.

d Sheikh Abu Ismail Ibrahim allegedly acted as an al-Shabaab recruiter in Mwanza, Tanzania, prior to his arrest in 2014. His arrest was noted in a laudatory article on the pro-al-Shabaab website Somalimemo. See "Maaskari wa Tanzania wavamia nyumba ya Sheikh Abuu Ismail na kumdhaliilisha mke wa Shekhe," Somalimemo, July 13, 2014.



ed when the U.S. embassy in Addis issued a public alert about the threat.<sup>102</sup> But al-Shabaab's primary target continued to be Kenya, where al-Hijra's disarray necessitated a restructuring of the relationship between the two groups.

One key dimension of this reform involved delegating to al-Shabaab's forces along the Kenyan border the responsibility for operations into adjacent parts of Kenya: the Gedo sector, along the northern section of the boundary, was to target the border town of Mandera; further to the south, the Middle Juba sector was to target the towns Wajir and Garissa, deeper inside Kenya toward the capital, Nairobi; and the southernmost Lower Juba sector, adjacent to the Indian Ocean, was responsible for neighboring Lamu County and, if possible, further south down the Kenyan coast.<sup>103</sup> The results were swift and savage. In late November 2014, al-Shabaab raiders hijacked a bus in Kenya's Mandera County, near the Somali border, then murdered the passengers, leaving 28 dead.<sup>104</sup> A week later, another al-Shabaab raid near Mandera at a quarry left 36 workers dead. In both cases, the attackers singled out non-Muslims for execution.<sup>105</sup> In April the following year, al-Shabaab gunmen struck a university in Garissa, northeastern Kenya, killing 148 people and wounding 79 more—the worst attack since Westgate. Al-Shabaab subsequently issued a statement accusing the Kenyan government of having perpetrated “a countless number of atrocities against the Muslim population” and affirming its determination to ‘liberate’ the “Muslim Lands” of Northeastern Province and the coast from “Kenyan occupation.”<sup>106</sup>

A second aspect of the new relationship, initiated under Godane's leadership, was the formation of a new unit, known as Jaysh Ayman, comprising mainly East African fighters operating into Kenya's Lamu County from the Lower Juba region.<sup>107</sup> In June 2014, Jaysh Ayman fighters raided the localities of Mpeketoni and Hindi, killing at least 77 people.<sup>108</sup> One of the principal leaders of the Lamu operations was Abdifatah Abubakar Abdi (aka Musa Muhajir),<sup>109</sup> a Kenyan Somali who has since been designated by the United States and United Nations as a global terrorist.<sup>110</sup>

A propaganda video released by al-Shabaab in March 2015 appeared to document the June raids, employing the title “Mpeketoni: Reclaiming back Muslim Lands under Kenyan occupation.”<sup>111</sup> In addition to graphic footage of the massacre in Mpeketoni, the film shows Jaysh Ayman fighters addressing Muslim villagers in Swahili at a local mosque in the nearby village of Pandanguo, denouncing the “oppression” of Muslims by the Kenyan government, and calling for its overthrow.<sup>112</sup> Another passage of the film includes a clip from a sermon by Aboud Rogo, in which he describes Mpeketoni as Muslim land that had been occupied and taken away by ‘disbelievers,’ before exhorting his followers to take up ‘jihad.’<sup>113</sup> The video's narrator avers that although Rogo has not lived to see it, “his words are being transformed into reality.”<sup>114</sup>

Taken together—the choice of targets, the presence of Swahili-speaking fighters, the attempt to invoke Kenyan social and economic grievances as justification, and the explicit homage to Aboud Rogo—all pointed to a growing convergence of al-Hijra objectives and al-Shabaab capabilities. In this sense, Jaysh Ayman's first major operation marked a symbolic turning point in the evolution of al-Hijra from a semi-autonomous affiliate into an integral part of al-Shabaab.

### Part Three: The Road to Dusit, 2014-2018

While Jaysh Ayman and other al-Shabaab units carried out cross-border attacks into northeastern Kenya, al-Shabaab never

lost sight of its ambitions to strike more high-profile targets in Nairobi and across East Africa. One of the most effective units engaged in transnational operations was based in Somalia's southwestern Gedo region and headed by Adan Garaar, a notoriously brutal commander believed to have been responsible for the massacres of Kenyan civilians in Mandera County.<sup>115</sup>

Garaar also oversaw a sophisticated IED production cell, which in March 2014 had produced a large, sophisticated car bomb for delivery to Mombasa. Kenyan police impounded the vehicle and arrested its two occupants for importing it to the country illegally, but failed to realize that they had seized a VBIED containing 130 pounds of plastic explosive until a week later.<sup>116</sup> In October the same year, Garaar's IED team prepared the explosives for the abortive attack on Addis Ababa's Edna Shopping Mall, but failed to deliver them to the target.<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, police raids on radical mosques in Mombasa in February 2014 triggered an exodus of al-Hijra members and sympathizers seeking to escape the scrutiny of the Kenyan security forces. Among these was an Imam from Masjid Musa named Sheikh Ramadan Kufungwa, a disciple of Rogo and Makaburi, who decided to seek refuge in Somalia with al-Shabaab.<sup>118</sup> Kufungwa eventually settled in Bardheere, Gedo region, where he retained his ties to al-Hijra networks in Kenya. In October 2014, two more members of Masjid Musa, Said Nyange Salim and Abdulrazak Abdallah Salim, were instructed to travel to Bardheere, where they received training in firearms from al-Shabaab. While in Bardheere, both Said and Abdulrazak claimed that they met with Kufungwa.<sup>119</sup>

By 2016, enough al-Hijra members had received training from al-Shabaab in Somalia that the group was not only approaching the capacity to conduct attacks inside Kenya, but to do so with a much greater degree of autonomy and effectiveness than at any time in the past. In May 2016, a number of these newly trained operatives met at a safe house in Komarock, Nairobi, to discuss plans for a specific mission.<sup>120</sup> According to a former al-Hijra member with direct knowledge of the meeting, three of those present would later take part in the Dusit attack, including Mahir Riziki who was the sole suicide bomber.<sup>121</sup> While the others were instructed to remain in Kenya, Riziki returned to Somalia to prepare for his role in the operation.

The Komarock cell was not the only al-Shabaab threat network active in Kenya. At least one other team was simultaneously planning a mass-casualty attack against an undetermined target in Nairobi. In February 2018, Kenyan police intercepted a four-wheel drive vehicle near Isiolo in what they described as a “routine” check. One of the vehicle occupants opened fire and was killed while the others fled. Two more were arrested and the remaining two escaped. Upon inspection it was discovered that the Mitsubishi had been converted into a sophisticated VBIED containing approximately 100 kilograms of explosives concealed under the dashboard and within the door panels. Also discovered in the vehicle were five AK-pattern assault rifles, 36 magazines of ammunition, 36 hand grenades, and a black al-Shabaab flag.<sup>122</sup>

A subsequent report by a U.N. monitoring team revealed that at least four of the key cell members were Kenyan citizens, including one of Somali descent and one believed to possess dual Somali-Kenyan nationality.<sup>123</sup> They selected routes, rendezvous points, and safe houses in locations not normally associated with al-Shabaab activity (e.g., Meru, Ongata Rongai, Langata), and they relied on a secondary network of non-Somali (and non-ideological) fixers and facilitators to assist with logistics, fake identification documents,

and false insurance certificates. Al-Shabaab appears to have retained overall direction of the operation through a suspected Amniyat commander known only as ‘Dheere’ (meaning ‘Tall’), who also supplied the team with cash.<sup>124</sup>

The abortion of the February 2018 attack was an important success for the Kenyan security services, but it should also have raised a number of red flags. Al-Shabaab had apparently begun testing the potential of its Kenyan threat networks to stage operations inside Kenya, and notwithstanding the plot’s disruption, the team had succeeded in laying the ground with extensive and relatively sophisticated preparations. The growing threat from homegrown Kenyan terrorist cells, albeit directed from al-Shabaab strongholds in Somalia, clearly merited close attention.

### *The Dusit Attack*

The attack at 14 Riverside Drive began shortly before 1530 hours on January 15, 2019, when one of the terrorists entered the compound and positioned himself in a grassy space outside the Secret Garden restaurant.<sup>125</sup> CCTV footage of the man shows him becoming agitated, pacing tightly back and forth, and speaking into his phone.<sup>126</sup> Abdullahi Ogello, a customer on his way to the restaurant, heard him asking where the others were.<sup>127</sup> Seconds later, at 1528, the terrorist’s suicide vest exploded, killing him along with several patrons inside the restaurant.<sup>128</sup>

Even before the smoke from the detonation had cleared, the remaining four attackers alighted from a vehicle at the front gate, armed with Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles, hand grenades, and magazine pouches containing extra ammunition.<sup>129</sup> As they approached the main gate of the compound, they opened fire on the guards and threw hand grenades, setting fire to several parked vehicles. The attackers then divided into two teams, moving deeper into the compound via separate paths. One team moved to the main entrance of the first office block, named Hanover, while the other moved to the rear of the building, past the bomber’s remains and entered through a back door beside the restaurant.<sup>130</sup>

After superficially clearing the first office block, moving floor by floor, shooting and throwing grenades, they walked to the far end of the compound where the Cavendish office block housed several organizations engaged in development work in Somalia. After sweeping the office tower, they entered the Dusit D2 Hotel in the middle of the compound.<sup>131</sup> By 1600 hours, Kenyan security forces and other first responders were on scene, seeking to find and contain the gunmen, while others assisted trapped civilians to escape. Just before 1700 hours, within an hour and a half of the start of the attack, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility on Twitter.<sup>132</sup> The siege continued overnight until the last attackers were confirmed killed by 0800 the following morning. Two hours later, Kenya’s president, Uhuru Kenyatta, declared the attack to be over and more than 700 people to have been rescued from the complex.<sup>133</sup>

Within days of the Dusit attack, police named several of the terrorists, including the suspected team leader, Ali Salim Gichunge, nicknamed ‘Farouk.’ A 26-year-old from Nyeri, in central Kenya, ‘Farouk’ had been sent to study at a Catholic school in Isiolo, where his sister claims he was radicalized.<sup>134</sup> Police also named Eric Kinyanjui, who was reportedly born in Isiolo but resided in Limuru, just outside Nairobi.<sup>135</sup>

Both ‘Farouk’ and Gichunge fit an emerging pattern of non-Somalis being recruited into al-Shabaab, regardless of their faith. A 2018 study funded by USAID estimated that since 2013, about 200 young men had been recruited into al-Shabaab from the county in

which Isiolo is located.<sup>136</sup> Officials in Farouk’s hometown of Nyeri claim that al-Shabaab recruiters are active in its slums, recruiting not only Somalis but also members of the Kikuyu ethnic group.<sup>137</sup>

The third Dusit attacker to be named by police was the suicide bomber outside Secret Garden restaurant: Mahir Riziki. Unlike ‘Farouk’ and Kinyanjui, Riziki was a known extremist with a history of violence. According to police, Riziki had frequented Mombasa’s Masjid Musa where he encountered Sheikh Ramadhan Kufungwa and been recruited by him into al-Shabaab.<sup>138</sup> Riziki subsequently learned his terrorist tradecraft from senior al-Hijra cell leaders such as Ibrahim Ramadhan Mwasi (aka Ruta)<sup>e</sup> and Ismael Mohamed Shosi (alias Ismael Mmanga).<sup>f</sup> In November 2014, Riziki fled Kenya to escape a warrant for his arrest in connection with the killing of a police officer at Royal Court Hotel in Mombasa. After a brief sojourn in Tanzania, Riziki called family members from Somalia to tell them he was training with al-Shabaab.<sup>139</sup> Based on subsequent events, it seems possible that, while in Somalia, Riziki reconnected with Kufungwa.

Just two days before the Dusit attack, on January 13, 2019, Riziki re-entered Kenya from Somalia’s Gedo region, through Elwak in Mandera County, then to Takaba (near Moyale), and boarded a Moyale Raha bus in Marsabit town to Nairobi.<sup>140</sup> When he arrived in the city, he immediately proceeded to Muchatha, on Nairobi’s outskirts, to link up with ‘Farouk’ and receive instructions on his role for the planned operation.<sup>141</sup> Less than 48 hours later, he would be dead.

## Conclusion

A day after the Dusit attack, al-Shabaab issued a statement in Arabic and English taking responsibility for the operation, which it labeled “*Al-Qudsu Lan Tuhawwad*” (“Jerusalem Will Never Be Judaized”). The statement claimed that the attack was a response to the U.S. government’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel,<sup>142</sup> “in accordance with the guidelines of Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri ... in targeting western and Zionist interests worldwide and in support of our Muslim families in Palestine.”<sup>143</sup>

This *ex post facto* justification for the Dusit operation should be taken with a degree of skepticism: the attack was clearly in the planning stages long before the U.S. government announced its decision; the Dusit Hotel chain is Thai-owned with no obvious links to either Israel or the United States;<sup>144</sup> and only one American was among the victims. Instead, the reference to Ayman al-Zawahiri serves to renew al-Shabaab’s public allegiance to the al-Qa`ida movement and to burnish its international aspirations—a cynical

e Ruta was among six suspects in a grenade attack on the Machakos bus station in Nairobi on March 10, 2012, that killed nine people and injured at least 60. The Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) subsequently arrested six suspects who were later released on bond. See “Kenya: Killings, Disappearances by Anti-Terror Police,” Human Rights Watch, August 18, 2014.

f Shosi was allegedly involved in several assassinations, including the killing of a police officer at Royal Court Hotel, Mombasa, for which a warrant was also issued for Mahir’s arrest. He was killed by security officers on September 27, 2016, at his hideout in Mwandoni after he resisted arrest and engaged them in an exchange of gunfire. See, for example, Enock Sikolla, “Homegrown terrorist: The humble beginnings of suicide bomber in Riverside attack,” *Citizen*, January 21, 2019; Cyrus Ombati, “Terror suspect Ismael Shosi killed in Kisauni shootout with police,” *Standard*, September 27, 2016; and Willis Oketch, “Widow knew of husband’s terror links in Somalia but kept mum,” *Standard*, January 20, 2019.

appropriation of global jihadi narratives to challenge the perception that al-Shabaab is a fundamentally Somali organization with parochial, essentially nationalist objectives. It may also be intended to tout al-Qa`ida's superiority at a time when its jihadi rival, the Islamic State, is striving to expand its influence across Africa.

In contrast with its lofty bombast, key aspects of the attack at Riverside Park situate it more firmly in the context of al-Shabaab's strategy for regional expansion and its longstanding ambitions for Kenya. Al-Shabaab's high-profile attacks against Kenya typically serve to underscore al-Shabaab's relevance, create a public sense of insecurity, and undermine public support for the Kenyan Defense Forces' presence in Somalia. Moreover, the date of the Dusit attack—January 15—was probably no coincidence, evoking al-Shabaab's humiliation of the Kenyan Defense Forces at Eel Adde, precisely three years earlier. And the attribution of the attack to the "Saleh an-Nabhan battalion" was probably less a reflection of reality than a rhetorical tribute to its most revered Kenyan 'martyr.'<sup>8</sup> It is far more likely that the operation was planned and directed by al-Shabaab's intelligence wing, the Amniyat, and that the reference to Nabhan was invoked chiefly because the target was in Kenya.

The true significance of the Dusit operation, in terms of the threat that al-Shabaab poses in the region, lies neither with the organization's Somali origins, its expanding ranks of Kenyan followers, or its al-Qa`ida affiliation. Rather, it is the combination of the three—the resuscitation of East Africa's jihadi 'triple helix'—that should be a source of concern.

Al-Shabaab's strongholds in Somalia play a key role in the training of recruits and their exposure to combat. They also provide

<sup>g</sup> "AS has a special battalion that is designed to take the battlefield from the enemy and gain much-needed supplies. This battalion has been referred to as Saleh Nabhan Battalion and Abu Zubayr Battalion, depending on the occasion." From *Al-Shabab's Military Machine*, Hiraal Institute, December 2018, p. 4.

safe havens from which the group can plan and prepare operations both inside and outside the country. But al-Shabaab's ability to project force beyond its borders has been previously limited by its predominantly Somali membership and the challenges it has historically faced in grooming operational cadres and 'martyrs' from other ethnic groups. The Dusit attack and the abortive VBIED operation that preceded it in 2018 suggest that a decade of investment in East African—notably Kenyan—outreach is beginning to pay dividends.

Al-Shabaab's allegiance to al-Qa`ida is also of symbolic importance as the movement seeks credibility and adherents beyond Somalia's borders. As the Islamic State claims to be winning adherents across Africa from Nigeria to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique,<sup>14,5</sup> al-Shabaab will be faced with a choice of switching loyalties to an ascendant rival or to invoke the al-Qa`ida 'brand'—as it did in the wake of the Dusit operation—in order to cast its struggle in global terms and attract foreign fighters to its banner.

Al-Shabaab will no doubt attempt more such attacks in the future, and the authors expect it to rely increasingly on non-Somali East Africans, both to avoid detection and disruption by the security services and to burnish its regional credentials as an al-Qa`ida franchise. If so, it will have important implications for the ways in which intelligence and law enforcement officials approach the evolving threat, while reinforcing the importance of regional political leaders seeking the trust and engagement of their publics in identifying warning signs and mitigating the socio-political drivers of radicalization and recruitment. Salman al-Muhajir, the Kampala suicide bomber, would no doubt have perceived in the Dusit operation the fulfillment of his testament that an al-Shabaab vanguard of East African fighters would set their own countries ablaze with terrorist violence, but if regional leaders and security services are sufficiently alert to the threat of this jihadi 'triple helix,' there is no reason that al-Muhajir's baleful prophecy should be fulfilled. **CTC**

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# A View from the CT Foxhole: Catherine De Bolle, Executive Director, Europol

By Paul Cruickshank

*Catherine De Bolle has served as Europol's Executive Director since May 2018. She previously served as Commissioner General of the Belgian Federal Police between March 2012 and April 2018. Between June 2015 and April 2018, she also served as the President of Belgium's Coordination Committee for Intelligence and Security. Between 2001 and 2012, De Bolle served as the chief of the local police of the Belgian city of Ninove. Since November 2015, she has been a member of the Executive Committee of Interpol. In October 2017, De Bolle was the recipient of France's highest civilian honor—Officier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

**CTC: Between 2012 and 2018, you were the Commissioner General of the Belgian Federal Police. During this time, Belgium faced one of the biggest terrorist threats faced by any country because of the presence of jihadi networks on Belgian soil and the significant numbers of jihadi extremists traveling from the country to fight in Syria and Iraq. What were the lessons learned in confronting those challenges?**

**De Bolle:** For us, the period of intense operations started in the [Belgian town of] Verviers, where in early 2015 we disrupted a terrorist cell. Due to that investigative file, we had more insight into what was going on. And then we had the terrorist attacks in Brussels in March 2016. The lessons learned for us after that terrorist attack was that cooperation is key. You have to cooperate with all the services involved in your own country but also on the European and the international level. Terrorism is a transnational challenge. Jihadi terrorists have traveled across borders, and they've created transnational links as evidenced, for example, by the French- and English-speaking communities of IS [Islamic State] fighters in Syria. Information exchange is therefore key. You have to be prepared for the unpredictable because nobody predicted what we saw play out in Belgium nor the huge impact it would have. Another lesson learned was that in law enforcement it's very important to have a clear view on what is going on with regard to extremists' use of social media, and there needs to be investment in creating capability in this regard.

Our experiences in Belgium made it clear the importance of efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. We were able to establish a bottom-up, cascading approach from the local communities to the national level to detect and deal with radicalization. All this involved important debates about the most effective way of going about this. What could be done on the local level by Belgium's mayors? What was the responsibility of schools and social services. How could the efforts of local bodies, national bodies, and the intelligence services be coordinated?

In Belgium, we now have the local task forces and the national task forces where all the security services, intelligence services, political-level social services come together to discuss the way forward

and the best approach.

And for all involved, the key priority is preventing terrorist attacks. At the national level, after some time, we were able to get a good overview of the threat landscape. Carrying out risk assessments of those posing the greatest threat and then following up was vital.

A very big game changer and lesson learned in police practice and police habits in Belgium during this period was our deployment of special units in cases of terrorism. Organized crime groups were afraid of our special units because they were well trained and equipped and performed very well. What we saw with the jihadi terrorists is that they were not afraid of losing their lives. So when you called the special units to enter a building, they blew themselves up. We saw that in the Saint-Denis raid shortly after the November 2015 Paris attacks when police officers were injured in the shootout between French special units and jihadist terrorists, and we saw it during the manhunt for Salah Abdeslam in Belgium. This was a new threat we had not faced before, and it created quite a lot of shock. Our people got injured. So you have to change the tactics. You have to change the police training program. And for the special units, it was also a big game changer.

**CTC: Given the scale of the counterterrorism challenge faced by Belgium, particularly in the period before and after the March 2016 Brussels attacks, and given the fact that Belgium is only a small country with limited resources compared to larger countries, there were very significant strains placed on Belgian police with long hours and a great deal of stress. What did you come to learn was essential to motivate and get the best out your organization?**

**De Bolle:** We found it was important for our police force to be able to speak about their experiences. So you really have to invest in psychologists to support them. You have to get rid of the attitude of "I am a police officer. I am strong. I hide my feelings." You have to talk about it. When you have people who are injured in your own organization, you have to do everything for them so they are supported.

What was a big game changer for us, too, was that as a police force, we were used to being an open house. You didn't have to call or make an appointment to come to see us. But we then had to close our buildings because we were under threat, too. This meant that not only did we have to work to prevent more attacks and arrest those involved in terrorism and make sure we had strong cases to bring to court to secure convictions, but we also had to be sure that our own people were protected and felt safe in the police environment because without them, we wouldn't have had the resources anymore to tackle and to disrupt further attacks. When we had the [March 2016 Brussels] attacks, it was a blow to the morale of the people working in the counterterrorist unit. They felt that they failed. And that made it even more important to talk to them and

to motivate them to continue.

So every morning, I was there for the general briefing. Every morning, we went over all the suspects we had to deal with that day. The full spectrum of our people working on counterterrorism needed to be very involved in those discussions. We also had the support of our Ministers of Justice and Interior, our Prime Minister, who often came by to visit. We even had the King stopping by. These were very small things which helped the morale of people working as hard as they could to protect the public. You have to recognize you work with people, and when you work with people, you also have to take care of their emotions. And I think every individual reacts in a different way to the stresses and challenges. Motivating them so they can continue providing their all to protect society is very important. There have been a lot of terrorism convictions in Belgium, which is a testament to important work undertaken by the Belgian police.

**CTC:** In the period after the November 2015 Paris attacks and the March 2016 Brussels attacks, what steps were taken to strengthen the counterterrorism capabilities of the Belgian federal police?

**De Bolle:** We were in a crisis situation in that period, which meant that on the ministerial level, more resources were available allowing us to invest a lot more in the tools we needed at that moment—for instance, with regard to open-source intelligence, for bridging the gaps between information exchange systems, and for technological systems to integrate information-sharing between the different services. And we also we had a possibility to hire much more people at that moment. For the special units, we were also able to obtain more and better equipment, and it helped. Sometimes, unfortunately, only a crisis creates the political will for more investments in some areas. There is a reverse side to that equation, and that's why I stressed during parliamentary discussions in Belgium that cost-cutting in the law enforcement and security sector can have a long-term negative impact on public safety.

**CTC:** You began work as the executive director of Europol a year ago. How do you see Europol fitting into European counterterrorism efforts?

**De Bolle:** Our involvement changed after the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016 because the national police organizations and intelligence services recognized the fact that we had to collaborate more on a European level. For Europol, this meant that we received more data, and the more data we received, the more we were able to put information together and to provide the strategic analysis and the operational analysis for the investigations into the two attacks. After those attacks, Europol was identified as the central point for counterterrorism cooperation at the E.U. level and for supporting member states in their counterterrorism efforts in the European Union.

Europol's counterterrorism efforts are coordinated by the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), which began operations in January 2016. The ECTC has not only won the trust of member states, who have recognized its utility, but it has also helped create trust *between* E.U. member states in their cooperation on counterterrorism. That's been reflected in the numbers. We see that in 2018, the support on the operational level delivered by ECTC



*Executive Director of Europol Catherine De Bolle (Europol)*

toward the CT community increased five times compared to 2016.

We continue to give support to counterterrorism investigations. This comes in the form of operations analysis in which we put together information we get from all the different member states and give this back to the member state or states conducting an investigation. For instance, in January, Europol provided operational support to the BKA [Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office] in their dismantling of a terrorist cell. Three suspects were arrested in Schleswig-Holstein in the north of Germany for planning a terror attack.<sup>a</sup> Specialists from Europol's Counter Terrorism Centre were on the spot.<sup>b</sup>

As a platform for criminal intelligence and information ex-

a Editor's note: For media reporting on this case, see, for example, Chase Winter, "German police arrest 3 Iraqi refugees suspected of planning terror attack," DW, January 30, 2019.

b Europol was present in the city of Dithmarschen in the German federal state Schleswig Holstein, when the BKA arrested three Iraqi individuals who were suspected of planning to carry out a jihadi terror attack in Germany. Europol's specialists were present during the day of the arrests and were providing operational support to Germany in the investigations, cross-checking live operational data against the data Europol already had, and analyzing all available investigative details to assist in compiling a structured picture of the alleged terrorist network. Information provided to this publication by Europol, July 12, 2019.

change, we have the biggest law enforcement liaison officers network in our headquarters, based here in The Hague, and we also have specialized people in CT. They meet every week in the operational center for counterterrorism and share information on ongoing investigations. Europol then puts the different information together and connects the dots to see the full information picture. Furthermore, during an operation, the ECTC supports the member states on the spot and can cross-check live operational data against the data Europol already has, quickly bringing financial leads to light, and analyze all available investigative details to assist in compiling a structured picture of the terrorist network.

A key step for Europol was the establishment in 2015 of the EU Internet Referral Unit [EU IRU]. It is based within the ECTC and involves monitoring social media and then together with member states identifying online hate speech and working to convince service providers to take down illegal content. Member states do not always have the resources to deal with the challenges posed by social media, and some member states have used our tools in their own countries. The creation of the IRU was a game-changer for the European law enforcement community.

**CTC: Europol’s Executive Deputy Director Wil van Gemert told *CTC Sentinel* two years ago that Europol had been moving “from not only collecting information but to [also] connecting information.”<sup>1</sup> Can you speak to how this emphasis on connecting information—connecting the dots—has since evolved.**

**De Bolle:** In the past, the way the information exchange worked was that a member state had information which they gave to Europol and we cross-checked the information. This cross-checking of information remains a core task for Europol, but we have long moved beyond it.

Europol connects information from E.U. member states and partner countries like the U.S., enriches it with all kinds of open-source information, social media, financial, and travel intelligence, and provides new intelligence back to member states and partner countries for their investigations. We also connect people by organizing operational meetings of CT investigators to discuss cases and detect connections between terrorist actors in different countries.

Let me give you an example. At the time of the March 2016 Brussels attacks, I was Commissioner General of the Belgian Federal Police. When the attacks occurred, operational analysis made by Europol enabled us to detect links from the terrorists that were active in Belgium and Sweden. They detected links we could not see because we only have the national situation picture.

Beyond collecting and connecting, Europol is also creating new technological tools and solutions to support E.U. member states’ law enforcement authorities. Providing national law enforcement with highly specialized, state-of-the-art decryption services, forensic services, facial recognition tools based on artificial intelligence, to give just a few examples, creates real added value for investigations.

**CTC: The link to Sweden you just referenced related to Osama Krayem, the Swedish national charged in relation to the Brus-**

**sels attacks?<sup>c</sup>**

**De Bolle:** Yes.

**CTC: The Islamic State no longer exists as a territorial caliphate, but there is still a lot of concern about the jihadi terror threat facing Europe, given thousands of Europeans went to fight in Syria and Iraq. What is your assessment of the jihadi threat landscape in Europe?**

**De Bolle:** In 2018, we saw a much lower number of terrorist attacks. In 2017, we recorded an overall of 205 foiled, failed, or completed terrorist attacks and in 2018, only 129.<sup>2</sup> While ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist attacks continue to outnumber all other types of attacks, jihadist incidents remain the most lethal. All 13 people killed in terrorist incident in the E.U. in 2018 were victims of the seven completed jihadist attacks.<sup>3</sup> These numbers sound low compared to previous years, but the significant number of disrupted plots and of arrests show that the threat from jihadi terrorism has not diminished.

And we see that there are still three patterns: violent jihadi extremists attack the symbols of Western life; they attack the symbols of authority; and there are also indiscriminate killings. We also see that jihadi attacks are committed mainly by homegrown terrorists. Radicalized in their European country of origin, they live there and they didn’t even travel to join terrorist groups abroad.

The profiles of these homegrown terrorists are diverse, but we see many individuals with a criminal past. Most have [been] born in the E.U. They have lived here all their lives. They are radicalized very, very quickly. And in most cases, there are no direct links to IS or another jihadist operation. They use unsophisticated weapons. And when they carry out an attack, it is very quickly organized. It’s not so sophisticated anymore.

A point of comparison is the [Easter 2019] Sri Lanka attacks, which were well planned and involved sophisticated weapons. This is not something we see in the E.U. anymore. We think that the measures taken by the European Union in the last years and the fact that tackling terrorism really became a priority may have contributed to the decrease in attacks. We really organized ourselves in terms of information exchange and changed our methods and our prevention approach. The fact that we disrupt a lot of attacks is also a good sign. But the threat is still there, and we have to stay vigilant all the time.

**CTC: Thousands of Europeans traveled to Syria and Iraq to join jihadi groups, many of them joining the Islamic State. What is your assessment about the threat that these fighters pose in the future?**

**De Bolle:** Approximately 5,000 individuals emanating from the E.U. are believed to have traveled to conflict areas in Syria and Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

c Editor’s note: Osama Krayem, a Swedish national of Syrian descent, is set to go on trial for his alleged role in the March 2016 Brussels attacks. For more, see “Attentats à Paris: Osama Krayem, inculpé pour les attaques à Bruxelles, va être remis à la France,” RTBF, June 8, 2018; “Attentats à Paris: Osama Krayem inculpé par la justice française,” RTBF, June 11, 2018; and “Le procès des attentats de Bruxelles est attendu pour 2020 et pourrait se tenir dans les anciens bâtiments de l’Otan,” *Soir*, March 22, 2019.



But it is always difficult to give an exact figure because we have to rely on the figures given to us by the member states, and even the member states find it difficult to get exact figures. We think that the threat posed by European foreign terrorist fighters is still a real danger because they are well trained, they have a lot of operational expertise and experience, because of their mindset, and because they have their contacts in the conflict zone. The picture for the returnees is diverse, we think. It cannot be excluded that some of the returnees were dispatched from Syria, have a real connection to IS, and are committed to come back and carry out terrorist attacks in the E.U. You will have others who go back to their families and try to live in peace with their families, still convinced of the idea of IS but not committed anymore to commit terrorist attacks.

**CTC: For those who have come back, as you note there are different possible outcomes. Some will completely abandon their commitment to jihad. Others will still have that commitment. Some will spend time in prison, but for some there may never be enough evidence to prosecute them and so they will remain at large. And I guess that means European security services as well as Europol need to continue to be very vigilant about these individuals because some may emerge as the officer class of future terror networks.**

**De Bolle:** Yes, that is correct. We consider returning foreign fighters a real danger, for the reasons I just outlined. You will have people who are still attached to the idea of IS and motivated to commit attacks in the European Union.

And then we have to be aware that there were a lot of women, and they are returning, too. When it comes to IS, the role of women cannot be underestimated. Of course, IS needed women to build a state, and we saw women traveling from Europe to Syria for this purpose. Although IS states that offensive jihad is not obligatory for women and that a woman's honor lies in being a producer of jihadis rather than a warrior herself, the organization nevertheless encouraged women to carry out attacks against the enemy. As of late 2017, IS explicitly called on women to become actively engaged in battles and legitimized combative jihad for women. Examples of women who either carried out terrorist attacks or were arrested preventively prove that women are willing to use violence if the ideology allows them to do so. For now, it is not yet their role, but this balance may easily shift depending on the organization's strategic needs and developments.<sup>5</sup>

**CTC: How many European foreign fighters have returned from Syria and Iraq?**

**De Bolle:** It's difficult to confirm the exact number. In our latest European Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, we analyzed that in 2018, the number of foreign terrorist fighters returning from the Iraq and Syria conflict zone remained very low. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, countries such as Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, and Italy have seen a return rate of between approximately 20 percent and 30 percent. The Netherlands and Spain have noted roughly 18 percent have returned, and Germany and the U.K. appear to have experienced the highest proportions of their FTFs returning—around 33 percent and 45 percent, respectively. Of course, combat training, experience, and international contacts of returnees remain a matter of concern. The terrorist use of the migrant flow

has been observed, but it is not deemed systematic.<sup>6</sup>

**CTC: There is significant concern about the impending release of significant numbers of individuals convicted of crimes related to terrorism in Europe because of the relatively short prison sentences in Europe for certain terrorism-related offenses.<sup>7</sup> According to a recent United Nations report, "in France, 500 detainees convicted of terrorism charges are in prison. A further 1,200 are reported to have been radicalized. Approximately 90 per cent of those 1,700 people will be released by 2025."<sup>8</sup> What is your assessment of this challenge?**

**De Bolle:** It is indeed a big concern for the E.U. member states and for Europol. There are a large number of convicts who are expected to be released in the coming years. It's something we have to be prepared for and develop policies for. A lot of countries have invested in deradicalization programs in prisons.

But we cannot fall for the idea that everybody who will leave prison will commit attacks in the European Union. One reason is those very significant efforts to counter radicalization in prisons. And there is follow up in certain countries after these individuals are released from prison. When there are still indications that they are not completely deradicalized upon release from prison, there are possible administrative measures that can be taken on a national level. What Europol is doing is gathering best practices and providing member states with the platform to exchange and discuss them. It's up to the member states themselves to make risk assessments and decide how to tackle this challenge.

One overall European policy in this area doesn't exist. It is the responsibility of member states, and I see that there is good cooperation between member states. There is also information exchange about who is going to be released when. Not in all the cases, but in some cases, we see that this information exchange exists and what we do is facilitate this.

**CTC: Given the gravity of the potential security risks, do you think there needs to be a unified European approach on this and other areas related to counterterrorism rather than having different member states take different approaches?**

**De Bolle:** The choice of the European Union is very clear on this. The Lisbon Treaty<sup>d</sup> states that national security is the responsibility of the national member states. Europol's core task in this setting is to support the cross-border law enforcement cooperation of the member states in the area of counterterrorism. And until now, there is no discussion about changing these fundamentals. This is the agreement between the different E.U. member states, and they stick to it. At the operational level, we see that not only law enforcement but also the intelligence services exchange more and more information than before. So it's working, there is a real information exchange, but decisions on issues such as the appropriate measures after releasing former attackers from prisons remain a competence of the member state.

<sup>d</sup> Editor's note: The Treaty of Lisbon, which amended the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, entered into force on December 1, 2009. "The Treaty of Lisbon," Fact Sheets on the European Union, European Parliament Website.

**CTC: What is your assessment of the extreme right-wing terror threat to Europe?**

**De Bolle:** It's increasing across the whole of Europe. That's our assessment. We experienced a revival of militant right-wing extremist groups and networks and incidents in the region here. The violent right-wing extremist scene is very heterogeneous across E.U. member states.

**CTC: Is this a small increase or is this a dramatic increase that you're seeing?**

**De Bolle:** There was only one attack reported to us in 2018, but the number of arrests linked to right-wing terrorism increased for the third year in a row and is now at 44 arrests. Also, the number of convictions for right-wing terrorist offenses increased significantly in 2018 to the previous year from four to 22.<sup>9</sup>

**CTC: Let's turn to cooperation between Europol and U.S. counterterrorism agencies. Two years ago, Europol Deputy Director Wil van Gemert and Peter Edge, then Executive Associate Director of Homeland Security Investigations, spoke at length to this publication about the ways in which Europol and the Department of Homeland Security were cooperating.<sup>10</sup> How important is such cooperation?**

**De Bolle:** The cooperation with the United States is extremely good. It's a clear success story and is now part of the daily life of our operations. In our headquarters here in Europol, we have liaison officers from all over the world. We have liaison officers from the 28 E.U. member states, and from many so-called third countries like the U.S. The U.S. community is one of the biggest communities represented at Europol. We have 13 U.S. federal or municipal agencies in our headquarters. And we really have a close cooperation day-by-day. The cooperation with the United States is of utmost importance to us, not only in the area of counterterrorism but also in the area of cyber crime and serious and organized crime.

In the CT field, we also exchange information with very specialized institutions such as the U.S. Terrorist Screening Center.<sup>e</sup> We have very good cooperation with the U.S. Treasury in the framework of the E.U.-U.S. Terrorist Financing Tracking Program (TFTP) Agreement from 2010, which allow for the exchange of financial messaging information. Facilitated by Europol, the program provides U.S. and E.U. law enforcement with thousands of leads for their counterterrorism investigations each year. It helps them to map out terrorist networks, to track terrorist money flow to identify and locate operatives and their financiers, and assists in broader efforts to uncover terrorist cells.

In short, I think Europol is now recognized as an important gateway for the United States to the member states. We have es-

e "The Terrorist Screening Center, a multi-agency center administered by the FBI, is the U.S. Government's consolidated counterterrorism watchlisting component and is responsible for the management and operation of the Terrorist Screening Database, commonly known as 'the watchlist.'" Terrorist Screening Center, FBI website.

tablished a lot of trust between Europol, European law enforcement agencies, and U.S. agencies, and we have to make sure that we keep this cooperation at the level that it is today. To a significant degree, this cooperation is now future proofed.

**CTC: On the issue of Brexit, what steps are being put into place to sustain police cooperation between the United Kingdom and its European partners given the uncertainty over what shape Brexit will take or whether it will happen at all? This must make it very difficult to plan for.**

**De Bolle:** The United Kingdom is very important to us because they've played a significant role in safeguarding the security of European citizens and as an E.U. member state have contributed significantly in cooperation with Europol on counterterrorism. We are in a difficult period now, and we are preparing all the different scenarios—a hard Brexit, Brexit with a withdrawal agreement, no Brexit. We are looking at the potential consequences for information exchange, and internally, we are preparing for different scenarios so that at the moment when a political decision will be taken from our side, we will have done our homework and we will have the possibility to give this information to the European Commission.

**CTC: If there is some form of Brexit, what would be, from your perspective, the ideal contours of a future arrangement with the United Kingdom?**

**De Bolle:** It's difficult to say now because it depends on the withdrawal agreement—what will be in, what won't be in—and this will be a political discussion that will have to be managed in Brussels.

**CTC: We've spoken a lot about the challenges facing counterterrorism agencies in Europe. What are the things that give you encouragement about their ability to rise to these challenges?**

**De Bolle:** What gives me encouragement and what I see as very important is the trust that has been built up between the different investigators in the different member states and that there is really an awareness of the fact that they have to exchange information. Only by working together can we tackle the threat and identify terrorist networks and dismantle them. Because the threat we face is still very significant, there is a very strong conviction in the European Union and in the law enforcement community that it's necessary work together and to exchange information. Counterterrorism is now a top priority. This commitment is key to us rising to the counterterrorism challenge in the future. There are 1,400 competent authorities connected to Europol's secure communication system for law enforcement information exchange, over 68 million entities<sup>f</sup> in Europol's databases, and we see every day that cooperation is increasing. We have to remain vigilant, even if we see that the number of attacks is going down. We also see that the number of disrupted plots is going up and that makes me confident about the future. **CTC**

f Editor's note: This refers to pieces of information such as names, phone numbers, license plates, etc.

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# The Christchurch Attacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age

By Graham Macklin

**In the space of 36 minutes on March 15, 2019, it is alleged that Brenton Tarrant, an Australian far-right extremist, fatally shot 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch in the deadliest terrorist attack in New Zealand's history. What was unique about Tarrant's attack—at least insofar as extreme-right terrorism is concerned—is that he livestreamed his atrocity on Facebook and in doing so, highlighted the Achilles heel of such platforms when faced with the viral dissemination of extremely violent content.**

**O**n March 15, 2019, at approximately 1:40 PM local time, Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian gym trainer with no previous criminal history<sup>1</sup> who was active on extreme-right internet forums, entered the Al Noor mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, where he allegedly shot dead 42 people. Exiting the mosque, he allegedly shot another person on the pavement before driving the short distance to Linwood mosque where he allegedly continued his killing spree. In the space of 36 minutes, Tarrant allegedly killed 49 people. Two more subsequently died of their wounds, bringing the death toll to 51.<sup>2</sup> New Zealand, which until this point had experienced terrorism as a “latent” threat rather than a “lived reality,”<sup>3</sup> suffered the single largest loss of life to terrorism in its history.

On June 13, 2019, Tarrant, who is currently facing 51 charges of murder, 40 charges of attempted murder, and one charge of engaging in a terrorist act, pleaded not guilty to all charges in relation to the Christchurch mosque shootings. Thus, despite the attack being livestreamed on Facebook, the following details are considered allegations based on press reports, which, at the time of writing in June 2019, are yet to be proven in court. Tarrant's trial, currently estimated to take six weeks, is scheduled to begin on May 4, 2020.<sup>4</sup> In the interim, the New Zealand government has launched a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the attacks, headed by Sitting Supreme Court Justice Sir William Young, which will report on December 10,

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2019. Its remit is to investigate the perpetrator, the accessibility of semi-automatic weapons, his use of social media and international connections, and any missed opportunities by the intelligence and security services to prevent the massacre.<sup>5</sup>

Potential intelligence failures are likely to be a key focus of the inquiry. Asked if he had confidence in New Zealand's intelligence apparatus, Andrew Little, the government minister in charge of the intelligence agencies, stated that “until there's a very microscopic look at what the agencies have been doing, and whether they've missed anything, I can't say for certain.” Monitoring extreme-right activity does not appear to have been a priority, however. It is not mentioned in any of New Zealand's Security and Intelligence Agency annual reports from 2001 onward, and Little conceded that the Agency had only begun conducting a “base line review” of extreme-right activity in mid-2018. “I don't know how far they'd got,” he stated.<sup>6</sup>

While awaiting the conclusion of both the inquiry and Tarrant's own trial, this article seeks to draw together some of the major threads of what is known so far.

## The Christchurch Terrorist Attacks

Somewhere between 10 and 20 minutes before the first mosque was attacked, Tarrant, logged on to the /pol/section of 8chan, an image board popular with the extreme right. As an anonymous user, Tarrant announced himself with a post entitled “\*ahem\*.” It read: “Well lads, it's time to stop shitposting and time to make a real life effort post. I will carry out and [sic] attack against the invaders, and will even live stream the attack via facebook.” He then allegedly posted the link to his account (Brenton.tarrant.9), which was subsequently removed. “By the time you read this I should be going live.” The post was also a farewell and indicated that he had been a frequent user of the platform. “I have provided links to my writings below, please do your part spreading my message, making memes and shitposting as you usually do. If I don't survive the attack, goodbye, godbless and I will see you all in Valhalla!”<sup>7</sup>

The link to his ‘writings’—which directed users toward several file-sharing/storage sites—referred to his 74-page manifesto, “The Great Replacement,” in which he set out his ideology, rationale, and self-justification for the impending atrocity. Tarrant emailed a copy of the manifesto to the generic email account of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, the opposition leader, the speaker of the parliament, and approximately 70 media outlets. The email informed them that its sender was about to commit a massacre, and though the authorities were immediately alerted, there was “nothing in the content or timing that would have been able to prevent the attack,” a spokesman for the Prime Minister asserted.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, as he had promised his fellow 8chan users, Tarrant had begun filming himself using the Facebook Live application as he got into his car to drive to his first target. “Let's get this party started,” he said, talking directly to the viewer.<sup>9</sup> Arriving at the Al

Noor mosque at 1:41 PM, Tarrant donned a helmet-mounted GoPro camera (originally designed for extreme athletes), entered the building, and went room-to-room, killing 42 worshippers, returning to his car midway through the massacre to retrieve a second weapon. Upon exiting the building, he shot and killed an injured woman on the pavement outside before driving away.<sup>10</sup> At 1:50 PM, he was still driving, talking about what he had just done when his livestream cut out. Undeterred, Tarrant pulled up outside the Linwood mosque where he allegedly killed another seven people.<sup>11</sup> Two more would later succumb to their wounds, bringing the death toll to 51.<sup>12</sup> Tarrant appears to have planned a third attack—his manifesto mentions a “bonus objective”—at the Asburton mosque, a former church converted into a mosque in 2017, which he described as a “desecration.” He doubted, however, that he would reach this “target.”<sup>13</sup> He did not. Police rammed his car and detained him 18 minutes after receiving the first 111 call.<sup>14</sup> Within 36 minutes, Tarrant had committed the worst mass shooting in New Zealand in 30 years.<sup>a</sup>

Tarrant, originally from the northern New South Wales city of Grafton, described himself as coming from a “working class, low income” family, enjoying a regular childhood “without any great issues.”<sup>15</sup> He had “little interest in education” and barely achieved a “passing grade.”<sup>16</sup> Between 2009 and 2011, Tarrant worked at the Big River Squash and Fitness Centre in his hometown, having attended the facility as a high school student.<sup>17</sup> He worked on its program offering free training to kids in the community. He was “very passionate about that,” remarked the gym’s owner.<sup>18</sup> He then left to go traveling in Europe and Asia on a trip apparently funded by an investment in the cryptocurrency Bitconnect.<sup>19</sup> Having returned to Australasia, Tarrant settled in New Zealand in 2017,<sup>20</sup> though he continued to travel sporadically thereafter.<sup>21</sup> “I only arrived to New Zealand to live temporarily whilst I planned and trained,” Tarrant subsequently claimed in his manifesto, “but I soon found out that New Zealand was as target rich of an environment as anywhere else in the west.”<sup>22</sup>

He joined the Bruce Rifle Club in South Otago, some 45 kilometers south of Dunedin on New Zealand’s South island where he had lived alone.<sup>23</sup> At the time of his arrest, he owned five guns—including two semi-automatic weapons, two shotguns, and a lever-action firearm—four of which he purchased through a police-verified online mail order process,<sup>24</sup> on which he had scrawled numerous historical and political references (discussed later). Tarrant had obtained the weapons legally and held a Category A firearms license, granted in November 2017, allowing him to obtain any number of sporting rifles and shotguns.<sup>25</sup> He appears to have illegally modified at least one of the semi-automatic rifles into a military-style weapon (which requires a much harder to obtain Category E license) through the simple expediency of purchasing high-capacity magazines, which can hold up to 100 rounds, instead of the legal limit of seven rounds allowed for Category A licensed firearms.<sup>26</sup> Tarrant also appears to have had some proficiency with explosives. As the police took him into custody, it was reported that the military had defused at least one improvised explosive device (IED) found in his car.<sup>27</sup>

a In 1990, a gunman killed 13 people following a dispute with a neighbor in the small seaside town of Aramoana, northeast of Dunedin. “David Gray kills 13 At Aramoana, 13 November 1990,” nzhistory.govt.nz.

Digital technology was an integral and integrated component of Tarrant’s attack. His video was not so much a medium for his message insomuch as it *was* the message, even more so than his actual manifesto. As Jason Burke observed, the central point of his attack was not just to kill Muslims, “but to make a video of someone killing Muslims.”<sup>28</sup> Tarrant visually choreographed his attack, filming the atrocity using a GoPro camera,<sup>29</sup> which gave the footage the quality of a first-person ‘shoot ‘em up.’ “Terrorism as theater” became terrorism as video game. Tarrant, who according to a relative had a “severe addiction” to video games,<sup>30</sup> had peppered his manifesto with in-jokes about them: Spyro: Year of the Dragon “taught me ethnonationalism” while Fortnite “trained me to be a killer,” he mocked, “and to floss on the corpses of my enemies”—the ‘floss’ being a dance move sometimes performed by Fortnite characters. Prior to getting out of his car, Tarrant told those following his livestream, “Remember lads, subscribe to PewDiePie”<sup>31</sup>—a reference to Felix Kjellberg, a highly popular online gaming personality from Sweden whose YouTube channel currently has nearly 97 million subscribers.

This gamification of mass murder was not new. Jihadis have used it extensively as part of what Burke has termed the “selfie jihad.”<sup>32</sup> The Magnanville terrorist attack in France in June 2016, in which a jihadi murdered two police officers in their home, incorporated livestream into the aftermath of the attacks,<sup>33</sup> while several other jihadi attackers, notably Mohamed Merah,<sup>34</sup> Mehdi Nemmouche,<sup>35</sup> and Amedy Coulibaly,<sup>36</sup> also sought to film their crimes. The Islamic State itself, perhaps desirous of greater editorial control over its narrative, has been rather more reticent to embrace livestreaming.<sup>37</sup>

While Tarrant’s use of such livestreaming technology indicated a migration of such tactics from jihadism to the extreme right, its adoption had already been germinating for some time in retrospect. Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik—in the early stages of his attack planning—had originally intended to behead Norway’s former prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland on Utøya island in 2011. Breivik had desired to film the killing using an iPhone and upload the footage to YouTube, but his plan stalled when he was unable to purchase an iPhone, he later testified.<sup>b</sup> Breivik subsequently detonated a bomb in central Oslo, killing eight, before murdering a further 69 people at a Workers’ Youth League summer camp on Utøya on July 22, 2011.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Elliot Rodger, an incel (‘involuntary celibate’) who blamed women for his own sexual failure and social isolation, murdered six people and injured 14 more during a misogyny-fueled massacre in Isla Vista, California, in May 2014. Having just killed three men, Rogers paused to upload a video to YouTube entitled “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution” in which he railed against women before driving to a nearby sorority house where he killed two and injured a third who were standing outside the building. Thereafter, he killed another man at random during a shooting spree before

b Siril K. Herseth and Linn Kongsli Lundervold [“Planen var å halshugge Gro Harlem Brundtland,” *Dagbladet*, April 19, 2012] and Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjørge [*The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 62] highlight that Breivik was less digitally proficient than Tarrant. In the event, he simply uploaded a video of his Knights Templar manifesto/movie to YouTube but failed in the task of sending his manifesto to all of the 8,109 email addresses he had collected. Technical problems with his computer meant that only 958 of these emails reached their intended recipients.

taking his own life.<sup>39</sup>

Extreme-right activists have regularly utilized livestream, albeit in other contexts. Militias on the U.S.-Mexico border have integrated it into their activities, transforming their confrontations with migrants and refugees into a form of “reality TV.”<sup>40</sup> Tarrant’s atrocity was the first time, however, that an actual terrorist attack has been filmed via livestream.

In filming his rampage and posting it online, Tarrant grasped intuitively that digital technology could and would amplify his murderous message, ensuring its projection far beyond the cloistered confines of the 8chan sub-thread on which it originated. Under 200 people watched the ongoing carnage as it unfolded during Tarrant’s live broadcast. None of these individuals reported the video to Facebook, which received its first user report 29 minutes after the video started, and 12 minutes after the live broadcast ended. Including the views the live broadcast received, the video was viewed approximately 4,000 times before Facebook removed it from its site.<sup>41</sup> The video quickly went viral, however. Indeed, as one commentator noted, “the New Zealand massacre was livestreamed on Facebook, announced on 8chan, reposted on YouTube, commented about on Reddit, and mirrored around the world before the tech companies could even react.”<sup>42</sup>

Following the Magnanville attacks, *CTC Sentinel* had highlighted concerns that an actual attack might one day be broadcast live on the internet, asking Brian Fishman, who manages Facebook’s global counterterrorism policy, in September 2017 as to the kind of mechanisms in place to prevent this. “It’s a scenario we certainly worry about,” Fishman stated:

*“We have extensive procedures in place to make sure live broadcasts do not violate our terms of service, including specialized enforcement and review teams monitoring Facebook Live. Algorithms, again, play a role in identifying concerning video, but we also work to make sure our operations team*

*has the appropriate tooling. All this allows us to keep tabs on Facebook Live and content that is going viral. None of it is perfect, so we will continue to work to improve.”*<sup>43</sup>

Tarrant’s terrorist attack highlighted how easily such systems could be overwhelmed. Indeed, Facebook subsequently conceded that it could have prioritized Tarrant’s video for “accelerated review” if it had been reported by a user. Additionally, because the video was eventually reported but “for reasons other than suicide ... it was handled according to different procedures,” thereby illuminating a fundamental flaw in its moderating systems.<sup>44</sup> The video quickly spread around the world.<sup>45</sup> In total, Facebook removed about 1.5 million videos of the attack globally within the first 24 hours, blocking 1.2 million of these attempts automatically at the point of upload and thereby preventing its viewing. The additional 300,000 copies were removed after they were posted.<sup>46</sup>

YouTube was also overwhelmed as users repackaged and re-cut footage of the killings in a bid to outsmart the platform’s detection systems. The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) hashed<sup>c</sup> more than 800 visually distinct versions of the video, for instance.<sup>47</sup> YouTube struggled to cope with the scale of the traffic. Tens of thousands of such videos were uploaded to YouTube’s platform, at a rate of one per second, in the hours immediately after the shootings, according to its chief product officer, Neal Mohan.<sup>48</sup> As well as terminating hundreds of accounts used to glorify the shooter, *Washington Post* journalists observed that the Google-owned company had taken the “unprecedented” step of temporarily disabling several search functions. This including the ability to sort or

c The GIFCT ‘hash’ database creates ‘digital fingerprints’ of terrorist content and shares it with participating companies so that they can identify and remove such content—videos and images—from their own platforms or in some cases block it prior to it being uploaded.



A sign is seen on March 16, 2019, after the mosque attacks outside a community center near Masjid Al Noor in Christchurch, New Zealand. (Jorge Silva /Reuters)

filter searches by upload date (which limited the ability to discover and view such content while its teams worked to remove it) and suspending its own human review system altogether to speed up the removal of videos flagged by its automated systems.<sup>49</sup>

The New Zealand authorities resorted to legislation to stem the videos' dissemination. The government's Chief Censor, David Shanks, officially classified the full-unexpurgated 17-minute video as "objectionable."<sup>50</sup> Under the terms of the Films, Videos & Publications Act (1993), possessing or disseminating Tarrant's video became a criminal offense, punishable by a maximum \$10,000 fine, if you were unaware it was prohibited, or up to 14 years in jail if you were aware it was "objectionable." New Zealand's Privacy Commissioner, John Edwards, also requested that Facebook notify the police of the names of users sharing such content, though Facebook demurred, stating that it only usually did so when there was "something like an imminent threat of violence."<sup>51</sup>

Several individuals were subsequently arrested, notably New Zealand white supremacist Philip Nevile Arps, previously convicted for doing Hitler salutes while delivering a box of pigs' heads and offal to the Al Noor mosque.<sup>52</sup> Arps was jailed for 21 months in June 2019, after pleading guilty to sharing the footage on Facebook the day after the killings—sending it to one friend asking for a "kill count" to be added.<sup>53</sup> A Christchurch teenager and a school-aged child are also separately facing prosecution for distributing "objectionable" material and, in the case of the teenager, other online messaging involving the incitement of extreme violence.<sup>54</sup>

Further afield, at least seven British men and women in the Greater Manchester area were arrested in the wake of the attacks on suspicion either of making criminally offensive comments on social media or racially aggravated public order offenses, referencing Christchurch.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, two Canadian extreme-right activists are also currently under investigation in relation to Tarrant's manifesto, one for having uploaded it, together with his own commentary, and another for allegedly listing "good targets" to attack in Canada.<sup>56</sup> Others sought to perpetuate Tarrant's message by alternative means, which in one instance included a popular far-right YouTube personality simply reading the manifesto to his 600,000 subscribers and thereby transforming it into an audiobook. It was available for two days and gained tens of thousands of views before YouTube took it down.<sup>57</sup>

One of Tarrant's strategic goals, outlined in his manifesto, was "to incite violence, retaliation and further divide between the European people and the invaders currently occupying European soil." There is certainly anecdotal evidence that his attacks contributed to a spike in violence and harassment of Muslims, albeit not on the scale he had hoped. In Britain, Tell Mama, a charity that tracks anti-Muslim hate crime, reported 95 incidents, both online and offline, between March 15 and March 21, 2019, of which 85 (89 percent) directly referenced the Christchurch attacks.<sup>58</sup> Tarrant's attacks also fueled a surge in anti-Muslim hatred online. It was reportedly "rampant" on forums like Reddit in the days and weeks afterwards. "If 8chan was the shooter's firewood, Facebook the match, and YouTube the oxygen, Reddit is a place where the fire he set is still smoldering," commented one journalist.<sup>59</sup> More positively, Reddit did ban one of the main channels used to disseminate such footage—its notorious 'r/watchpeopledie' sub-forum in which users could watch graphic footage of death—after monitoring its users becoming "extremely active" in seeking out Tarrant's video and sharing mirrored links to it via direct messaging.<sup>60</sup>

## "The Great Replacement"

Tarrant's manifesto, entitled "The Great Replacement," opened with an interview with himself, narrating his journey from an "ordinary" everyday man to, as he termed it, a "kebab removalist"—an opaque reference to the "Remove Kebab" song, also known as "Serbia Strong," that was popular with Bosnian Serb paramilitaries. Symbolically, the song was playing in the background as Tarrant drove to Christchurch.<sup>61</sup> The remainder of the manifesto, laden with in-jokes and disinformation, he sub-divided into two parts, the first an "address to various groups" whom he belittled or threatened, while in the second he gave his "general thoughts and potential strategies." Much of this section was standard extreme right-wing boilerplate revolving around his central theme of ethnic, cultural, and racial "replacement," which he perceived to be resulting from immigration and demographic change.

Given the anti-Muslim nature of Tarrant's terrorism, his manifesto has less to say about Islam than one might expect. While conceding his attack had an anti-Islamic motivation, Tarrant also highlighted its racist, xenophobic, and anti-immigration dimensions. Indeed, while undoubtedly eliding Muslims with immigrants and immigration, it was biology rather than faith that appears to have been an overarching concern. His manifesto contained numerous racialized references to "stock," "blood," and racial "science."<sup>62</sup> While Tarrant appropriated the language of the Identitarian movement<sup>63</sup> to express his anger at cultural and demographic change, he also oscillated back and forth between this 'cultural' racism and more overt white supremacist variants. This was evident in his referencing of the white supremacist "14 words" slogan of David Lane, formerly a leading figure in The Order, a white supremacist terrorist group, both in his manifesto and on his firearm.

Tarrant framed the rationale for his massacre as defensive resistance ("a partisan action against an occupying force"<sup>64</sup>), a preemptive strike to trigger a much wider racial conflagration in order to prevent "white genocide"<sup>65</sup> by accelerating ethnic and racial conflict while the odds were still perceived to be in favor of white majority populations. While Tarrant fantasized about extirpating the presence of immigrants from 'white' countries, his fixation on "white genocide," observed the genocide scholar A. Dirk Moses, also spoke volumes, particularly from an Australian point of view, about the unravelling of masculine settler/colonial mythologies not to mention representing a violent reaction "to the end of white entitlement as the global norm."<sup>66</sup>

Whether Tarrant was conscious of it or not, the title of his manifesto, "The Great Replacement," which encapsulated his fears about white demographic decline, derived from French anti-immigration writer Renaud Camus, to whom the phrase is commonly attributed, though the basic idea has a far longer historical lineage.<sup>67</sup> The overwhelming majority of Camus' work is in French, however, including *Le Grand Remplacement* (2012).<sup>68</sup> It is likely, therefore, that Tarrant encountered the concept mediated through online alt-right and identitarian sub-cultures where it has common currency.<sup>69</sup> The phrase itself, like its cruder counterpart "white genocide," provides a pithy, negative mantra for activists, encapsulating a sense of urgency and a call to arms against a racial and cultural enemy perceived as invader, occupier, and usurper—though the idea that Europe is being inundated by migrants is hardly fringe discourse.

Speaking to journalists in the aftermath of the massacre Camus denounced the attack, stating that "if he [Tarrant] wrote a pamphlet titled 'The Great Replacement' it's blatant plagiarism ... of a

phrase that doesn't belong to him and he doesn't understand ... At the centre of my work is the concept of innocence, which is to say, of non-aggravation, non-violence.<sup>70</sup> That said, on March 16, the day after the Christchurch attacks, Camus wrote on Twitter:

*“Je m'inquiète beaucoup pour nos amis musulmans. Je pense que par sécurité ils devraient se regrouper dans une vaste forteresse, la “terre d'Islam” (cinquante-sept pays tout de même...), et y vivre en paix selon leurs goûts et selon leur foi, bien protégés contre les déséquilibres.”<sup>71</sup>*

*(I worry a lot for our Muslim friends. I think that for security they should gather in a vast fortress, the “land of Islam” (fifty-seven countries anyway...), and live in peace according to their tastes and according to their faith, well protected against the imbalanced.)*

### “Why Don't I Do Something?”

Tarrant presented a mock interview with himself in his manifesto as a means of controlling the media narrative, giving him a ‘voice’ he would be deprived of if either killed or apprehended during the commission of his attack. At the interview's core was an autobiographical account of his political awakening and personal trajectory toward terrorism. Unlikely to be entirely truthful, many media outlets nonetheless uncritically regurgitated it as gospel. In the case of *Daily Mail*, the news outlet allowed readers to download the manifesto directly from its own website before removing the embed a short time later, claiming that publication of the manifesto was “an error and swiftly corrected.”<sup>72</sup>

As Tarrant told it, the path toward his impending atrocity began in April 2017 while he traveled through Western Europe, with a chain of events that convinced him “that a violent revolutionary solution” was “the only possible solution to our current crisis.” Inviting readers to consider their own experiences and motivations in light of his own, Tarrant wrote angrily about the murder of Ebba Åkkerlund, an 11-year-old Swedish girl killed in Stockholm on April 7, 2017, by Uzbek jihadi Rakhmat Akilov. Her killing “broke through my own jaded cynicism like a sledgehammer,” Tarrant claimed in his manifesto.<sup>73</sup>

Two years later, Tarrant painted her name on two of the rifles he used in his massacre. Posing as Åkkerlund's avenging angel was riddled with contradictions not least of which was his own transformation into a child killer, his youngest victim being a three-year-old boy. While railing against child sexual exploitation in his manifesto, it was also striking Tarrant would choose to announce his impending attack on 8chan, a forum whose users have shared graphic images of children and links to child pornography.<sup>74</sup>

The second critical event he narrated was the defeat of Marine Le Pen's Front National (FN) in the 2017 French presidential election, which took place between April 23 and May 7. Despite having a deleterious opinion of the FN (described as “milquetoast”), Tarrant appears to have believed that she would win. Her defeat was a shock, signaling to Tarrant that hopes for a nationalist political victory were over. “The truth of the political situation in Europe was suddenly impossible to accept. My despair set in. My belief in a democratic solution vanished.”<sup>75</sup>

The third and final vignette Tarrant presented was an account of his travels through eastern France where he claimed to have discovered a people that were a “minority” in their own land, their identity and culture diminished by immigration. Describing his emotions as swinging “between fuming rage and suffocating de-

spair” as he pondered the supposed hopelessness of the situation, Tarrant related his visit to a military cemetery and its fields full of white crosses stretching “seemingly without end, into the horizon.” Juxtaposing their heroic sacrifice against the country's conquest by an “invasion” of immigrants, Tarrant narrated the experience: “I broke into tears, sobbing alone in the car, staring at the crosses, at the forgotten dead.” This tableau was supposedly catalytic. “[M]y despair turned to shame, my shame to guilt, my guilt to anger and my anger to rage ... The spell broke, why don't I do something?”<sup>76</sup>

### Ideological Inspirations?

Tarrant's manifesto listed multiple ideological influences, some more serious than others. “For once, the person that will be called a fascist is an actual fascist,” Tarrant declared. He proclaimed that Sir Oswald Mosley (1896-1980), erstwhile leader of the British Union of Fascists “is the person from history closest to my beliefs,” though there was little in his manifesto to suggest any particular familiarity with Mosley's ideas. Tarrant's eye-catching claim to be an “eco-fascist” was similarly shallow, entailing little more than a simplistic repackaging of immigration as an environmental issue vis-à-vis overpopulation.<sup>77</sup> There was scant engagement with the ecological philosophies of the contemporary or historical extreme right.<sup>78</sup>

Tarrant juxtaposed these claims against the statement that communist China (hardly a flagship for environmentalism) was the nation with “the closet political and social values to my own,” which, while probably tongue-in-check, was not wholly incongruous considering his subsequent comment that China was set to become the world's dominant nation “while lacking diversity.” Other statements, however, such as Candace Owens, an African-American conservative commentator, being “the person who has influenced me above all” were seemingly mischievous attempts to mislead, mock, or sow discord.<sup>79</sup>

Though Tarrant acknowledged reading the ‘manifesto’ of Dylann Roof, who murdered nine African-American worshippers at a Charleston church in 2015, he was keen to claim that he “only really took true inspiration from Knight Justiciar [Anders] Breivik.” In another passage, he stated fancifully that he had contacted the “reborn” Knights Templar organization, which Breivik claimed to have founded, “for a blessing in support of the attack, which was given.”<sup>80</sup> This was likely untrue. The Knights Templar organization was a figment of Breivik's imagination, and given the prison authorities' tight control of Breivik's correspondence with the outside world, there was little chance Tarrant had interacted with his idol, though it is possible he wrote to him.

There were similarities and differences in the two attacks, suggesting that Tarrant had studied Breivik's *modus operandi* and learned from it. While Breivik had spent years planning his attack and intended his manifesto as a training manual—indeed, he discusses at length how he prepared for his attacks—Tarrant was light on such detail, stating simply that he had planned his attack for roughly two years and had chosen Christchurch only three months beforehand. Despite claiming to have had the “resources” to conduct any number of different attacks, including a “TATP filled rental van,” Tarrant chose, or more likely was constrained to choose, firearms.<sup>81</sup> He did so, he claimed, “for the affect [sic] it would have on social discourse” as well as the “extra media coverage they would provide,” though his claim that this would serve to polarize the gun control debate in the United States and detonate a wider conflict<sup>82</sup> was either trolling or else delusional. More presciently, however, Tarrant understood his attack would have an immediate impact



on gun ownership in New Zealand, claiming “their loss was inevitable. I just accelerated things a bit.”<sup>83</sup> On April 10, 2019, less than a month after the tragedy, New Zealand’s parliament voted 119-1 in favor of a gun reform bill that banned military-style, semi-automatic weapons.<sup>84</sup>

There were also obvious differences in their targeting strategies. Breivik had wanted to make a grand ideological gesture by murdering those he saw as “traitors”<sup>85</sup> responsible for Norway’s supposed prostration rather than immigrants themselves, though ultimately this entailed him murdering 33 teenagers on Utøya, two of whom were under 14 years of age. This severely curtailed the appeal of his actions within the broader extreme-right milieu.<sup>86</sup> Tarrant, meanwhile, was less ‘revolutionary’ in his aims since he was not attacking state structures or those perceived to be future political leaders. Instead, he aimed to massacre Muslims, which, in contrast to Breivik, he believed would only enhance his status. “Attacking them receives the greatest level of support,” he predicted.<sup>87</sup> While Breivik tried, unsuccessfully, to avoid the label of child killer, Tarrant made no apology for seeking to become one. Nonetheless, he framed his terrorism as an altruistic act, removing the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of future generations:

*“Children of invaders do not stay children, they become adults and reproduce, creating more invaders to replace your people ... Any invader you kill, of any age, is one less enemy your children will have to face. Would you rather do the killing or leave it to your children? Your grandchildren?”<sup>88</sup>*

There were notable difference in their two manifestos, too. At 74-pages long, the comparative brevity of Tarrant’s manifesto made it far more manageable than Breivik’s sprawling 1,516-page compendium. He claimed to have distilled this from a much larger 240-page document, which he had deleted. The manifesto was of secondary importance, however. “I will let my actions speak for themselves,” Tarrant wrote.<sup>89</sup> This cannot have been entirely true, however, since Tarrant still desired to communicate his views—even if “half finished”<sup>90</sup>—to a wider public, hence in further mimicry of Breivik, he had emailed a copy to several leading political figures, including the prime minister, and nearly 70 media outlets, before embarking upon his attack.<sup>91</sup>

## Recycling the Past for the Present

If Tarrant’s manifesto was largely a narrative of victimhood, the words he scrawled on his arsenal signified vengeance. His weapons provided a visual litany of historical episodes in which Christendom and the Ottoman Empire ranged against one another. This might also be interpreted as Tarrant’s effort to situate his actions within this broader arc of historical struggle against an enemy that was once more ‘at the gates’—as they had been, from the perspective of Christian Europe, in Vienna in 1683, a date inevitably memorialized on one of his guns. These also contained references to figures like Ernst Rudiger Starhemberg, the military commander during the siege of Vienna, and Charles Martel, the Frankish military leader credited with turning the tide of Umayyad conquest at Tours in 732, a date also etched on one weapon. Numerous other dates of perceived significance received their due, denoting Tarrant’s belief that a racial war had been raging since time immemorial. These coexisted alongside contemporary references. “Here’s [your] Migration Compact!” read another slogan, referencing the United Nations’ Global Compact on Migration, signed in December 2018.<sup>92</sup> Photos of his clothing, posted on Twitter, as well as the front cover of his manifesto prominently featured the Sonnenrad/Schwarz Sonne

(Sun Wheel/Black Sun), as well as two dog tags, one depicting a Celtic Cross, the other a Slavic Kolovrat, all popular symbols within extreme-right counter cultures.<sup>93</sup>

When and where such historical events entered his consciousness is unknowable, but following the death of his father in 2010,<sup>94</sup> Tarrant traveled a great deal to the Balkans. After visiting Greece and Turkey in 2016,<sup>95</sup> he took a bus across Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina in late December of the same year. He visited Bulgaria in November 2017, reportedly visiting several historic battlegrounds involving conflict with the Ottoman army, as well as spending time in Hungary.<sup>96</sup> He also reportedly visited the United Kingdom in 2017, too, though this remains unconfirmed.<sup>97</sup>

## The Self-Referential Nature of Extreme-Right Terrorism

Tarrant’s weapons also paid homage to past perpetrators of extreme-right violence, providing visual testimony to the interconnectivity and self-referential nature of such terrorism. A *New York Times* study recently indicated that at least one-third of extreme-right terrorists since 2011 had been inspired by similar perpetrators, revered them, or studied their tactics and modus operandi.<sup>98</sup>

Tarrant exemplified this trend. On the grip of one gun, he painted the name Alexandre Bissonette,<sup>99</sup> sentenced to 40 years in jail without parole in February 2019 for murdering six people in a Quebec mosque in 2017.<sup>100</sup> On the weapon’s stock, he had written Anton Lundin-Pettersson,<sup>101</sup> who killed three with a sword during a racist attack at a school in Trollhätten, Sweden, in 2015. Emblazoned on an ammunition clip, together with another reference to Bissonette, was Luca Traini,<sup>102</sup> sentenced to 12 years in October 2018 for shooting six African migrants in the Italian city of Macerata in 2017.<sup>103</sup> The same clip featured the slogan “For Rotherham”<sup>104</sup>—highlighting the importance of this high-profile child sexual exploitation scandal<sup>105</sup> for the extreme right, which had also played a role in galvanizing another anti-Muslim terrorist, Darren Osborne, to drive a van into worshippers outside London’s Finsbury Park mosque.<sup>106</sup>

Painted on the same ammunition clip was the name Josué Estébanez, a former Spanish soldier and extreme-right activist who had murdered a teenage anti-fascist, Carlos Palomino, on the Madrid subway in 2007. Largely unknown to the wider public, Estébanez is a cult figure within the extreme-right milieu, not least because CCTV footage of his killing circulates online. He was given a 26-year prison sentence.<sup>107</sup>

## Identitarians

Tarrant denied membership to any organization or group, though he stated, “I have donated [money] to many nationalist groups” and “have interacted with many more.”<sup>108</sup> Some of these transactions and interactions have since become more apparent. In the fall of 2017, Tarrant made four donations totaling €2,200 (\$2,248) to Les Identitaires, formerly the Bloc Identitaire, in France.<sup>109</sup> In a separate transaction in January 2018, Tarrant donated a further €1,500 (\$1,690) to Martin Sellner, the chief ideologue of the Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (IBÖ, Identitarian Movement Austria).<sup>110</sup> Sellner, who exchanged emails with Tarrant,<sup>111</sup> admitted directing him to his English-language YouTube videos, but denied any further involvement or inspiration for the attack, and there is no suggestion that he had advance knowledge of it. It subsequently emerged, however, that Sellner had not simply ‘passively’ received a donation from Tarrant (he originally claimed their communica-

tion was limited to a brief thank-you) but had corresponded with him until July 2018.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, he thanked Tarrant effusively for his “incredible donation,” gave him his personal email address, and suggested to Tarrant that if he was ever in Austria, they should meet for a “coffee or a beer.”<sup>113</sup> Tarrant responded, “The same is true for you, if you ever come to Australia or New Zealand. We have people in both countries who would like to welcome you to their home.”<sup>114</sup>

Tarrant did indeed visit Austria later that year, arriving from Hungary on November 27, 2018, before traveling onward to Estonia on December 4, 2018. He had booked his rental car and accommodations one day after his last email exchange with Sellner.<sup>115</sup> So far, however, no evidence has publicly emerged to suggest he and Sellner met or that Tarrant had any “personal contacts to extremist persons or organizations” in Austria, according to the then Interior Minister Herbert Kickl.<sup>116</sup> Following the revelation that Tarrant had donated monies to Sellner, Austria’s then chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, announced that his government would consider dissolving the IBÖ, though at the time of writing (June 2019) the group continues to operate.<sup>117</sup>

Sellner subsequently deleted his email exchange with Tarrant 41 minutes before the police raided his Vienna apartment on March 23, 2019, leading to speculation from Austria’s Social Democrats that Sellner had been forewarned about the impending swoop.<sup>118</sup> This was a politically contentious accusation given links between the IBÖ and Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ, *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*), which was then part of the ruling coalition in Austria until a corruption scandal involving party leader and Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache caused the government to collapse in May 2019.<sup>119</sup>

### United Patriots Front

Tarrant wore many of his influences almost literally on his sleeve, and certainly on his weapons. He was, however, rather more circumspect when it came to discussing those closer to home, not least perhaps because they clashed with the account of his political awakening that he wished to present in his manifesto. Tarrant had been especially enthusiastic about two extreme-right Australian groups, the United Patriots Front (UPF) and the True Blue Crew (TBC), and in particular UPF leader Blair Cottrell who helped establish the group in May 2015 following a split within the larger anti-Muslim organization Reclaim Australia.<sup>120</sup> Cottrell, who had convictions for property damage, aggravated burglary, arson, possessing a controlled weapon, failing to comply with court orders, and trafficking in testosterone,<sup>121</sup> had not always been straightforwardly anti-Muslim in his political outlook. Under a photograph of Adolf Hitler on social media, he had once commented, “There should be a picture of this man in every classroom and every school, and his book should be issued to every student annually.”<sup>122</sup> Tarrant donated money to the UPF, too, though Cottrell fervently denied knowing him. “And you won’t find any evidence to the contrary,” he told journalists.<sup>123</sup>

UPF social media was transnational in its inspiration, engaging in a “reflexive mimicry” of European and U.S. far-right politicians, which highlighted the group’s subjective positioning and interaction with a broader field of virulent anti-Muslim politicking, far-right ideas, and eschatological narratives, particularly those espoused by the Identitarians.<sup>124</sup>

Facebook deleted the UPF page in May 2017 at which point it had over 120,000 supporters.<sup>125</sup> A subsequent investigation by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in the aftermath of the

Christchurch shootings retrieved the metadata, enabling it to reconstruct and verify the erased messages, thereby revealing Tarrant to have been an active user of the UPF and TBC pages. He made some 30 comments over a 10-month period from as early as April 2016. “Knocked it out the park tonight Blair,” Tarrant enthused after watching Cottrell on television. “Your retorts had me smiling, nodding, cheering and often laughing. Never believed we would have a true leader of the nationalist movement in Australia, and especially not so early in the game.” After viewing a live stream of Cottrell and a colleague celebrating the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in November 2016, Tarrant gushed, “Simply one of the most important events in modern history. Globalists and Marxists on suicide watch, patriots and nationalists triumphant— looking forward to Emperor Blair Cottrell coming soon.”<sup>126</sup> While clearly viewing Cottrell as the ‘great white hope,’ Tarrant’s posts were also supportive of UPF violence. “Communists will get what communists get, I would love to be there holding one end of the rope when you gets yours traitor,” he commented following a clash between the UPF and anti-fascists in Coburg, Melbourne, in 2016.<sup>127</sup>

Tarrant clearly identified with the UPF, posting a menacing Facebook message to a Melbourne man who had criticized the group in August 2016. “The UPF is the leading ethno-nationalist group within Australia ... When you speak against the UPF you speak against my right to a home for my people and my culture. This marks you,” Tarrant told the man. He concluded by advising him to “chose your words carefully” and “think of who you insult” before stating, “If you are a nationalist I hope you one day see the light and if you are a Marxist I hope you one day meet the rope.” The recipient reported the threat to the police the following month but did not make a formal statement, telling ABC that police advised him simply to block the threat maker on social media.<sup>128</sup>

Tarrant last commented on the UPF page in January 2017, expressing support for Cottrell’s impending court appearance.<sup>129</sup> Cottrell and two other former UPF members were at the time on trial after staging and filming a mock beheading video outside Bendigo’s council offices in October 2015 to protest the construction of a mosque, a sign of what they argued was the increasing “Islamization of Australia.”<sup>130</sup> A judge subsequently found Cottrell and the two other UPF activists guilty of inciting hatred, contempt, and ridicule of Muslims.<sup>131</sup> Cottrell is currently appealing his conviction.<sup>132</sup> Tarrant was not the only violently inclined figure to have gravitated toward the UPF. In 2016, another activist, Phillip Galea, became the first far-right figure in Australia ever to be charged with a terrorism-related offense after police recovered a bomb-making manual, a proscribed chemical (361 grams of mercury), and a prohibited weapon as well as evidence that he had reconnoitred anarchist and left-wing properties, during a search of his house the previous year.<sup>133</sup>

Tarrant’s contacts with anti-Muslim groups in his native Australia did not end there. Lads Society president Tom Sewell, a former UPF activist, stated after the Christchurch attack that he had previously tried to recruit Tarrant online to join a project to create a “parallel society” for whites only. Within hours of the attack, Sewell had written on Facebook “this is not a false flag ... take my word for it” and that Tarrant “had been in the scene for a while.” Although they had never met, Sewell said that he had approached Tarrant online about possible membership of his society, though Tarrant had declined citing his imminent relocation to New Zealand as the reason. Furthermore, Sewell claimed to have inferred from Tarrant’s

comments contemporaneously that Tarrant “didn’t believe there was a peaceful solution to European people being genocided.”<sup>134</sup>

### The ‘Dark Fandom’ of Extreme-Right Terror

Tarrant claimed in his manifesto that “people will forget my motivations quickly and only remember the attack itself.” Given the broader cultural fascination with mass murderers and serial killers, not to mention crime, violence, and death more generally, this was never likely. Indeed, some online communities celebrated and commemorated Tarrant’s politics and person as a form of “dark fandom.”<sup>135</sup> Keyboard activists vociferously praised Tarrant as a “hero,” rejoiced in the killings, and took inspiration from them. “Wow. Just finished reading the manifesto,” wrote one Discord user, a chat application favored by video gamers that is also widely used by the far right. “Truly powerful ... and I wholeheartedly agree. I will be starting my own contribution to the fight soon, in every way that i can. i will start a group, i will train. i will be part of this if it fl[\*\*\*]ing kills me.”<sup>136</sup> To give a sense of the scale of the conversations, whether ‘real’ or mere “s[\*\*]t posting” (i.e., trolling to enrage, misinform, or obfuscate), users of 12 Discord servers posted an estimated 38,932 messages in the first 24 hours following the attack. Administrators of these chat groups raced to delete copious comments glorifying the killings and to ban posts venerating the perpetrator for fear Discord would delete the chat groups for breaching its terms of service.<sup>137</sup>

Less regulated online communities like 8chan were even less squeamish about valorizing Tarrant’s attacks, users collectively creating and disseminating, as he had hoped that they would, hundreds of memes and other forms of ‘fan’ art exalting the killings and revering him as a cult, religious figure. Tarrant was well aware of the visual power of such memes and the role that their constant production and reproduction played in political acculturation since, as an 8chan user, he had witnessed it firsthand. “Memes have done more for the ethnonationalist movement than any manifesto,” he wrote.<sup>138</sup> In some of these memes, internet users have beatified him, figuratively. In one instance, Tarrant’s face and those of five other far-right terrorists were transposed onto images of medieval saints under the slogan “Praise the Saints” and marketed as T-shirts, tote bags, and mugs using an online custom merchandise platform, before the retailer removed them.<sup>139</sup> Another anonymous internet user added to this hagiographic iconography by uploading pictures of a fresco (likely Photoshopped), which other internet users dubbed a “Mural of St. Tarrant of Christchurch.”<sup>140</sup>

Inevitably, there were plenty of ‘real-life’ examples of Tarrant’s influence, too. In Poland photographs emerged of school pupils posing with Confederate flags and a machine gun adorned with anti-Muslim slogans like “Kebab Remover” as Tarrant’s weapons had been.<sup>141</sup> Another equally disturbing act of homage was a ‘satirical’ online videogame, which, although launched before Tarrant’s attacks, was updated after the massacre to allow gamers to play as ‘Brent T.’<sup>142</sup> Another ‘game,’ which was posted online (in this instance to Facebook)—though subsequently removed—spliced video game action with raw footage of Tarrant’s attacks.<sup>143</sup>

As Tarrant had taken inspiration from Breivik, so others quickly took inspiration from him, his actions sparking several copycats, as he undoubtedly intended. In Louisville, James Dylan Grimes was arrested on March 22, 2019, after allegedly threatening in a Facebook message that he had been inspired by Tarrant’s attacks to blow up a local school and kill “9,000 kiddies.”<sup>144</sup> The following month,

the FBI arrested another alleged white supremacist who allegedly had praised Tarrant and discussed his desire to commit violence in Facebook messages to his cousin, charging him with lying to FBI officials about his ownership of firearms.<sup>145</sup>

Others moved beyond threatening violence to committing it, however. Nine days after the Tarrant’s terrorist attacks, John Earnest, 19, allegedly set fire to the Dar-ul-Arqam mosque in Escondido, California.<sup>146</sup> In the parking lot, he allegedly scrawled graffiti reading “For Brenton Tarrant ...”<sup>147</sup> Thereafter, on April 27, 2019, Earnest allegedly entered the Chabad of Poway Synagogue in Poway, California, and opened fire using a .223 AR semi-automatic rifle purchased the previous day, killing an elderly female worshipper and wounding three others.<sup>148</sup> In a similar vein to Tarrant, Earnest had allegedly been “lurking for a year and a half” on the 8chan/pol/ board, where he had allegedly announced his impending action with a post thanking his fellow users for their “redpill threads” and stating “what I’ve learned here is priceless. It’s been an honor.” Following Tarrant’s template, Earnest allegedly provided a Livestream link and a seven-page “open letter” that copied the same mock interview format Tarrant had used, together with a music playlist to accompany his atrocity. Screenshots taken by Bellingcat journalists show that the first reply, posted four minutes later, read “get the high score.”<sup>149</sup> 8chan deleted the post within nine minutes, but blamed the “fake news media” for publicizing Earnest’s post rather than addressing the core issue of how, in little over a month, another of its users had utilized the platform to announce an act of racist terrorism, while being egged on by other users.<sup>150</sup>

While Earnest allegedly targeted a synagogue rather than a mosque (at least for his alleged deadly violence), his alleged preoccupation with “white genocide” was identical to Tarrant’s, albeit saturated with conspiratorial anti-Semitism rather than anti-Muslim reference points.<sup>151</sup> Ideological nuance aside, it was Tarrant’s “propaganda of the deed” that appears to have provided the overarching inspiration. “Tarrant was a catalyst for me personally. He showed me that it could be done. And that it needed to be done,” stated a document bearing Earnest’s name that law enforcement subsequently discovered on his laptop (together with a copy of a web posting written by Tarrant).<sup>152</sup> Highlighting the self-referential nature of such acts, he added “Brenton Tarrant inspired me. I hope to inspire many more.”<sup>153</sup> Robert Bowers’ anti-Semitic attack on The Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, which left 11 dead on October 27, 2018, provided another reference point for Earnest’s alleged manifesto.<sup>154</sup> Bowers, who was similarly obsessed by notions of “white genocide,” also utilized social media (in this case Gab) to announce his impending atrocity. “I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in,” read his final post.<sup>155</sup>

Fortunately, Earnest’s alleged attempt to reenact a carbon copy of these massacres faltered due to his lack of technical proficiency. The Livestream failed, and as a subsequent review of surveillance footage from the Synagogue revealed, he appears to have had problems reloading his firearm, undoubtedly limiting the lethality of his attack. He clearly anticipated inflicting greater carnage. According to court documents, Earnest was wearing an ammunition chest rig containing five additional magazines holding an additional 50 rounds.<sup>156</sup> Thereafter, according to court documents, Earnest fled the scene before calling 911. “I just shot up a synagogue. I’m just trying to defend my nation from the Jewish people ... They’re destroying our people,” he told the operator.<sup>157</sup> Police apprehended

him nearby. He currently awaits trial.<sup>158</sup>

The extreme right is not alone in seeking to derive capital from Tarrant's attacks, however. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cynically manipulated the tragedy during his election campaign, using stills from the video to attack his political opponents.<sup>159</sup> Supporters of both al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State have also referenced the attacks to fuel their own narratives, stoke anger, and encourage revenge, some activists circulating some of the video footage itself to support their contention.<sup>160</sup> Islamic State spokesman Abu Hassan al-Muhajir (*kunya*) emerged after nearly six months of silence to argue that Christchurch was "enough to wake the sleep" and to incite supporters against the "nations of the Cross and the apostate."<sup>161</sup> He also likened the attacks to the battle raging in Baghuz, the last village then under Islamic State control in Syria.<sup>162</sup> Following the deadly Islamic State-claimed Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka, which claimed the lives of more than 250 people, Ruwan Wijewardene, the state minister for defense, claimed the attack was "retaliation" for Christchurch, though offered no evidence to support his assertion.<sup>163</sup> Researchers focusing on the Islamic State have since persuasively refuted these claims, however,<sup>164</sup> and the Islamic State made no mention of the Christchurch attacks in its various statements claiming responsibility for the Sri Lanka attacks during the days that followed the attacks.

There is evidence, though, that the attacks had an impact on at least one alleged jihadi extremist. The day before Earnest's attack on the Poway synagogue, police arrested Mark Domingo, a U.S. Army veteran and recent Muslim convert who had expressed support for the Islamic State.<sup>165</sup> They charged him with planning to attack "various targets—including targeting Jews, churches and police officers" before deciding to detonate a bomb at a United Patriots Nationalist Front rally in Long Beach scheduled to be held on April 28, though as it transpired the group did not show up to its own event.<sup>166</sup> Police arrested Domingo after he took delivery of what he believed was an IED from an undercover law enforcement officer posing as a bomb maker. According to the criminal complaint, Domingo posted online that he was motivated to plan his attacks, at least in part, as "retribution" for Christchurch.<sup>167</sup> He too is currently awaiting trial.<sup>168</sup>

## Conclusion

While more details will undoubtedly emerge when New Zealand's Royal Commission of Inquiry reports in December 2019 and after the conclusion of Tarrant's trial in 2020, it is already apparent that

although Tarrant acted alone, he was sustained by, and interacted with, a broader sub-cultural online environment that was electrified by his atrocity, as he knew it would be. Tarrant's online accounts were removed the moment his identity became known, meaning that little is known about his personal online activity, though those details that have emerged indicate that his murderous prejudices were nurtured by an online milieu that was simultaneously local and transnational in its scope. Given the deliberately self-referential nature of such actions, calculated to inspire further atrocities, many of these individual acts of violence are perhaps better understood not as isolated acts, but as part of a cumulative continuum of 'collective' extreme-right violence. Academic research into extreme-right terrorism is, surprisingly, still in its infancy. Only three percent of terrorism studies publications relate to the topic.<sup>169</sup> There is a pressing need for further research.

Beyond the scale of the human tragedy, and the novelty of the atrocity being livestreamed by its perpetrator, which was perhaps always a grim inevitability, it was the scale and speed with which sympathetic internet users uploaded and disseminated Tarrant's video that was one of its most salient and alarming features. The viral dissemination of real-time terror, which provided a cue for John Earnest to emulate, certainly represents a clear and present danger. That said, despite the majority of social media platforms, large and small, being initially overwhelmed by the volume of uploads, they generally succeeded in taking action to remove traces of the video from their platforms in the days after the attack, though it remains accessible in some instances. Facebook in particular has not only sought to explore the limits it can place upon who is eligible to use its livestream application, but has also strengthened its policies, banning praise, support, and representation of "white nationalism and separatism" on its platforms.<sup>170</sup> How it implements this policy and its broader impact remains to be seen, however, though Facebook's own external auditors recently stated that the company's interpretation of its own policy was "too narrow," hampering moderation, and enabling users to evade the ban with relative ease.<sup>171</sup> It is clearly very much a work in progress. What the attack served to highlight was a fundamental flaw not just in moderating systems but, moreover, the reactive approach of individual platforms when what was required—and which will hopefully be developed for the future—was an integrated, cross-platform response to a problem that very quickly metastasized across the entire technological ecosystem.<sup>172</sup> **CTC**

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# From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate

By Joana Cook and Gina Vale

**The Islamic State has lost its final territory in Syria, but the international community now faces an array of complex and difficult challenges, in particular those related to the up to 52,808 foreigners now recorded by the authors with the group including up to 6,902 foreign women and up to 6,577 foreign minors. Of unique concern are the minors born to parents in the 'caliphate' established by the Islamic State who represent up to 60 percent of total minors currently accounted for in countries with strong data on this issue. Returning home to varied state responses, up to eight percent of the up to 8,202 returnees are now recorded as women, and up to 20 percent minors. Thousands more remain in limbo in the region, however, and significant gaps in the data leave this picture incomplete.**

In March 2019, the Islamic State lost the final territorial remnant of its 'caliphate' in Baghouz. Yet its demise has left the international community with a myriad of complex and difficult challenges, including how to deal with the many women and minors from across the globe recruited by, taken by, or born into the group. In July 2018, a dataset compiled by the authors revealed that of 80 countries beyond Syria and Iraq, women accounted for up to 13 percent (4,761)<sup>1a</sup> and minors 12 percent (4,640) of the total 41,490 foreign persons who were recorded to have traveled to, or were born inside, Islamic State territory.<sup>2b</sup> These figures were unprecedented and the direct result of the territorial and governance ambitions of the Islamic State, which drew 'citizens'

a In this article, women are defined as adults aged 18 and above. See Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From 'Daesh' to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, July 2018, p. 13 for further discussion.

b In this article, minors are defined as those 17 and below. Minors are further distinguished as teenagers (15-17), children (5-14), and infants (0-4). See *Ibid.* for further discussion.

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from around the world. Yet, at that time (July 2018), only 26 states had published reliable information for both of these two interrelated, though distinct populations, raising the likelihood of significant underestimation.

Beyond the fall of the caliphate, three trends have prompted a reexamination of the status of Islamic State-affiliated women and minors. First, due to the group's duration of occupation, an increasing number of Islamic State-affiliated women have borne children. Of the 10 countries with strong data on minors, 44-60 percent have been reported as infants born in theater, highlighting the potential scale and long-term implications of this matter.<sup>c</sup> Second, a significant number of women remained with the Islamic State until its final stand in Baghouz and now require varied responses. Some are devout, battle-hardened members, while others may seek to leave this chapter of their life behind them. Third, due to the tens of thousands of adult males killed in counter-Islamic State and Islamic State operations,<sup>d</sup> the proportion of women and minors present in the remaining Islamic State population in Syria and Iraq is higher than ever and therefore must be reflected in all responses to the group.<sup>e</sup>

This article reexamines the status of Islamic State-affiliated women and minors, and the present challenges posed by these two distinct populations. Updating the authors' dataset from July 2018,<sup>3</sup> this article compiles the most recent figures for Islamic State-affiliated travelers, returnees, and detainees, and for the first time includes distinct figures for Islamic State-born infants. It considers how states have been responding to returnees and the long-term inter-generational concerns associated with these diverse populations, and it also provides considerations for international actors going forward.

## Methodology

Obtaining precise figures for foreigners affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria remains a challenging task. The methodology for the original dataset in 2018 has been repeated.<sup>4</sup> Figures

c These countries include Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, France, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. All figures are in Table 1.

d The Islamic State actively recruited and utilized males under the age of 18. However, there are currently no clear figures of how many male minors were killed in battles against the Islamic State. Discussing the entire Islamic State foreign fighter population, Edmund Fitton-Brown, the Coordinator for the ISIL (Daesh)/Al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring Team at the United Nations, estimated an attrition rate of "over a quarter," but acknowledged "nobody knows the true figures." Paul Cruickshank, "A View from the CT Foxhole: Edmund Fitton-Brown, Coordinator, ISIL (Daesh)/Al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring Team, United Nations," *CTC Sentinel* 12:4 (2019).

e Estimates that account for both foreign and local Islamic State followers killed have ranged from 25,000-70,000 and do not distinguish between men, women, and minors. A discussion on casualties on the battlefield is discussed at length in Cook and Vale, pp. 41-42.



have been updated based on information released between July 2018 and July 2019, cross-referenced with the previous dataset, and where possible verified by regional experts. Several challenges remain. Many countries continue to not publish figures; others have only acknowledged ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ (FTFs)<sup>f</sup> or do not distinguish women and minors.<sup>g</sup> Others may not have the means to track the movement of all their citizens. Some states have increasingly released figures, while others’ data proves contradictory and diverse, which is reflected in the dataset, particularly seen in the ranges included.

#### Updated Global Figures

Two developments impact the issue of returnees: more countries have clarified figures for women and minors who became affiliated with the Islamic State,<sup>h</sup> and there are an increasing number of recorded foreign Islamic State-born infants. This has raised not only the authors’ global estimates of all foreign Islamic State affiliated persons (men, women, and minors), including those now deceased to 44,279-52,808, but specifically women to 6,797-6,902 and minors to 6,173-6,577.<sup>i</sup> Increasing numbers of women and minors have also returned to their countries of origin.

#### Returnees

A number of observations emerge. First is the important distinction between state-managed repatriation initiatives and independent return. Where governments control the flow and return of persons back to their country, they are better able to manage them, while those who return independently may be unmonitored or unaccounted for.<sup>j</sup> Second, the post-return realities of Islamic State affiliates vary by country. Some face immediate arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment. Others receive deradicalization and rehabilitation services or differing extents of physical, economic, or psycho-social support and return to normal life. Almost all, including women and minors, face social stigma for their time with the Islamic State.

Yet, many countries do not publicly acknowledge their citizens’ return.<sup>k</sup> Women and minors may also be excluded or undistinguished in returnee figures or may return undetected. However, total confirmed returnees have increased in the authors’ updated dataset, albeit minimally since June 2018—from 7,145-7,366<sup>5</sup> to 7,712-8,202—with the greatest proportion found in the Southeast Asia region (up to 33 percent of those who traveled to, or were born within, the Islamic State) and Western Europe (28-29 percent).

#### Women

In 2018, only 256 women (five percent of total returnees) who had traveled to join the Islamic State had been recorded as returned to their country of departure.<sup>l</sup> By July 2019, up to 609 women of those who traveled had been recorded as returned, comprising up to eight percent of all returnees, or nine percent of women who traveled. However, these figures may not accurately capture the true picture. Statements from the United Kingdom<sup>m</sup> and European Union<sup>n</sup> have suggested that women and minors have been returning more frequently than men over the past two years, even if these were not acknowledged or distinguished at the country level.

Media portrayals of Islamic State-affiliated women have generally oscillated between victims taken or duped by their husbands, naïve ‘jihadi brides,’ or active security concerns. Where framed in security terms, there appears to be less political will or public acceptance to return women. In contrast, where viewed more in terms of victimhood or naïveté, prospects for redemption and rehabilitation may appear more in public discourses.

Russia had been actively repatriating women up to November 2017, whereafter only minors were accepted due to women being perceived as security risks.<sup>o</sup> Kazakhstan has taken a proactive approach, repatriating 137-139 women through its three-part ‘Operation Zhusan’ between January and May 2019. Upon arrival, women are isolated at a rehabilitation and reintegration center and face

f The Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad acknowledged 970 “fighters” have returned from Syria and Iraq. Lindsey Snell, “The ISIS recruits that won’t be coming home,” *Daily Beast*, March 20, 2018.

g The United Kingdom has only acknowledged 40-50 percent have returned without distinguishing women and minors in these. Matthew Offord and Sajid Javid, “UK Nationals Returning from Syria – in the House of Commons,” *theyworkforyou.com*, February 18, 2019; Kim Sengupta, “War Against Isis: Security Services Bracing for Possible Return of Thousands of Jihadists as Group Loses Territory,” *Independent*, September 5, 2016.

h This article uses the word “affiliated” to account for the distinctions between both the roles of various persons within the group (not all of whom picked up arms), as well as the level of volition present in their joining the Islamic State. This is particularly true for minors who were forcibly taken by their parents, or infants born into the organization, who must now be addressed in comprehensive responses to the Islamic State.

i This figure of 44,279-52,808 comprises all foreign persons who between 2013 and June 2019 became affiliated with the Islamic State in its Levantine territory. A significant number of these persons were killed in Syria and Iraq so it does not represent actual figures for populations being responded to today.

j The United States has offered its assistance to any country willing to repatriate its citizens and has facilitated a number of returns, while others such as Kazakhstan have been active in independently repatriating hundreds of its citizens (though reportedly with U.S. mediation). “5 ISIS militants, families returned to Kazakhstan with US mediation: SDF,” *Rudaw*, January 7, 2019.

k The reasons for this are varied and may include security or intelligence motivations; political motivations driven by fear of public backlash; and privacy and safeguarding issues (particularly in the case of minors).

l The word “recorded” acknowledges that even when greater numbers of women have returned, these are not publicly acknowledged or distinguished in some cases.

m In the United Kingdom, women and minors have generally been noted to be returning, even though the authors’ table records only two women and four minors have been publicly recorded as returned. The United Kingdom’s 2018 CONTEST counterterrorism strategy noted, “The majority of those who have returned did so in the earlier stages of the conflict, and were investigated on their return. Only a very small number of travellers have returned in the last two years, and most of those have been women with young children.” The reason for not distinguishing these women and minors within total U.K. returnee figures is unclear. “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism,” HM Government, June 2018, p. 18.

n In a January 2017 interview, Wil van Gemert, Deputy Director of Europol and Head of Operations, noted that “those recently fleeing back to Europe have mostly been women and children,” though he did not spell out how this was manifested country by country in the European Union. Paul Cruickshank, “A View from the CT Foxhole: Peter Edge, ICE Acting Deputy Director, and Wil van Gemert, Europol Deputy Director,” *CTC Sentinel* 10:1 (2017).

o The concern of female militancy is particularly acute in Russia where women have been active in Islamist militancy, including in the Chechnya context as the so-called ‘black widows’ who acted as suicide bombers. Ilya Arkhipov, “Putin Shows Rare Soft Spot to Rescue Russia’s ISIS Children,” *Bloomberg*, February 1, 2019.

questioning by security services. While many return home and continue to be monitored, at least five women have been charged with terrorism-related offenses.<sup>6</sup> Indonesia, with 54 confirmed female returnees, has also managed a large-scale rehabilitation and reintegration program.<sup>7</sup> At least one woman went on to attempt an explosive attack and now faces the death penalty.<sup>8</sup> Here, reintegration at the community level has been specifically tailored to women, including economic empowerment programs.<sup>9</sup> With such programming, public safety must remain a paramount concern. Adequate planning, resources, and gendered considerations must be integrated at every step, together with the active participation and support of community organizations and families.<sup>10</sup> Yet, such tailored programs remain rare.

Some women have been prosecuted upon return, including British woman Tareena Shakil.<sup>11</sup> 'Jennifer W.,' a 27-year old German returnee, was charged with the murder of an enslaved Yazidi child, war crimes, membership in a foreign terror organization, and weapons violations.<sup>12</sup> Sabine S. also became the first woman convicted in Germany of belonging to a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>13</sup> Yet, this route remains challenging as the type of evidence obtained against men, such as recordings of their direct involvement in Islamic State activities, is more limited for women who rarely appeared in propaganda.<sup>14</sup> However, women within the Islamic State may also have been privy to information that may help facilitate the prosecution of other members.

There has also been increased focus on the gender dimensions of criminal justice responses to counterterrorism<sup>14</sup> and evidence that women may be arrested, charged, and sentenced differently (often more leniently) than men.<sup>15</sup> Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have opted to strip or deny citizenship, as demonstrated in the cases of Shamima Begum or Hoda Muthana,<sup>16</sup> raising broader questions about rights and identity of first- and second-generation immigrants in these countries. Though many trajectories remain possible for Islamic State-affiliated women, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (as appropriate) remain the most feasible for their successful long-term monitoring.

### Minors

By July 2018, 411-1,180 minors were recorded as confirmed and in-process returnees. A constant trend from 2018 is the international community's prioritization of repatriation of minors. In total, 1,460-1,525 minors (22-25 percent) have now returned to their country of departure (or the country of their parents), representing up to 20 percent of total returnees. For some states, such as Tajikistan and Saudi Arabia, this is the result of proactive collaboration with local authorities to identify and return their underage nationals.<sup>17</sup> Yet, these efforts are predominantly framed as 'rescue' missions to recover young children whose Islamic State affiliation was not through their own volition. This was epitomized by the reunion of a Trinidadian mother and her two sons, which was facilitated by Pink Floyd's Roger Waters.<sup>18</sup> This framing of the issue has put mounting pressure on hitherto unresponsive governments. For some, repatriation of the most vulnerable Islamic State-affiliated

population can be presented as a politically acceptable concession.<sup>19</sup> A salient example is Norway's repatriation of five orphans,<sup>20</sup> out of 40 minors in the conflict zone. This arguably creates a 'hierarchy of victimhood,' in which those seen to be most helpless and unthreatening are prioritized.

Despite increasing awareness and efforts to repatriate minors, national initiatives remain limited and ad-hoc. In February 2017, a French official stated approximately 700 French minors were in the conflict zone.<sup>21</sup> It was boldly announced, "they will return to France, it is just a question of time."<sup>21</sup> France later tapered this, pledging to return only 150 minors, stipulating "the mothers of any repatriated children would be left in Syria."<sup>22</sup> Yet, by June 2019, only 107 minors had been confirmed as returned.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, Kazakhstan has repatriated 357 minors in quick succession.<sup>23</sup>

The repatriation of minors, particularly infants, also raises the issue of separation from their Islamic State-affiliated parent(s). Although Islamic State-affiliated parents have endangered their children through their travel to Islamic State territory, separation could also exacerbate trauma experienced by minors. Furthermore, blanket separation policies may prove harmful if custody is granted to other family members also holding extremist views.<sup>24</sup> This reinforces the need to assess the parameters of repatriation and rehabilitative needs for minors on a case-by-case basis.

Despite momentum shifting toward repatriation and rehabilitation, some countries have adopted a security-first approach, adding additional barriers to minors' return. In Australia, Islamic State-affiliated minors from age 14 can have their citizenship revoked under recent legislation.<sup>25</sup> This also applies to children of 'suspected terrorists.'<sup>26</sup> Denmark introduced legislation that refuses the automatic assignment of citizenship to infants born to Islamic State-affiliated parents<sup>27</sup>—the result of increasing public fears of the security threat that minors may pose upon return. Some officials have also (unhelpfully) referred to these children as a "ticking time bomb."<sup>28</sup> It is important that countries acknowledge and address minors' indoctrination through the Islamic State's education and training programs.<sup>29</sup> However, approaches that generalize, securitize, and further victimize minors—instead of addressing their developmental needs—will compromise the effectiveness and sustainability of rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives.

### Detainees

Another critical issue is the predicament of thousands of foreign Islamic State affiliates imprisoned in Iraq and detained by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria of which foreign women account-

p As women's roles were primarily prescribed in the domestic sphere, offenses were more likely to have occurred in the home with local or enslaved women, making such evidence even harder to attain.

q It was noted that of the 700, half are under the age of five and a third were born inside Islamic State territory. "700 mineurs français vont rentrer de Syrie [700 French Minors Will Return from Syria]," *Figaro*, February 2, 2017.

r Ninety-five minors were repatriated up until April 2019, with a further 12 repatriated in June 2019. Paule Gonzalès, "95 enfants de djihadistes rentrés en France depuis 2015 [95 French Children of Jihadists Returned to France Since 2015]," *Figaro*, April 1, 2019; "Syrian Kurds transfer 12 orphans from jihadist families to France for repatriation," France 24, June 10, 2019.

ed for up to 5,350 and foreign minors 8,580.<sup>s</sup> Iraq has tried thousands of persons in controversial court proceedings,<sup>30</sup> and indefinite SDF-detention in Syria is unlikely. Several considerations pertinent to women and minors detained in the region have become visible.<sup>31</sup>

### Women

In Iraq in 2018 alone, 616 foreigners were tried and convicted of Islamic State membership, receiving varied sentences of up to life in prison, or even the death penalty. A staggering 466 of these were women, 108 of these minors, and only 42 of these men, and it was noted that “most of the women sentenced for ISIS links were from Turkey and republics of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>32</sup> For those who did receive the death sentence, these have not yet been carried out. For countries that oppose capital punishment, there are reports that Iraq has been willing to commute these sentences, for a price.<sup>1</sup> However, serious concerns over flawed and swift trials and human rights violations in detention remain.<sup>33</sup> If paid, Iraq has also offered to receive, try, and hold thousands of foreigners currently in SDF custody, including women, only compounding these concerns.<sup>34</sup>

Women currently in SDF custody face similar potential trajectories as men. These were well outlined recently by Brian Michael Jenkins in this publication, who identified eight local and multilateral options for dealing with these detainees.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the proportion of women makes these options more complex and demands gendered considerations at every step. Of the three major SDF-administered refugee and internment camps in northeast Syria out of its total population, al-Hol alone hosts 12,000 Islamic State-affiliated foreigners—4,000 are women and 8,000 are minors. In contrast, SDF forces are holding only 1,000 men deemed ‘fighters’ across its prisons.<sup>36</sup> These persons do not have access to fair trial and cannot be held indefinitely—an important pillar of international law and another reason to repatriate citizens.<sup>37</sup>

For women currently detained in the region, there is a challenge of identifying persons in custody. Upon arrival in Iraq and Syria, many foreigners destroyed or surrendered their identification and may seek to conceal their identity.<sup>38</sup> There is also a lack of deradicalization and rehabilitative services available while detained or upon

release, highlighting long-term hurdles for reintegration. While many detention facilities, particularly in Europe, have segregated areas for those convicted of terrorism offenses, such units do not (as far as the authors are aware) exist in Iraq for women, meaning that women who still adhere to the Islamic State’s ideology may radicalize others or their children.<sup>v</sup> While SDF camps have segregated annexes for foreign women and minors suspected of being associated with the Islamic State, the same concern related to their children remains.<sup>w</sup> The potential for inter-generational radicalization has already been highlighted as a long-term strategic concern by senior officials.<sup>x</sup>

### Minors

Despite more promising rates of repatriation and return for Islamic State-affiliated minors, thousands languish in limbo within prisons, camps, and detention centers in Iraq and Syria. According to a Reuters report in March 2019, an estimated “1,100 children of Islamic State are caught in the wheels of Iraqi justice.”<sup>y</sup> For the youngest, detention in Iraqi government facilities is the direct result of their parents’ Islamic State affiliation and conviction for terrorism offenses.<sup>38</sup> Foreign infants and toddlers are now being raised in crowded and unsanitary cells.<sup>39</sup> Two hundred foreign infants have reportedly been born inside one Baghdad prison alone.<sup>40</sup> Before the decision was taken to separate and repatriate only the children,<sup>41</sup> seven minors have perished in the poor conditions.<sup>42</sup> Recently, mothers from countries such as Tajikistan have refused permission for their children to be repatriated without them, resulting in 17 Tajik minors remaining in Iraqi prisons.<sup>43</sup>

In line with the national minimum age of criminal responsibility, Iraqi authorities deem children from the age of nine to be legally accountable for their involvement in the Islamic State.<sup>44</sup> This contravenes international standards, which stipulate that children recruited to non-state armed groups are “primarily victims who should be provided with assistance for their rehabilitation and reintegration.”<sup>45</sup> Charges and prosecutions range from illegal entrance into Iraq to fighting for the Islamic State, and 108 foreign boys and 77 foreign girls have received sentences from a few months to up to 15 years in juvenile detention.<sup>46</sup> Of even greater concern are reports of arbitrary arrest, forced confessions, and torture of juvenile Islamic State suspects in Iraqi and Kurdish custody.<sup>47</sup> Such actions can be harmful and counterproductive, and may create further barriers for minors to reintegrate into society upon release, psychologically and physically alienating individuals branded as ‘Islamic State-sup-

s It should be noted here that there is a disconnect between this figure and the authors’ dataset, which only shows a number of foreign minors affiliated with the Islamic State up to 6,577. The significant number of countries that still do not publicly record disaggregated data for minors reinforces that the figure in the authors’ dataset continues to be an underestimation. Iraq: 1,350 women and 580 minors. Syria: 4,000 women and 8,000 minors. Margaret Coker and Falih Hassan, “A 10-Minute Trial, a Death Sentence: Iraqi Justice for ISIS Suspects,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2018; Ben Hubbard, “In a Crowded Syria Tent Camp, the Women and Children of ISIS Wait in Limbo,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2019; Quentin Sommerville, “There are 12,000 foreigners in Kurdish custody. 4000 women- 8000 kids. Men, 1000+ From more than 50 countries. That’s not including Iraqis and Syrians,” Twitter, April 12, 2019.

t In the case of 11 French citizens, the Iraqi government reportedly requested \$1 million per person to commute their death sentences to life in prison. It is not clear if these citizens included women or if women will be treated differently in such cases. David Chazan, “Iraq offers to commute death sentences of French Isis members for ‘millions of euros,’” *Telegraph*, June 2, 2019.

u Reasons for concealment of identity may include avoiding authorities if the individual has committed a crime or if they do not wish to return home and hope to stay in the region. Thanks to Petra Ramsauer for highlighting this last point.

v Such a scenario is reminiscent of Camp Bucca, where the forging of relationships and the hardening of ideological convictions preceded the rise of the Islamic State.

w In contrast to Iraq, women or minors have not been charged or tried in SDF-held territory. OCHA, “Syria: Humanitarian response in al-Hol camp,” Situation Report No. 5, July 5, 2019.

x Major General Alexis Grynkech, deputy commander of Operation Inherent Resolve who oversees joint and coalition operations, recently stated the potential for radicalization in these camps is “the biggest long-term strategic risk” outside of active military operations in efforts to counter the Islamic State. Richard Hall, “‘Hardcore’ Isis ideologues held in Syrian camps represent long-term risk, warns US-led coalition,” *Independent*, July 3, 2019.

y These comprise both foreign and local minors. Raya Jalabi, “Special Report: Forgotten victims - The children of Islamic State,” Reuters, March 21, 2019.

porters.’

Minors face even greater uncertainty and insecurity in SDF-controlled camps. Al-Hol currently holds 73,000 foreign and local Islamic State ‘family members;’ 49,000 are minors, of which 95 percent are under the age of 12.<sup>48</sup> Many sustained injuries prior to accessing these camps and have since contracted diseases and suffer from severe malnutrition, with more than 300 children dying in the first weeks after they departed Baghouz.<sup>49</sup> This concern is further compounded by the scarcity of resources divided among residents that far exceed the camp’s maximum capacity.<sup>50</sup> Approximately 8,000 of these are foreign children either born into or relocated to Islamic State territory with their parents, several hundred of whom are now separated or orphaned.<sup>51</sup> <sup>z</sup> For Islamic State-born infants, undocumented status and legal statelessness can restrict access to short-term benefits and aid inside camps, as well as long-term employment opportunities and permanent residency upon release.<sup>52</sup>

The continued security-first approach to Islamic State-affiliated minors has led to few state-level repatriations, leaving thousands in limbo or at the mercy of rapid judicial processes. While recognizing the complex legal and logistical issues involved in repatriation, such lags in response appear to neglect minors’ welfare and development. This risks further alienation and stigmatization, deepening their ‘Islamic State-affiliate’ identity and fueling similar grievances that provided fertile soil for the Islamic State’s rise.

## Conclusion

Over the last year, modest but important progress has been made to address issues resulting from the Islamic State’s territorial collapse. The need to recognize, record, and assess the status of women and minors in relation to political violence at every step is clear. It enables nuanced analysis of the demographic of the Islamic State, and the strategies, tactics, and objectives it engages, while informing responses to other groups who pursue state-building.

Returnee figures recorded for women since July 2018 have almost tripled, and the plight of minors and infants has captured international attention. The disaggregated figures for women and minors in this dataset demonstrate the need to act in accordance

with their status as interrelated, though distinct populations, with the flexibility and nuance to respond to each case in turn.

For women, it is critical to assess the varying levels of individual agency based on their unique circumstances of joining, the plurality of their roles in the group, and possible continued support for, or disavowment of, the group. Assessments should take into account the risk that some women may pose, both in security terms and the possibility of radicalizing others. Action must also be taken in accordance with legal norms and with respect of human rights, including access to fair trials and gender-conscious rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Stripping citizenship of adults has potentially adverse implications. Such policies foster societal tensions and alienation born from a ‘hierarchy’ of citizenship and risk pushing these individuals to countries who may not be willing or adequately equipped to manage them.

For minors, stripping or denying citizenship is even more problematic. This creates barriers to access benefits, rights, and services that are needed to facilitate true reintegration into society. Fortunately, repatriation and rehabilitation of minors is a more common point of agreement and concession, yet still appears to prioritize specific groups, such as infants or orphans. Minors should have their rights and development put first, and initiatives that address healthcare, education, and psychosocial support should be prioritized. A rehabilitation-first approach responds to individual needs, provides an effective counterpoint to the Islamic State’s indoctrination, and offers a new ‘non-Islamic State’ identity on which to build a future.

Justice and recovery for the victims of the Islamic State, as well as prevention of future instability and conflict in the region, is paramount, but it is jeopardized by states’ inaction or hesitancy to manage their citizens.<sup>aa</sup> This is an inter-generational challenge, one that requires a nuanced and long-term approach. A transparent and rights-based process will provide justice for both Islamic State members and their victims, as well as demonstrate the values of the international community in contrast with the Islamic State. This, however, is the long game. It requires courage to overcome the temptation of vengeance; flexibility and collaboration to work across national jurisdictions; and patience to implement tailored and sustainable solutions. **CTC**

<sup>z</sup> The authors’ 2018 dataset records less than 8,000 minors, excluding those already returned. This demonstrates that not adequately and publicly acknowledging women and minors can produce consequences such as underestimations, which may limit preparation and response for such significant populations.

<sup>aa</sup> This is exemplified by some states’ public acknowledgment of “losing track” of their Islamic State-affiliated citizens. “Germany loses track of 160 ‘Islamic State’ supporters,” Deutsche Welle, June 23, 2019.

Country	Minor Affiliates (includes traveled and born in theater)	Infants (confirmed born in theater)	Female Affiliates	Total Affiliates	Minor Returnees	Female Returnees	Total Returnees
<i>Middle East and North Africa (MENA)</i>							
Algeria				175 <sup>53</sup> -278 <sup>54</sup>	6 <sup>55</sup>	4 <sup>56</sup>	116 <sup>57</sup>
Bahrain				100 <sup>58</sup>			
Egypt	10 ICR <sup>59</sup>		5 ICR <sup>60</sup>	600 <sup>61</sup>			600 <sup>62</sup>
Israel	4 ICR <sup>63</sup>		3 ICR <sup>64</sup>	60 <sup>65</sup>	3 ICR <sup>66</sup>	1 ICR <sup>67</sup>	10 <sup>68</sup>
Iran			16 <sup>69</sup>	21 <sup>70</sup>		16 <sup>71</sup>	21 <sup>72</sup>
Jordan				3,000-3,950 <sup>73</sup>			300 <sup>74</sup>
Kuwait				150 <sup>75</sup>			6 <sup>76</sup>
Lebanon	6 ICR <sup>77</sup>	1 ICR <sup>78</sup>		900 <sup>79</sup>	5 ICR <sup>80</sup>	1 ICR <sup>81</sup>	14 ICR <sup>82</sup>
Libya				600 <sup>83</sup>			8 <sup>4</sup>
Morocco	391 <sup>85</sup>		293 <sup>86</sup>	1,698 <sup>87</sup>	15 <sup>88</sup>	52 <sup>89</sup>	253 <sup>90</sup> -308 <sup>91</sup>
Saudi Arabia			46 <sup>92</sup>	3,244 <sup>93</sup>	2 ICR <sup>94</sup>		762 <sup>95</sup>
Sudan			19 ICR <sup>96</sup>	70-140 <sup>97</sup>	2 ICR <sup>98</sup>	1 ICR <sup>99</sup>	5 ICR <sup>100</sup>
Turkey	476 <sup>101</sup>	1 ICR <sup>102</sup>	2,000 <sup>103</sup>	7,476-9,476 <sup>*104</sup>	243 <sup>105</sup>		243 <sup>106</sup>
Tunisia	*107		700 <sup>108</sup>	4,000 <sup>109</sup> - 6,500 <sup>110</sup>			970 <sup>111</sup>
Yemen			1 ICR <sup>112</sup>	110 <sup>113</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>877</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3,083</b>	<b>22,204- 27,827</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>3,300-3,355</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>3-4%</b>		<b>11-14%</b>		<b>8%</b>	<b>2%</b>	
<i>Eastern Europe</i>							
Albania	38 <sup>114</sup> -41 <sup>115</sup>	13 <sup>116</sup>	29 <sup>117</sup> -35 <sup>118</sup>	157 <sup>119</sup> -163 <sup>120</sup>			44 <sup>121</sup> -45 <sup>122</sup>
Azerbaijan	19 <sup>123</sup> -22 <sup>124</sup>		200 <sup>125</sup>	900 <sup>126</sup>	22 <sup>127</sup>		71 <sup>128</sup>
Belarus	3 ICR <sup>129</sup>			3 ICR <sup>130</sup>	3 ICR <sup>131</sup>		3 ICR <sup>132</sup>
Bosnia	230 <sup>133</sup>	150 <sup>134</sup>	70 <sup>135</sup>	500 <sup>136</sup>	7 <sup>137</sup>	6 <sup>138</sup>	56 <sup>139</sup>
Bulgaria				10 <sup>140</sup>			
Croatia			4-5 <sup>141</sup>	7 <sup>142</sup>			
Georgia	1 ICR <sup>143</sup>		17 <sup>144</sup>	41 <sup>145</sup> -200 <sup>146</sup>	3 ICR		15-20 <sup>147</sup>
Kosovo	98 <sup>148</sup>	40 <sup>149</sup>	55 <sup>150</sup>	446 <sup>151</sup>	77 <sup>152</sup>	39 <sup>153</sup>	243 <sup>154</sup>
Latvia				2 <sup>155</sup>			
Macedonia	6 ICR <sup>156</sup>		15 <sup>157</sup>	161 <sup>158</sup>			72-86 <sup>159</sup>
Moldova				1 <sup>160</sup>			
Montenegro	4 <sup>161</sup>	1 <sup>162</sup>	5 <sup>163</sup>	27 <sup>164</sup>	1 <sup>165</sup>	1 <sup>166</sup>	10 <sup>167</sup>
Poland				20-40 <sup>168</sup>			
Romania				1 <sup>169</sup>			
Russia	1,600 <sup>170</sup>	57 ICR <sup>171</sup>	1,000 <sup>172</sup>	4,000-5,000 <sup>173</sup>	145 <sup>174</sup> -200 <sup>175</sup>	24 <sup>176</sup>	452-507 <sup>177</sup>
Serbia	15 <sup>178</sup>		20 <sup>179</sup>	59 <sup>180</sup>			7 <sup>181</sup>
Slovakia				6 <sup>182</sup>			

Slovenia				10 <sup>183</sup>			2 <sup>184</sup>
Ukraine	5 ICR <sup>185</sup>		3 ICR <sup>186</sup>	8 ICR <sup>187</sup>	1 ICR <sup>188</sup>		1 ICR <sup>189</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,019-2,025</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>1,418-1,425</b>	<b>6,359-7,544</b>	<b>259-314</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>976-1,051</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>27-32%</b>		<b>19-22%</b>		<b>25-32%</b>	<b>7%</b>	
<b>Central Asia</b>							
Kazakhstan	649-749 <sup>190</sup>		150 <sup>191</sup>	1,136-1,236 <sup>192</sup>	420 <sup>193</sup>	137 <sup>194</sup> -139 <sup>195</sup>	594 <sup>196</sup>
Kyrgyzstan	130-140 <sup>197</sup>		188 <sup>198</sup>	863 <sup>199</sup>			63 <sup>200</sup>
Tajikistan	293 <sup>201</sup>		279 <sup>202</sup>	1,899 <sup>203</sup> -2,000 <sup>204</sup>	131 <sup>205</sup> -141 <sup>206</sup>	1 ICR <sup>207</sup>	400-410 <sup>208</sup>
Turkmenistan			2 ICR <sup>209</sup>	360 <sup>210</sup> -500 <sup>211</sup>			
Uzbekistan	92 <sup>212</sup>	1 ICR <sup>213</sup>	1 ICR <sup>214</sup>	1,500 <sup>215</sup> -2,500 <sup>216</sup>	91 <sup>217</sup>	59 <sup>218</sup>	148-300 <sup>219</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,164-1,274</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>5,758-7,099</b>	<b>642-652</b>	<b>197-199</b>	<b>1,205-1,367</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>16-22%</b>		<b>9-11%</b>		<b>47-54%</b>	<b>14-17%</b>	
<b>Western Europe</b>							
Austria	20 <sup>220</sup> -40 <sup>221</sup>	2 ICR <sup>222</sup>	37 <sup>223</sup>	256 <sup>224</sup>	1 ICR <sup>225</sup>	13 <sup>226</sup>	94 <sup>227</sup>
Belgium	175 <sup>228</sup>	142 <sup>229</sup>	93 <sup>230</sup>	602 <sup>231</sup>	25 <sup>232</sup>	26 <sup>233</sup>	160 <sup>234</sup>
Denmark			18 <sup>235</sup>	150 <sup>236</sup>			72 <sup>237</sup>
Finland	42 <sup>238</sup>	12 <sup>239</sup>	20 <sup>240</sup>	122 <sup>241</sup>	2 ICR <sup>242</sup>		43 <sup>243</sup>
France	460 <sup>244</sup> -700 <sup>245</sup>	150 <sup>246</sup> -233 <sup>247</sup>	300 <sup>248</sup> -382 <sup>249</sup>	1,910 <sup>250</sup>	107 <sup>251</sup>	78 <sup>252</sup>	376 <sup>253</sup> -410 <sup>254</sup>
Germany	290 <sup>255</sup>	*256	165 <sup>257</sup>	1,268 <sup>258</sup>	19 <sup>259</sup>	53 <sup>260</sup>	357 <sup>261</sup>
Iceland				1 <sup>262</sup>			
Ireland	2 ICR <sup>263</sup>	2 ICR <sup>264</sup>	1 ICR <sup>265</sup>	30 <sup>266</sup>	1 ICR <sup>267</sup>	1 ICR <sup>268</sup>	2 <sup>269</sup>
Italy	11 <sup>270</sup>		12 <sup>271</sup>	138 <sup>272</sup>		1 ICR <sup>273</sup>	8 <sup>274</sup> -12 <sup>275</sup>
Luxembourg				1 <sup>276</sup>			
Netherlands	185 <sup>277</sup>	117 <sup>278</sup>	105 <sup>279</sup>	432 <sup>280</sup>	12 <sup>281</sup>	17 <sup>282</sup>	67 <sup>283</sup>
Norway	40 <sup>284</sup>	40 <sup>285</sup>	10 <sup>286</sup>	140-150 <sup>287</sup>	5 <sup>288</sup>		45 <sup>289</sup>
Portugal	2 ICR <sup>290</sup>	2 ICR <sup>291</sup>	4 ICR <sup>292</sup>	15 <sup>293</sup>		2 ICR <sup>294</sup>	2 ICR <sup>295</sup>
Spain	17 <sup>296</sup>	1 ICR <sup>297</sup>	21 <sup>298</sup>	208 <sup>299</sup>			37 <sup>300</sup> -46 <sup>301</sup>
Sweden	80 <sup>302</sup>	30-40 <sup>303</sup>	75 <sup>304</sup>	341-351 <sup>305</sup>	12 ICR <sup>306</sup>	1 ICR <sup>307</sup>	160 <sup>308</sup>
Switzerland	20 <sup>309</sup>		12 <sup>310</sup>	99 <sup>311</sup>	1 ICR <sup>312</sup>	3 <sup>313</sup>	17 <sup>314</sup>
United Kingdom	50 <sup>*315</sup>	*316	150 <sup>317</sup>	900 <sup>318</sup>	4 ICR <sup>*319</sup>	2 ICR <sup>*320</sup>	400 <sup>321</sup> -425 <sup>322</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,394-1,654</b>	<b>498-591</b>	<b>1,023-1,105</b>	<b>6,613-6,633</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>1,840-1,912</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>21-25%</b>		<b>15-17%</b>		<b>10%</b>	<b>10-11%</b>	
<b>South-Eastern Asia</b>							
Cambodia				1 <sup>323</sup>			
Indonesia	100 <sup>324</sup>		113 <sup>325</sup>	800 <sup>326</sup>	~60 <sup>327</sup>	~54 <sup>328</sup>	183 <sup>329</sup> -300 <sup>330</sup>

Malaysia	17 <sup>331</sup>		14 <sup>332</sup>	102 <sup>333</sup> -154 <sup>334</sup>	2 ICR <sup>335</sup>	1 ICR <sup>336</sup>	34 <sup>337</sup>
Philippines	1 ICR <sup>338</sup>		1 ICR <sup>339</sup>	100 <sup>340</sup>			
Singapore	5 ICR <sup>341</sup>		2 ICR <sup>342</sup>	8 ICR <sup>343</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>		<b>130</b>	<b>1,011-1,063</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>217-334</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>12%</b>		<b>12-13%</b>		<b>19-29%</b>	<b>16-25%</b>	

*Eastern Asia*

China	~350 <sup>344</sup>		~350 <sup>345</sup>	1,000 <sup>346</sup>			
Japan			1-5 <sup>347</sup>	5 <sup>348</sup> -9 <sup>349</sup>			
South Korea				1 <sup>350</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>~350</b>		<b>~351-355</b>	<b>1,006-1,010</b>			
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>35%</b>		<b>35%</b>				

*Americas, Australia, and New Zealand*

Argentina				23 <sup>351</sup>			
Australia	70 <sup>352</sup> -90 <sup>353</sup>	2 ICR <sup>354</sup>	30-40 <sup>355</sup>	232 <sup>356</sup>	9 <sup>357</sup>	1 <sup>358</sup>	48 <sup>359</sup>
Brazil				3 <sup>360</sup>			
Canada	26 <sup>361</sup>	18 <sup>362</sup>	18 <sup>363</sup>	110-120 <sup>364</sup>	2 ICR <sup>365</sup>	1 ICR <sup>366</sup>	19 <sup>367</sup>
Chile				1 <sup>368</sup>			
New Zealand			11 <sup>369</sup>	12 <sup>370</sup>			
Trinidad & Tobago	60 <sup>371</sup>		30 <sup>372</sup>	130 <sup>373</sup> -250 <sup>374</sup>	4 ICR <sup>375</sup>	1 ICR <sup>376</sup>	5 <sup>377</sup>
United States	14 <sup>378</sup>	2 ICR <sup>379</sup>	38 <sup>380</sup>	272 <sup>381</sup>	14 <sup>382</sup>	4 <sup>383</sup>	59 <sup>384</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>170-190</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>127-137</b>	<b>783-913</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>19-24%</b>		<b>14-17%</b>		<b>22%</b>	<b>5%</b>	

*Southern Asia*

Afghanistan							385
Bangladesh	1 ICR <sup>386</sup>		2 ICR <sup>387</sup>	40 <sup>388</sup>			25 <sup>389</sup>
India	19-22 ICR <sup>390</sup>		6 <sup>391</sup> -8 ICR <sup>392</sup>	67 <sup>393</sup> -75 <sup>394</sup>		1 ICR <sup>395</sup>	5 <sup>396</sup> -11 <sup>397</sup>
Maldives	17 <sup>398</sup>	13 ICR <sup>399</sup>	12 ICR <sup>400</sup>	61 <sup>401</sup> -200 <sup>402</sup>			
Pakistan	12 ICR <sup>403</sup>		15 ICR <sup>404</sup>	100 <sup>405</sup>			
Sri Lanka	7 ICR <sup>406</sup>	1 ICR <sup>407</sup>	1 ICR <sup>408</sup>	32 <sup>409</sup> -36 <sup>410</sup>		1-4 ICR <sup>411</sup>	1-4 ICR <sup>412</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>56-59</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36-38</b>	<b>300-451</b>		<b>2-5</b>	<b>31-40</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>12-20%</b>		<b>8-13%</b>			<b>5-16%</b>	

*Sub-Saharan Africa*

Kenya			2 ICR <sup>413</sup>	100 <sup>414</sup>			
Madagascar				3 <sup>415</sup>			

Senegal				1 ICR <sup>416</sup>			1 ICR <sup>417</sup>
Somalia				1 ICR <sup>418</sup>			
South Africa	10-15 <sup>419</sup>		7 <sup>420</sup>	140 <sup>421</sup> -163 <sup>422</sup>	3 <sup>423</sup>	1 ICR <sup>424</sup>	11 <sup>425</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10-15</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>245-268</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>4-6%</b>		<b>3-4%</b>		<b>25%</b>	<b>8%</b>	
<b>Global Totals</b>							
<b>Total all countries</b>	<b>6,173-6,577</b>	<b>798-891</b>	<b>6,797-6,902</b>	<b>44,279-52,808</b>	<b>1,460-1,525</b>	<b>604-609</b>	<b>7,712-8,202</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>12-15%</b>		<b>13-16%</b>		<b>18-20%</b>	<b>7-8%</b>	
<b>As a proportion of returned women and minors</b>					<b>22-25% of minors that were in theater have returned</b>	<b>9% of women that were in theater have returned</b>	<b>15-19% of all persons that were in theater have returned</b>
* ICR refers to "individual cases recorded." ICRs are not comprehensive and offer little numerical value to the dataset, but they do indicate that indeed women and minors were departing from, or returning to, these countries, prompting the need for further examination.							

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# When Terrorists Stay Home: The Evolving Threat to Europe from Frustrated Travelers

By Robin Simcox

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**For several years, ‘frustrated travelers’ unable to make it to Syria have responded with plots targeting the countries in which they reside. In Europe, most individuals attempted to travel between 2014 and 2016, when the Islamic State was at the peak of its power. Thwarted in these attempts, frustrated travelers sometimes launched rapid, unsophisticated attacks, rather than meticulously planned ones, in order to contribute to the Islamic State’s cause from their country of residence. In total, the 25 frustrated traveler plots that were set in motion in Europe between January 2014 and June 2019 resulted in eight attacks and led to 18 injuries and seven deaths. These plots involved a disproportionate number of females and minors, and more often than not, perpetrators were in contact with the Islamic State.**

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**I**n September 2018, Dutch authorities thwarted an alleged major Islamic State-inspired plot that was being planned in the Netherlands. As part of their raids, police discovered 100 kilograms of fertilizer and several firearms.<sup>1</sup> Three of the individuals arrested in this cell had allegedly previously made unsuccessful attempts to travel to Syria and, according to a United Nations Security Council report, this plot “demonstrated that ‘frustrated travelers’ remain a problem.”<sup>2</sup>

Six months later, two individuals who met online were arrested in Italy for allegedly planning attacks in the Islamic State’s name. Their plans to travel to the ‘caliphate’ were redundant, as there was no longer a viable caliphate for them to travel to; the last remaining towns controlled by the Islamic State in Syria had been liberated the previous month. So, instead, they allegedly sought to strike in Italy.<sup>3</sup>

One cell plotted because the caliphate no longer existed; the other because they were not able to reach it even when it did. This helps demonstrate why there has been a persistent risk posed by frustrated travelers. With this in mind, this article assesses whether the problem is on the rise or decline in Europe. It also studies which trends have emerged from previous frustrated traveler plots in Europe over the past five and a half years.

## Criteria

The author’s dataset on plots includes successful attacks carried out by frustrated travelers (defined as a terrorist attack leading to

injuries and/or deaths). It also includes failed plots carried out by frustrated travelers (defined as those that were thwarted by authorities, or abandoned by the perpetrators, and led to zero injuries and deaths).

To be included in this study, an individual needed to both live in Europe and to have physically made an attempt to leave his/her country of residence in Europe in order to connect with terrorists overseas; been legally barred from doing so; or been reported to the authorities for intending to do so. Expressing a vague willingness to travel was deemed not suitable for inclusion.

Included in the dataset was one Islamism-inspired act of violence, rather than what might traditionally be regarded as terrorism: in September 2016, a 25-year-old convert to Islam strangled his own mother to death in France after she prevented him from leaving for Syria.<sup>4</sup>

Also of note, in the late summer/early fall of September 2016, Sarah Hervouët and Ines Madani were allegedly involved in a series of separate plots targeting France. Both have been charged with terrorism offenses in France related to this plotting,<sup>5</sup> with Madani having already been found guilty of using the encrypted messaging app Telegram to encourage others to carry out attacks in France and to travel to Syria.<sup>6</sup> Madani and Hervouët allegedly plotted once alongside each other and sometimes with others who did not try to travel to Syria. However, in this study, their plots from this time-frame are categorized as a single unit.<sup>7</sup>

## Destination: Syria

Based on these criteria, between January 2014 and through June 30, 2019, there were 25 plots involving frustrated travelers attempting to depart from Europe.\* Eight of the plots resulted in attacks and 17 of the plots failed. The 25 plots pertained to 32 separate individuals. Thirty-one of these 32 (97 percent) intended to travel to Syria.

The only exception was Lewis Ludlow, a British citizen who was jailed for life (having to serve a minimum of 15 years) for planning

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*\* July 22, 2019 update: This number reflected the author’s best efforts to create a comprehensive database of frustrated traveler plots from open source information, which is a difficult task for two main reasons. The first is the large volume of open source reports in different countries and different languages. The second is that media reports on terrorist plots may not always mention the frustrated traveler dimension. After this article was published, the author was made aware of a number of frustrated traveler plots in Belgium and France not included in his dataset and will include these, and any other additional cases he is made aware of, in expanding his database in the future. He thanks Guy Van Vlieden and Jean-Charles Brisard, respectively, for highlighting the additional cases.*



a vehicular attack against civilians on Oxford Street in central London. Ludlow had tried to fly to the Philippines two months before his eventual arrest, yet had been prevented from doing so at the airport and had his passport confiscated.<sup>8</sup> Ludlow was attempting to travel to the city of Zamboanga on the Zamboanga Peninsula, a distance 160 kilometers to the west of Marawi, the city controlled by the Islamic State for a period of five months in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

Four months after Philippine forces regained control of Marawi, Ludlow made his attempt to travel to that country. British authorities suspected Ludlow was going to Zamboanga to participate in acts of terrorism.<sup>10</sup> In April 2019, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte warned against travel to Zamboanga as it was a stronghold for Abu Sayyaf,<sup>11</sup> a Philippines-based jihadi group closely tied to the Islamic State.<sup>a</sup>

Of those who attempted to travel to Syria, only one was known to have attempted to do so before the Islamic State's June 2014 declaration of a caliphate. Nadir Syed tried unsuccessfully to travel to Syria from the United Kingdom in January 2014, with his application for a passport being rejected. He instead planned to behead a poppy-seller or police officer, leading to his November 2014 arrest. Syed was subsequently jailed for life, having to serve a minimum of 15 years.<sup>12</sup>

Whether an Iraqi Kurd known as Hardi N. tried to journey to Syria before the announcement of a caliphate has not been publicly disclosed. He had attempted to travel to Syria from the Netherlands on an unspecified date in 2014 to join the al-Qa`ida affiliate there, Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>b</sup> Hardi N. spent three months in jail in the Netherlands as a result, having been convicted for planning to travel abroad for terrorist purposes.<sup>13</sup> In September 2018, he was arrested as the suspected ringleader of the aforementioned cell planning a major attack in the Netherlands. It is alleged two other individuals who had tried and failed to get to Syria in 2015 (i.e., after the declaration of the caliphate) were part of the same cell.<sup>14</sup> At the time of writing (July 2019), no additional information has been publicly disclosed about the status of the case against them.

The timing of most of the attempts to travel means frustrated travelers would struggle to credibly claim they were trying to go to Syria for aid work or to join non-Islamist rebel groups. Almost all were traveling with the knowledge that a caliphate had been declared there.

### Year of Travel and Year of Plot

The years between 2014 and 2016, when the Islamic State was at the apex of its power and influence, were when most individuals attempted to travel. Of the 32 individuals, 21 (66 percent) attempted to travel between 2014 and 2016. Six had attempted travel in 2014,

a In July 2014, Abu Sayyaf's emir, Isnilon Hapilon, pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. (See Maria A. Ressa, "Senior Abu Sayyaf leader swears oath to ISIS," Rappler, August 4, 2014.) Abu Sayyaf's current relationship with the Islamic State, following Hapilon's death at the hands of the Philippines government's army in October 2017, is ambiguous. However, the Islamic State has claimed credit for terrorist attacks that occur in traditional Abu Sayyaf territory. (See Thomas Joscelyn, "Islamic State claims suicide bombings at Catholic cathedral in the Philippines," FDD's Long War Journal, January 27, 2019.)

b A conflicting report states that he was going to join the Islamic State. See "Police round off terror raids, more details emerge about suspects," Dutch News, September 28, 2018.

10 in 2015, and five in 2016. The contrast as the Islamic State began to suffer military reversals and lose territory is stark: only two individuals tried to travel in 2017; just one in 2018; and two in 2019.

There were six individuals whose initial date of travel was unknown. However, by looking at the dates when their plots were thwarted, it can be surmised that most of their initial attempts to travel were also likely to be roughly when the Islamic State was thriving. Of the six, three had their plots foiled in the fall of 2016 and three between May to September 2017.

While there were several people blocked from heading to Syria in 2014, there was only one frustrated traveler failed plot that year: Nadir Syed's. There was a slight increase in plots in 2015, to three, before a jump in 2016, when there was nine frustrated traveler plots. There was then a slow decline from that point: seven in 2017 and three in 2018. However, at time of writing (July 2019), there have already been two frustrated traveler plots in 2019. One was the aforementioned plot in Italy, with the two alleged perpetrators being arrested in April 2019.<sup>15</sup> The other was in France, where it is alleged a 17-year-old frustrated traveler was part of a broader cell suspected of likely targeting the police in a firearms attack. This individual was arrested in February 2017, aged 15, while trying to travel to Syria and was jailed for three years (with two years suspended).<sup>16</sup>

If that ratio was replicated over the next six months, this year would see a slight increase in frustrated travelers compared to 2018.

### Target

Thirteen (52 percent) of the 25 frustrated traveler plots were targeting France. Four (16 percent) were targeting the United Kingdom and three (12 percent) were targeting Germany. The remaining five plots were against Sweden (twice), Italy, the Netherlands, and Romania (one each).

France, the United Kingdom, and Germany are the European countries<sup>17</sup> most frequently targeted by Islamist terrorists, so it is normal to also see them highly represented in plots by frustrated travelers. What is perhaps most surprising is that another country that has been targeted frequently by Islamist terrorists—Belgium—is not represented at all.<sup>\*\*18</sup> Why this may be is unclear. While, according to International Center for Counter-Terrorism data, 584 individuals successfully traveled from Belgium to Syria, there was another 99 who were prevented from doing so.<sup>19</sup> None, however, are known to have then planned an attack in retaliation.<sup>\*\*</sup>

### Profile

Of the 32 frustrated travel plotters, 23 were male (72 percent) and nine were female (28 percent). This is a disproportionately high number of women. By comparison, one study of all "Islamism-relat-

*\*\* July 22, 2019 update: This finding requires revision. After the publication of this study, the Belgian journalist Guy Van Vlierden drew attention to two frustrated traveler plots in Belgium not included in the author's database published in this article. See Guy Van Vlierden, "In Belgium, at least two plots by frustrated travelers' have been thwarted actually ...," Twitter, July 19, 2019.*

ed offenses<sup>c</sup> in the United Kingdom between 1998 and 2015 found that only seven percent were committed by women.<sup>20</sup> In that entire time period, only three women had attempted to carry out a terrorist attack, with most convictions related to support roles (assisting an offender or fundraising, for example).<sup>21</sup> The presence of so many females among frustrated travel plotters is stark.

Converts were involved in eight plots overall. Six of these convert plots pertained to France, one to Italy, and one to the United Kingdom. One plot, from France in October 2016, saw two converts plan together.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in total, nine of the 32 individuals (28 percent) were converts to Islam. By way of comparison, the aforementioned study of all “Islamism-related offenses” in the United Kingdom between 1998 and 2015 found that 16 percent were converts. A study of all al-Qa`ida-related offenses in the United States between 1997 and 2011 found that 23 percent were converts.<sup>23</sup> Four of the nine converts in frustrated traveler plots were females.

Seven of the total plots (28 percent) involved minors. Five related to France, one to Germany, and one the United Kingdom. In one plot—the one involving two converts in France in October 2016—two minors allegedly planned together. Therefore, eight of the 32 individual frustrated travelers were minors (25 percent).

The youngest individual to be implicated was a 15-year-old female—Safia S.—who made it from Germany to Turkey before being collected by her mother. While in Turkey, German prosecutors alleged that members of the Islamic State encouraged her to carry out an attack in Germany—which she did in February 2016, stabbing and injuring a policeman in Hanover.<sup>24</sup> Safia S. was subsequently jailed for six years, having been convicted of attempted murder, grievous bodily harm, and supporting a foreign terrorist organization (the Islamic State).<sup>25</sup>

## Lethality of Attacks

Eight of the 25 plots (32 percent) led to injuries or deaths. Six took place in France, one in Germany, and one in Sweden. One occurred in 2015; five occurred in 2016; and two in 2017. In total, frustrated traveler attacks led to 18 injuries and seven deaths over these eight plots.

The most lethal frustrated traveler attack was that carried out by Rakhmat Akilov in Stockholm in April 2017. He injured 10 and killed five when he drove a hijacked truck into civilians on the busy shopping street of Drottninggatan. However, this attack could have

been even more deadly; an explosive device comprised of gas canisters and nails that was stowed in the back of his truck failed to detonate properly.<sup>26</sup> Akilov was subsequently tried in Sweden, where he was found guilty of murder and attempted murder and jailed for life in June 2018.<sup>27</sup>

## Rapidity of Planning

Fourteen of the 32 individuals (44 percent) profiled either had their plot thwarted or successfully carried it out within one year of their initial attempt to get to Syria failing. This suggests that failed attempts at travel are a possible indicator of potential, future attack planning occurring within a relatively short time period.

Of these 14, seven acted within three months, a particularly rapid response to being prevented from traveling for terrorist purposes. Another two acted within six months, and five between six to 12 months. This speed of action partially speaks to these individuals' desire to act rapidly rather than meticulously. For example, French citizen Moussa Coulibaly was stopped in Turkey on his way to Syria on January 29, 2015; he stabbed and injured three soldiers in Nice just five days later.<sup>28</sup>

Eight other individuals either had their plot thwarted or successfully carried it out between one to two years after their first failed travel attempt. Another three either had their plot thwarted or successfully carried it out within two to three years. With one individual—Hardi N. in the Netherlands—it was even longer from his first attempt to travel to being arrested on suspicion of planning an attack. He first attempted to travel in 2014 and his alleged plot was thwarted in September 2018. Hardi N. had spent part of this time—three months—in jail, having been convicted in the Netherlands for attempting to travel to Syria in the first place.<sup>29</sup>

With six individuals, their initial date of attempted travel was unknown.

## Plot Sophistication

The attacks planned by frustrated travelers were relatively unsophisticated. The largest amount—nine of the 25 plots (36 percent)—involved solely the use of an edged weapon. There was no discernible trend among the remaining 16. Two plots involved just explosives, two involved just firearms, and two involved both. There was one example of a vehicular plot; an explosives plot; a firearm with an edged weapon plot; and a combined vehicular and explosives attack. As earlier referenced, one attack simply involved strangling. On four occasions, the type of weapon to be used was unspecified or the plot was insufficiently developed for authorities to discern.

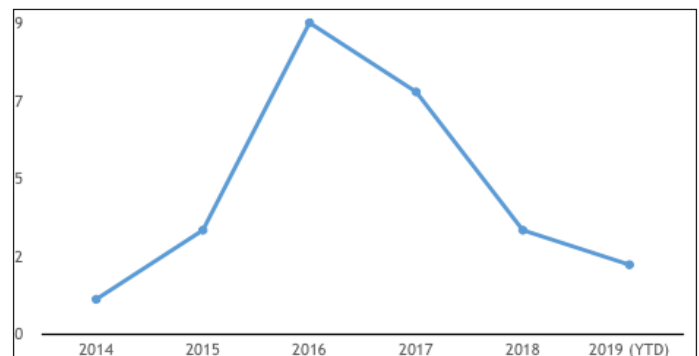


Figure 1: Number of Frustrated Traveler Plots Executed/Failed in Europe

c According to that study, the criteria for what constitutes an “Islamism-related offense” was “a self-proclaimed Islamism-inspired motive (i.e. a suicide video or letter claiming affiliation to a proscribed Islamist organisation or discussing key jihadist concepts, such as martyrdom and jihad); An Islamism-inspired motive identified and proven as such during trial; Membership of a proscribed Islamist organisation or links to members or associates for purposes that demonstrably, and knowingly, furthered an Islamism-inspired terrorist-cause; Provision of material or financial support to a member or an associate of a proscribed Islamist organisation knowing that it may be used for terrorist purposes; Frequent contact with a member or an associate of a proscribed Islamist organisation as part of the offence; Evidence of foreign travel to join and fight for or receive terrorist training from a militant Islamist organisation; Possession (at time of arrest) of jihadist material (including, but not limited to, teachings from prominent jihadist ideologues as well as documents, audio recordings and videos that provide instructional material for Islamism inspired purposes and/or encourage or glorify acts of jihadist terrorism).” See Hannah Stuart, “Islamist Terrorism Analysis of Offences and Attacks in the UK (1998-2015),” Henry Jackson Society, March 2017, pp. xiv-xv.

The most sophisticated plot by a frustrated traveler was thwarted in Germany in June 2018. Sief Allah H., a Tunisian asylum seeker believed to be in contact with the Islamic State, had been prevented from getting to Syria on two occasions in the fall of 2017. Both times, he was prevented from crossing the border in Turkey.<sup>30</sup> With these plans thwarted, he is then alleged to have successfully produced ricin before being arrested in Cologne prior to being able to execute his attack on an unspecified target. This was the first time that ricin was successfully produced as part of an alleged Islamist plot in Europe.

### Lone Plotters vs. Frustrated Traveler Cells

The fact that there was 25 plots involving frustrated travelers but 32 separate individual plotters shows that they sometimes planned and plotted together.

One example of this comes from France. Ismael K., Djebriil Amara, and Antoine Frèrejean were based in the south of France, met online, and often communicated that way. All were interested in traveling to Syria. Yet Ismael K.'s mother had reported him to the authorities (he was only 17), leading to him being questioned by authorities in November 2014 and deciding it was impossible to make the journey to the caliphate.<sup>31</sup> Ismael K. was in contact with an Islamic State member online, 'Abu Hussain el-Britani', who encouraged him to carry out an attack in France instead.<sup>32</sup> While the author has not been able to definitively establish it is the same person, 'Abu Hussain el-Britani' was also a *nom de guerre* adopted by Junaid Hussain, a British citizen based in Syria who British intelligence concluded had used social media to plan attacks in the West "on an unprecedented scale."<sup>33</sup> Hussain was killed in a U.S. airstrike in Raqqa, Syria, in August 2015.<sup>34</sup>

For his part, Amara later told investigators he did not feel "able" to make the trip.<sup>35</sup> However, inspired by the Charlie Hebdo attacks of January 2015, Amara began to subsequently plan an attack on Fort Béar military base in the Pyrénées-Orientales.<sup>36</sup> Yet with Ismael K. expressing willingness but his enthusiasm only tepid, Amara says he shelved the plot by March 2015.<sup>37</sup> The cell was arrested four months later. In April 2018, all three were found guilty of committing criminal conspiracy. They were jailed for nine years each.<sup>37</sup>

It was not always the case that the members of a frustrated traveler cell knew each other well. Another example from France involved Adel Kermiche and Abdelmalik Petitjean. Both had allegedly tried to go to Syria—Adel Kermiche on two occasions, in March 2015 and May 2015,<sup>38</sup> and Petitjean in June 2016.<sup>39</sup> With their plans thwarted, it is alleged they decided to storm a church in Normandy, slitting the throat of a priest, Jacques Hamel, in July 2016. Both declared their allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>40</sup> However, they had only allegedly been in contact with each other for the first time four days before the attack, via the encrypted messaging app Chatogram.<sup>41</sup> Kermiche and Petitjean are yet to face trial for their alleged role in Hamel's murder.

### Role of the Islamic State

In 13 of the 25 plots (52 percent), it is known that one or more cell

member was in contact with the Islamic State. In 11 of these 13 plots, the contact was solely electronic, as opposed to face-to-face. One exception to this was Bilal Taghi, as two of his brothers had successfully joined the Islamic State and were killed fighting on its behalf.<sup>42</sup> In September 2016, Taghi stabbed two guards in the prison he was incarcerated in for having attempted travel to Syria. He is due to be tried in 2019 for the attempted murder of the guards and faces life in prison if convicted.<sup>43</sup>

The other plotter who had face-to-face contact with the Islamic State was Safia S. from Germany, who met Islamic State members while in Turkey.

As noted, far more numerous were the examples of Islamic State fighters providing encouragement or guidance solely electronically. An example from France involved Hakim Marnissi, who tried to travel to Syria twice, in October and December 2014.<sup>44</sup> With both attempts unsuccessful (for uncertain reasons), he was barred from leaving France in February 2015. However, Marnissi was in contact with a French citizen called Mustapha Mokeddem who had made it to Syria in December 2014 and joined the Islamic State. It was Mokeddem who was responsible for radicalizing Marnissi prior to his first attempt to travel to Syria.<sup>45</sup> When Marnissi was banned from leaving France in February 2015, Mokeddem encouraged him to strike in France instead. Marnissi subsequently acquired knives in preparation for an attack on soldiers at a French naval base, during which he hoped to be 'martyred.' He was arrested in November 2015 and eventually jailed for 10 years for criminal conspiracy.<sup>46</sup>

However, a lack of hands-on and personal, operational guidance from the Islamic State was not an impediment for several others, who proved to be self-starters. One example saw Aydin Sevigin fail in two attempts to travel from Sweden to Syria in the summer of 2015, being stopped first in Greece and then in Turkey. He decided to carry out a suicide bombing in Sweden instead. Sevigin was arrested in January 2016 and sentenced to five years in jail six months later, having been charged with preparation for a terrorist crime.<sup>47</sup>

### Conclusion

The frequency of frustrated travelers planning attacks in Europe has dipped from its 2016 peak. These plots are sometimes unsophisticated and over two-thirds of the time (68 percent) were thwarted by the authorities. This is possibly because these individuals are already on the security radar for attempting to travel to a conflict zone in the first place.

Furthermore, the destruction of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria should theoretically lead to a further reduction in frustrated travelers, as there is no longer a 'state' governed by terrorists to travel to. There is some reason to be optimistic that this will prove to be the case: the trend lines point to frustrated traveler plots in Europe decreasing in rate from their 2016 peak.

However, frustrated traveler plots have outlived the existence of the caliphate. In current form, there is a possibility there may even be a very small uptick in Europe in 2019 when compared to the previous year.

It should also be noted that any wane in this phenomenon is dependent on a new conflict zone failing to emerge that can draw foreign fighters on anything approaching the scale that Syria did. The likelihood of this remains to be seen, but while the nucleus of the Islamic State's caliphate has been removed, the Islamic State retains a presence across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. In the April 2019 video of Abu Bakr-al Baghdadi that was released by

d Djebriil Amara has stated that Antoine Frèrejean refused to take part in the plot, so he is excluded from the dataset. Marianne Enault, "Projet d'attentat de Fort Béar: le récit rare de la radicalization," *Journal Du Dimanche*, April 9, 2018.

the Islamic State's media arm, he emphasized that despite recent military reverses, the Islamic State had carried out attacks in eight different countries. The group is long known to have had a presence in Yemen, Libya, and Afghanistan. However, al-Baghdadi also specifically referred to the April 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka, pledges of allegiance received by Islamist groups in Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as protests taking place in Sudan and Algeria.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, the Islamic State has potential options in terms of areas in which it can once more seek to try and control territory. These factors mean that while frustrated traveler plots may not be the most numerous kind of plot Europe faces, they are certainly not a phenomenon about which policymakers should be complacent.

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<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>First Attempt at Travel Thwarted</i>	<i>Desired Location</i>	<i>Plot Attempted/ Abandoned/ Thwarted</i>	<i>Country Targeted</i>	<i>Time Lapsed Before Plot Attempted/ Abandoned/ Thwarted</i>	<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Injuries</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Confirmed Contact with the Islamic State</i>	<i>Form of Contact</i>	<i>Presence of Converts</i>	<i>Alleged Plot Description</i>
Nadir Syed	M	21	Jan. 2014	Syria	Nov. 2014	U.K.	11 mo.	Edged weapon	0	0	No	N/A	No	Planned to behead either a poppy-seller or a police officer.
Moussa Coulibaly	M	30	Jan. 2015	Syria	Feb. 2015	France	1 mo. or below	Edged weapon	3	0	No	N/A	No	Stabbed soldiers outside a Jewish community center.
Ismael K; Djibril Amara	M; M	17; 23	Nov. 2014	Syria	Mar. 2015	France	4 mo.; 4 mo.	Firearm; edged weapon	0	0	Yes	Electronic	No	Planned to attack Fort Béar military base in Pyrénées-Orientales and behead a soldier.
Hakim Marnissi	M	25	Oct. 2014	Syria	Nov. 2015	France	13 mo.	Edged weapon	0	0	Yes	Electronic	No	Planned to attack a naval base in Toulon.
Aydin Sevigin	M	20	Jun. 2015	Syria	Jan. 2016	Sweden	7 mo.	Explosives	0	0	No	N/A	No	Planned to carry out a suicide bombing at an unspecified location.
Safia S.	F	15	Jan. 2016	Syria	Feb. 2016	Germany	1 mo. or below	Edged weapon	1	0	Yes	Electronic; face-to-face	No	Stabbed a police officer at a train station in Hannover.
Abdelmalik Petitjean; Adel Kermiche	M; M	19; 19	Jun. 2016; Mar. 2015	Syria	Jul. 2016	France	1 mo. or below; 16 mo.	Edged weapon	0	1	Yes	Electronic	No	Allegedly slit the throat of a Catholic priest during Mass in Normandy.
Bilal Taghi	M	24	Jan. 2015	Syria	Sep. 2016	France	21 mo.	Edged weapon	2	0	Yes	Face-to-face	No	Allegedly stabbed wardens in Osny prison.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>First Attempt at Travel Thwarted</i>	<i>Desired Location</i>	<i>Plot Attempted/Abandoned/Thwarted</i>	<i>Country Targeted</i>	<i>Time Lapsed Before Plot Attempted/Abandoned/Thwarted</i>	<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Injuries</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Confirmed Contact with the Islamic State</i>	<i>Form of Contact</i>	<i>Presence of Converts</i>	<i>Alleged Plot Description</i>
Sarah Hervouët; Ines Madani	F; F	23; 19	Mar. 2015; unknown	Syria	Sep. 2016	France	18 mo.; unknown	Edged weapon	1	0	Yes	Electronic	Yes (Hervouët)	Alleged plan to be 'martyred' at Cogolin Town Hall (Hervouët); alleged attempt to detonate gas cylinders near Notre Dame Cathedral (Madani); stabbing and attempted stabbing of police, Boussy-Saint-Antoine (Hervouët and Madani).
Unspecified	M	25	2016	Syria	Sep. 2016	France	1 mo. or below	Wire	0	1	No	N/A	Yes	Strangled his mother in Le Havre for her attempts to block him traveling to Syria.
Unspecified	F	17	2014 (approx.)	Syria	Sep. 2016	France	24 mo.	Un- speci- ficed; undevel- oped	0	0	Yes	Electronic	Yes	Suspected of planning an unspecified form of attack in Nice.
Unspec- ified; Unspecified	F; F	Un- spec- ified	Unknown; unknown	Syria	Oct. 2016	France	Unknown; unknown	Un- speci- ficed; undevel- oped	0	0	Yes	Electronic	Yes (both)	Suspected of planning an unspecified form of attack, arrested in Seine-Saint-Denis.
Magomed- Ali C	M	31; 23	Jun. 2015	Syria	Oct. 2016	Germany	16 mo.	Explo- sives	0	0	No	N/A	No	Alleged to be planning an explosives attack in Berlin, possibly on a shopping mall.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>First Attempt at Travel Thwarted</i>	<i>Desired Location</i>	<i>Plot Attempted/Abandoned/Thwarted</i>	<i>Country Targeted</i>	<i>Time Lapsed Before Plot Attempted/Abandoned/Thwarted</i>	<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Injuries</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Confirmed Contact with the Islamic State</i>	<i>Form of Contact</i>	<i>Presence of Converts</i>	<i>Alleged Plot Description</i>
Thomas Sauret	M	20	Nov. 2015	Syria	Feb. 2017	France	14 mo.	Explosives	0	0	No	N/A	Yes	Alleged to be planning a suicide attack on an unspecified location, arrested in Montpellier.
Rakhmat Akilov	M	39	2015	Syria	Apr. 2017	Sweden	24 mo. (approx.)*	Explosives; vehicle	10	5	Yes	Electronic	No	Drove a hijacked truck into civilians in central Stockholm.
Safaa Boular	F	17	Aug. 2016	Syria	Apr. 2017	U.K.	8 mo.	Firearm; explosives	0	0	Yes	Electronic	No	Planned an explosives attack on civilians at the British Museum.
Rizlaine Boular	F	21	Aug. 2016	Syria	Apr. 2017	U.K.	8 mo.	Edged weapon	0	0	Yes	Electronic	No	Planned a knife attack on civilians in Westminster, London.
Unspecified	M	34	Unknown	Syria	May 2017	France	Unknown	Firearm	0	0	No	N/A	Yes	Confessed to planning an attack on military personnel at Evreux Airbase.
Unspecified	M	39	Unknown	Syria	Jun. 2017	Romania	Unknown	Unspecified; undeveloped	0	0	No	N/A	No	Alleged to be planning an unspecified form on attack on a U.S. military base in Romania.
Unspecified	F	15	Unknown	Syria	Sep. 2017	France	Unknown	Edged weapon	1	0	No	N/A	No	Stabbed a police officer in an unspecified location in France.
Lewis Ludlow	M	26	Feb. 2018	Philippines	Apr. 2018	U.K.	2 mo.	Vehicle	0	0	Yes	Electronic	Yes	Planned a vehicular attack on civilians in Oxford Street, central London.

Name	Gender	Age	First Attempt at Travel Thwarted	Desired Location	Plot Attempted/Abandoned/Thwarted	Country Targeted	Time Lapsed Before Plot Attempted/Abandoned/Thwarted	Weapon	Injuries	Deaths	Confirmed Contact with the Islamic State	Form of Contact	Presence of Converts	Alleged Plot Description
Sief Allah H.	M	29	Fall 2017	Syria	Jun. 2018	Germany	8 mo. (approx.)*	CBRN [ricin]	0	0	Yes	Electronic	No	Alleged to have planned a ricin attack on civilians in an unspecified location, arrested in Cologne.
Hardi N.; Wail el-A; Nadeem S.	M; M; M	34; 21; 26	2014; 2015; 2015	Syria	Sep. 2018	Netherlands	48 mo.; 36 mo. (approx.)*	Firearm; explosives	0	0	No	N/A	No	Alleged to have planned coordinated explosives and firearms attacks on an unspecified target in the Netherlands.
Giuseppe Frittatta; Ossama Gafhir	M; M	25; 18	Mar. 2019 (approx.); Mar. 2019 (approx.)	Syria	Apr. 2019	Italy	1 mo. or below; 1 mo. or below	Unspecified; undeveloped	0	0	No	N/A	No	Alleged to be planning an unspecified form of attack on an unspecified location, arrested in northern Italy.
M.C.	M	17	Feb. 2017	Syria	Apr. 2019	France	26 mo.	Firearm	0	0	No	N/A	Yes (Frittatta)	Alleged to be planning a firearms attack, possibly on a police officer, in Paris.

**Figure 2**

**Note:** Data for the exact month of travel is not always specified, even if the year is. When the month of travel is completely unknown, but the year of travel is specified, the author has calculated between full calendar years. For example, it is known that Hardi N. first attempted to travel to Syria in 2014 and had his plot thwarted in September 2018. So, in these statistics, the time between attempt to travel and then plot thwarted is 4 years or 48 months.



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