COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER
at West Point

Then and Now:
Comparing the Flow of Foreign Fighters to AQI and the Islamic State

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Cover Photos: Personnel documents from al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the Islamic State

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Introduction

It is not known if Ahmad `Abd al-Sayyid Hamad and Murad Khalid al-Tayhi knew each another. Yet, they shared a common bond. A number of factors about the two young men were similar. Both were from Libya, and both grew up in the eastern city of Darnah. In search of adventure and greater purpose, both also decided to leave their homes—and they were some of the first ones from their town to go. They ended up in a similar place: Ahmad in Iraq and Murad in Syria. Their common bond? Both wanted to become suicide bombers, albeit at different times, for the group that now calls itself the Islamic State.

Despite the connections that these two Libyans shared, there are also a number of important differences between them. When Ahmad left home he was 23; Murad was 15, eight years younger. Seven years, and multiple twists and turns in world events, separated their journeys. Ahmad arrived in Iraq on the same day as three other Libyans (who were likely his travel companions); Murad, however, appears to have been the only Libyan foreign fighter to arrive in Syria on the day he entered that country. Lastly, while they both ended up with derivatives of the same organization, the groups that Ahmad and Murad volunteered to serve were run differently and had different levels of appeal.

A lot had changed in seven years, but many things also remained the same. Using two different sets of data derived from internal, bureaucratic documents produced by the Islamic State (and its predecessor group) during two distinct periods of time (2006-2007 and 2011-2014), this report empirically evaluates these differences. It does so across three dimensions. First, it outlines the similarities and differences that exist in the background of the foreign fighters who joined the Islamic State during separate blocks of time. Second, it provides insight into the local travel and flow of foreign fighters across time, and the mobilization infrastructure that the Islamic State had in place to facilitate their travel into Syria or Iraq. Third, it details changes in the preferences of foreign fighters, as reflected by the roles they wanted to fill within the organization.

When all of this information is evaluated, it reveals how the make-up, scale, and scope of the Iraq- and Syria-bound foreign fighter problem has changed and become significantly more complex over the last decade. It confirms trends that many commentators have already identified, such as how the flow of recruits to the Islamic State during the 2011-2014 timeframe was stronger and much more consistent than the flow of foreigners who joined the group in 2006-2007. Indeed, this report finds that the average number of recruits who arrived at the Islamic State on each day of entry during that latter period was more than double the amount observed several years earlier. This report also provides new and more specific insights, such as how those recruits who joined the Islamic State in 2011-2014 were several years older on average and included people from a wider range of ages; came from 50 additional countries and were generally more geographically representative of their home countries (which reveals how the Islamic State has become more popular across a broader swath of both global *and* local territory over time); had a broader mix of backgrounds, skills, and experiences; and were less interested in becoming suicide bombers. The recruits who joined the Islamic State during that latter time period also traveled alone more frequently. When they didn't travel alone, they arrived in larger-sized groups and were often accompanied by members of their families. Despite the broad geographic diversity observed from those who joined the Islamic State during 2011-2014, the data also indicates that a select number of cities were 'hot spots' and sent groups of recruits from the same hometowns in higher frequencies than other areas.

Data: Overview, Limitations, and Caveats

Two sets of data were used to inform this study. The first collection is a database of 584 personnel records of foreign fighters who sought to join the Islamic State's predecessor group, al-Qa`ida in Iraq

(AQI), during a 13-month period in 2006-2007.[1] That collection of material, referred to in this study as the 'Sinjar records' (because it was captured by the U.S. military during a raid near the Iraqi town of Sinjar in September 2007), included processing forms that incoming recruits filled out once they had reached AQI.[2] The second is a collection of 4,119 Islamic State personnel records of foreigners who joined that group over a 47-month period between 2011-2014, which a defector provided to NBC News and other media outlets.[3]

It is clear that the earlier and later incarnations of the Islamic State were interested in collecting much of the same basic information from their incoming recruits, a factor that allows for a comparison of various fields that exist across the two sets of data. Indeed, many aspects of the forms are similar, and many of the questions asked of recruits are more or less the same, to include the fighter's name, alias, address, phone numbers, date of birth, previous occupation, border facilitator, fighting preference, items surrendered, and date of entry.

Despite the similarities between the two datasets, there are also a number of important differences. The Islamic State documents appear to display a progression and evolution in how the organization thinks about the data needed on its recruits and how to use that data. Most obvious is the increased amount of detail solicited by each form. The AQI form has 13 fields, whereas the Islamic State's entry form has 23 fields. As an example of the differences, while the Islamic State documents captured data on the educational background of the fighters and those who recommended or vouched for them, the Sinjar records did not. Likewise, the form used by AQI collected data on the specific travel route fighters took to reach Syria. The Islamic State form asked what countries recruits had been to in the past, but not specifically what route they used to arrive in Syria. A copy of the forms used by both AQI and the Islamic State have been included in the appendix.

For some of the categories that appear the same or similar, there are slight differences that make direct comparisons between the Sinjar and Islamic State documents somewhat problematic. For example, while both forms captured information about the personal items that each recruit brought with them, AQI placed more emphasis on cataloging data about the amount of money each fighter had. The Islamic State also cataloged some of this data, but for one reason or another, data about each Islamic State recruit's finances do not appear as frequently. This does not mean that comparisons across this field—and others where there also appears to some type of data asymmetry—are not useful, but rather that researchers need to be aware of these type of limitations and be cautious when drawing conclusions without appropriate context.

Differences in the coding of material from the two datasets by Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) researchers present other challenges. While both collections have information on the previous occupations of recruits, there are small differences in the categories that the CTC used to code and standardize the Islamic State documents. This means that while generalized comparisons between these two datasets with respect to this field can still be made, specific comparisons of the occupation field

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1   The authors recognize that al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Iraq used a series of names for its organization in Iraq – including the Mujahidin Shura Council and the Islamic State of Iraq – during the period covered by this first batch of data. For the sake of simplicity, the authors have decided to use the term "al-Qa`ida in Iraq," as noted by the acronym AQI. The authors also recognize that there are many differences between AQI and the Islamic State, especially in terms of each entity's relationship with the main al-Qa`ida organization, but they have made a decision to link this first collection of data to the Islamic State because that group is historically tied to, and is an organizational outgrowth of, AQI. For background on these entities and their organizational ties to the Islamic State, see Brian Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside al-Qa`ida in Iraq* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, March 16, 2009).

2   For an analysis of the Sinjar records themselves, see Brian Fishman and Joseph Felter, *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, January 2, 2008), and Brian Fishman, Jacob Shapiro, Joseph Felter, Peter Bergen, and Vahid Brown, *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa`ida's Road In and Out of Iraq* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, July 22, 2008).

3   For an analysis of this data, see Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State's Foreign Fighter Paper Trail* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, April 18, 2016).

should be approached with caution.

And of course, there are some concerns that are general to various types of data. For example, one of the issues that complicates the inferences we can draw from comparing the two collections stems from the fact that we do not know how representative either dataset is of the broader mix of people who joined AQI or the Islamic State during the periods for which we have data.

Beyond general data concerns, there are a number of differences specific to the two types of data used in this study. First, the Sinjar records and Islamic State documents cover different spans of time. The former includes records filled out by incoming fighters over a 13-month period from August 2006 through August 2007. The latter collection, however, includes records over a multi-year period—from early 2011 to the end of 2014. The vast majority of the Islamic State documents that listed an entry date (97%) cover a 14-month period from July 2013 to August 2014, thus mitigating to a certain extent the time-span difference. A second difference is in the directionality and staging of the fighters represented in the documents. Whereas fighters seeking to join the Islamic State in 2011-2014 were, for the most part, attempting to get to Syria via Turkey, the fighters cataloged in the Sinjar records are all believed to have arrived in Syria via various routes and were then smuggled across the border into Iraq.[4]

In sum, these differences do not suggest that a comparison between these two sets of data cannot or should not be made, but rather that any comparative analysis, and subsequent inferences made based on such an analysis, should be done carefully and with an understanding of the limitations.

Fighter Backgrounds

Despite the above stated caveats, there is still a wealth of interesting comparisons that can be made across these two datasets. Both collections provide details on the background of the fighters who joined each group. The two categories that can most safely be compared are (1) the ages of those who joined and (2) the countries in which the new recruits resided before arriving in Syria.

Age

Examining the ages first, two general findings emerge from this analysis. First, individuals coming to fight for the Islamic State encompass a wider range of ages than those who joined AQI, which suggests that a broader and more diverse cross-section of society is attracted to the former group. At the extremes, the youngest person in the Islamic State documents is 12 and the oldest 69, while the youngest in the Sinjar records was 15 and oldest 54. When it comes to those on the younger side of the age distribution, approximately 400 individuals below the age of 18 joined the Islamic State, or close to 10% of the total number of fighters for whom ages were listed. This compared to a total of 13 fighters in the Sinjar data below the age of 18, or just over 3% of the total number in the dataset.

When viewed in aggregate, Islamic State recruits are also several years older than their AQI counterparts. As shown in Figure 1, in the Sinjar records, the mean age of recruits was between 24-25 years, while the mean age of those who joined the Islamic State was in their late 20s—aged between 26 and 27. At least 13 individuals older than 54—the oldest from the Sinjar collection—joined the Islamic State. For these individuals, the Islamic State—and what it stands for—has been a strong enough motivating factor to get them to leave their daily lives and participate in what one might describe as a 'sunset' jihad, a trend which was not as strong in the Sinjar records. This indicates that, in addition to the hundreds of young and inexperienced recruits it has brought in, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's group has been attracting people with more life experience, more skills, and more established lives.

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4   The authors recognize that the Islamic State holds territory and is active in both Syria and Iraq. The authors have decided to draw this distinction because the Islamic State records, at least to their knowledge, reflect those who arrived or joined the group in Syria, not Iraq. It is not known if the Islamic State has similar records for those who have joined the organization by accessing it in Iraq.

Figure 1: Sinjar Records and Islamic State Documents Age Comparison

While Sinjar fighters are, on average, two to three years younger than their Islamic State counterparts, these differences are contingent on the specific country from which the fighters are coming. Figure 2 below demonstrates this by comparing the average age and range of ages of recruits from countries with at least 20 fighters in both Sinjar and the Islamic State datasets. To better compare the two datasets when it comes to age, we utilized 2006 and 2014 as the base years to compute age upon arrival for the Sinjar and Islamic State fighters, respectively.
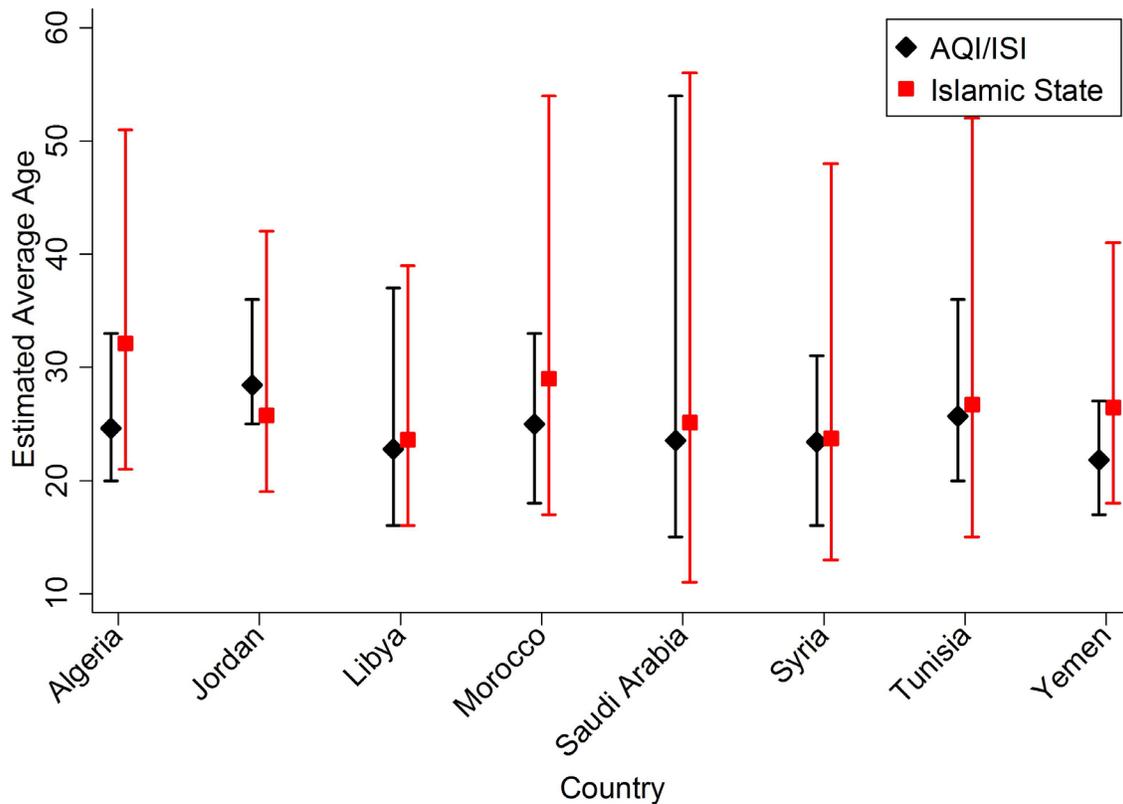
Figure 2: Average Age and Range of Age by Country

A couple of key takeaways emerge from this chart. First, the age range of the Islamic State recruits (the red bands) is larger than the age range of the Sinjar-era recruits (the black bands). More specifically, the average number of years between the youngest and oldest fighter in the Sinjar records is 17.5 years.

In the case of Islamic state volunteers, that range is 31.6 years. This speaks to the generational diversity that exists among those seeking to join the Islamic State. Second, despite the fact that Islamic State recruits, as discussed above, tend to be on average older than Sinjar recruits, there is still a surprising amount of diversity when it comes to the average age of the Sinjar- and Islamic State-era contingents. For example, the average age of the Algerian group of fighters in the Sinjar data is 24.6, but it rises to 32.1 in the Islamic State data. The Jordanian group, however, shows the exact opposite. The average age of the Sinjar volunteers is 28.4, but it falls to 25.7 for the Islamic State volunteers. For other countries, such as Libya, there is not much difference in the average age of the two groups.

One country for which the age range stayed more or less the same was the most populous country in both datasets, Saudi Arabia. It is clear then that these are, in fact, two distinct populations, and not returning veterans. The average year of birth of the Saudi fighters is 1982 in Sinjar and 1989 for the Islamic State. This means that in both waves, the Saudi fighters were 24-25 years old when they arrived in Iraq and Syria, respectively. While this age is consistent with the global average for the Sinjar dataset, it is actually two years younger than the average for Islamic State recruits.

Some of the clearest implications related to these findings have to do with the countering violent extremism (CVE) effort. As highlighted in our previous report on the Islamic State data, there is a difference from country to country when it comes to average age of their fighting contingents. But this comparison clearly shows that the age dynamics are different in the Islamic State data. The Islamic State has been able to attract a wider range of individuals. In addition, for some countries, the average individual that it has attracted differs from what that country experienced in the Sinjar-era. If countries are going to engage in CVE efforts, they will not only have to address a wide range of individuals, but they will also need to update their approach as circumstances (such as the age of the target audience) change.

Country of Origin

The report now turns to an examination of the country of origin of these individuals. Three insights emerged from the analysis of this one variable. First, the flow of Islamic State fighters is less geographically concentrated. Consider that in the Sinjar records, two countries—Saudi Arabia and Libya—accounted for 60% of the flow of foreign fighters joining AQI. Even if the scope is expanded further, in the Sinjar records, only seven countries accounted for approximately 90% of the foreign fighter flow. While dealing with a complex issue such as foreign fighters is never easy, this geographic dynamic in the AQI timeframe made the problem more identifiable and manageable from a counterterrorism perspective.

In the Islamic State documents, the global picture looks much different and, consequently, much more challenging. To get to 60% of the Islamic State's foreign fighter flow, one needs to include seven countries, not two. The flow of individuals to the Islamic State from Europe and Asia further highlights this dynamic. In the Sinjar records, the flow of fighters to AQI from Europe was a trickle, as that collection only included two recruits from France, and one each from the United Kingdom and Sweden. The flow of recruits from Asian countries in the Sinjar records was non-existent. The difference in the Islamic State documents could not be starker. The cases of France and Russia are illustrative, as 126 and 210 fighters, respectively, joined the Islamic State from those countries. Then there is China, a country that is not found in the Sinjar records but has had 163 recruits (4% of the total dataset) from its region of Xinjiang join the Islamic State.

The second point arising from an examination of the country of origin data is that Islamic State fighters come from a far wider range of countries. Figure 1 illustrates this finding by showing the countries that appear in the Islamic State cache but do not appear in the Sinjar records in red.[5] The fact that this totals 50 countries is a sobering reminder of the global nature of the foreign fighter problem faced in

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5   There were no countries found that contributed fighters to AQI but not also to the Islamic State.

the context of the Islamic State. In particular, the new countries are generally found at greater distances from the destination state. The Sinjar fighters were almost all from the Middle East and North Africa, while the Islamic State, as is widely known, was recruiting globally, with fighters arriving from every populated continent,[6] and in particularly large numbers from Europe and Asia.
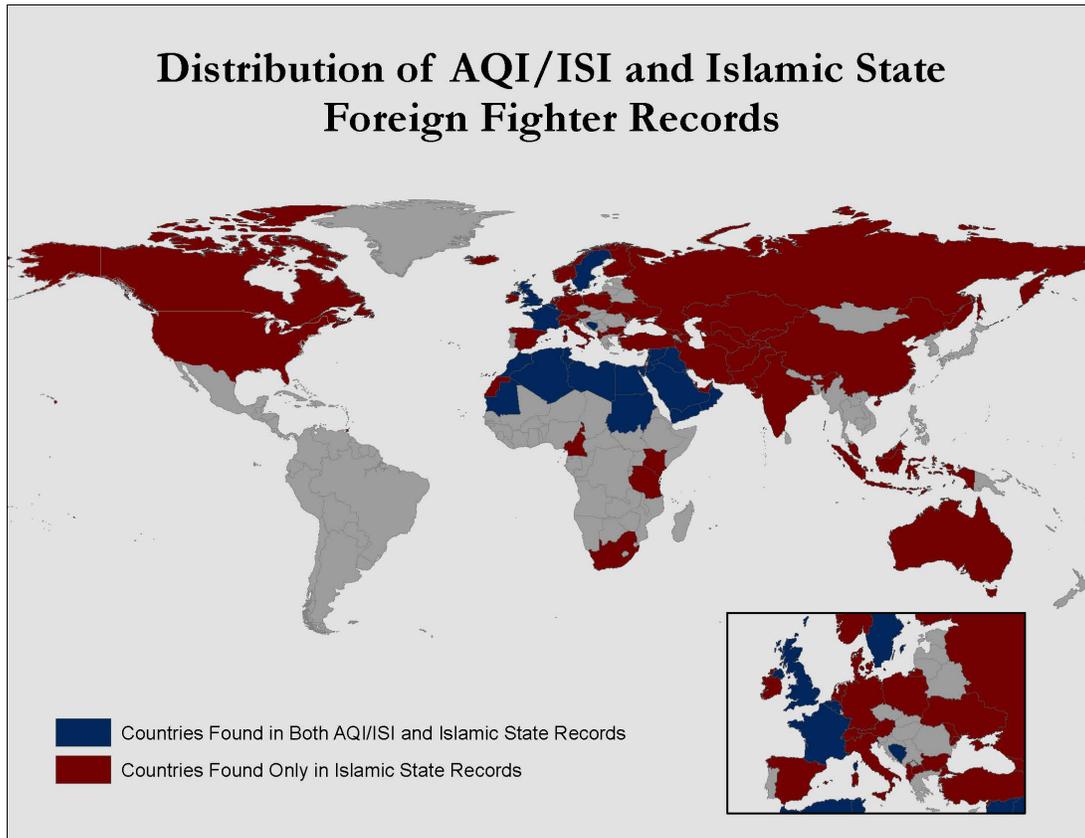
Figure 3: Geographic Distribution of Recruits from Each Dataset[7]

If there is any geographic consistency between the two collections, it is the strong flow to both organizations, during both periods, from individuals from key states in the Middle East and North Africa with long reputations as source states of foreign fighters. And in both datasets, two countries sit well above the rest in terms of total number of fighters produced. At the top on both lists as a high volume producer of foreign fighters is Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, however, the gap at the top has shrunk. In the Sinjar records, the Saudis occupied 40% of the total (235 fighters), with Libyans in second at 19% (111 fighters). In the Islamic State documents, the Saudis occupy only 19% of the total, with the Tunisians being second at 15%.

Beyond the Saudis, of particular interest are those countries that produced the second-highest number of foreign fighters in each dataset: Libya and Tunisia. Libya exhibited an interesting decline in its foreign fighter representation between the two campaigns. As stated, in the Sinjar records Libyans accounted for 19% of the fighters, second behind the Saudis. However, in the Islamic State dataset, Libya falls to 11th on the list, with 106 fighters (2.5%). Despite the overall fighter population experienc-

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6   The CTC's Islamic State dataset does not contain any South Americans (assuming one considers Trinidad and Tobago as distinct from mainland South America), but other studies and reporting have identified small numbers arriving from countries like Argentina and Brazil. See Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (New York: Soufan Group, 2015).

7   The authors wish to thank Brandon Mohr for producing the maps featured in this report.

ing a 605% increase, the number of Libyans declined by 4.5%. This is not to suggest, of course, that the threat posed by jihadism in Libya decreased significantly over the seven or eight years between these two collections.

The difference likely has much more to do with the vastly different environments in Libya in these two timeframes. For example, the authoritarian rule of Muammar Qaddafi made it much more difficult, and risky, for local individuals and groups—like the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—to participate in violent activity at home. Instead, during the early and mid-2000s, most Libyans who wanted to get involved in jihadist activity had to look—and go—elsewhere. After the Arab Spring and the fall of Qaddafi's regime, Libya's political and security environment became a lot more fractured, which provided Libyans with more choices. Indeed, now Libyans who want to get involved with a jihadist cause can either do so in their home country or seek out such opportunities abroad. Some of those who chose the former option during the timeframe of the Islamic State documents (2011-2014) ultimately decided to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State in October 2014, leading to the formal creation of three Islamic State *wilayat* in Libya. This meant that Libyans not only could participate in jihad at home, but could also be a part of the so-called caliphate without having to travel to Syria or Iraq.

In the Islamic State documents, Tunisia replaces Libya as the most significant (by far) contributor from a per capita perspective, with 58.2 fighters per million citizens. This was a large increase in representation by Tunisians from the Sinjar records (33 fighters, 5.7% of the total) to the Islamic State (634 fighters, 15% of the total).

To see such a large increase was somewhat counterintuitive given that Tunisia was the only Arab country to undergo a successful democratic transition as a result of the so-called Arab Spring (which, of course, began in Tunisia). The reality is, however, that this transition created a vacuum and opportunity not only for Islamist political parties to rise to prominence, but also for jihadis to increase their activities and influence. Initially, these activities were limited to preaching, or *da `wa*, but by 2013 the focus shifted to jihad. A number of factors contributed to these events. The pre-revolution Ben Ali regime's tight control over religious activities meant that with the regime's collapse there were no influential religious institutions to fill the void, leaving a religious vacuum that radical groups quickly attempted to fill. In addition, the social and economic needs of many Tunisians, especially the youth, were not met by the post-revolution governments. This contributed to increased radicalization that actually crossed all social classes, a fact validated in the Islamic State documents that showed a diverse range of Tunisians answered the call to fight.[8]

The final insight from the country of origin variable is that there are also notable differences between the two datasets regarding the geographic concentration of fighters from *within* each country. When one looks within high-flow countries, those who joined the Islamic State are more geographically dispersed, meaning that they joined the group from more towns across a broader swath of territory in most nations. While there are still geographic pockets, or higher-density flow areas, within each country, the pool of people who are joining the Islamic State is generally more geographically representative across more countries. Now, given that the Islamic State document collection is much larger than the Sinjar records, one would be correct in assuming that the Islamic State collection would be—by default due to its larger size—more diverse. Figures 4-6 visually put the Islamic State's ability to attract a more geographically diverse collection of recruits within specific countries, as compared to those from the Sinjar era, into perspective.

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8   Georges Fahmi and Hamza Meddeb, *Market for Jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia*, Carnegie Middle East Center, October 2015; and Haim Malka and Margo Balboni, *Tunisia: Radicalism Abroad and at Home*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2016.

Foreign Fighters from Saudi Arabia
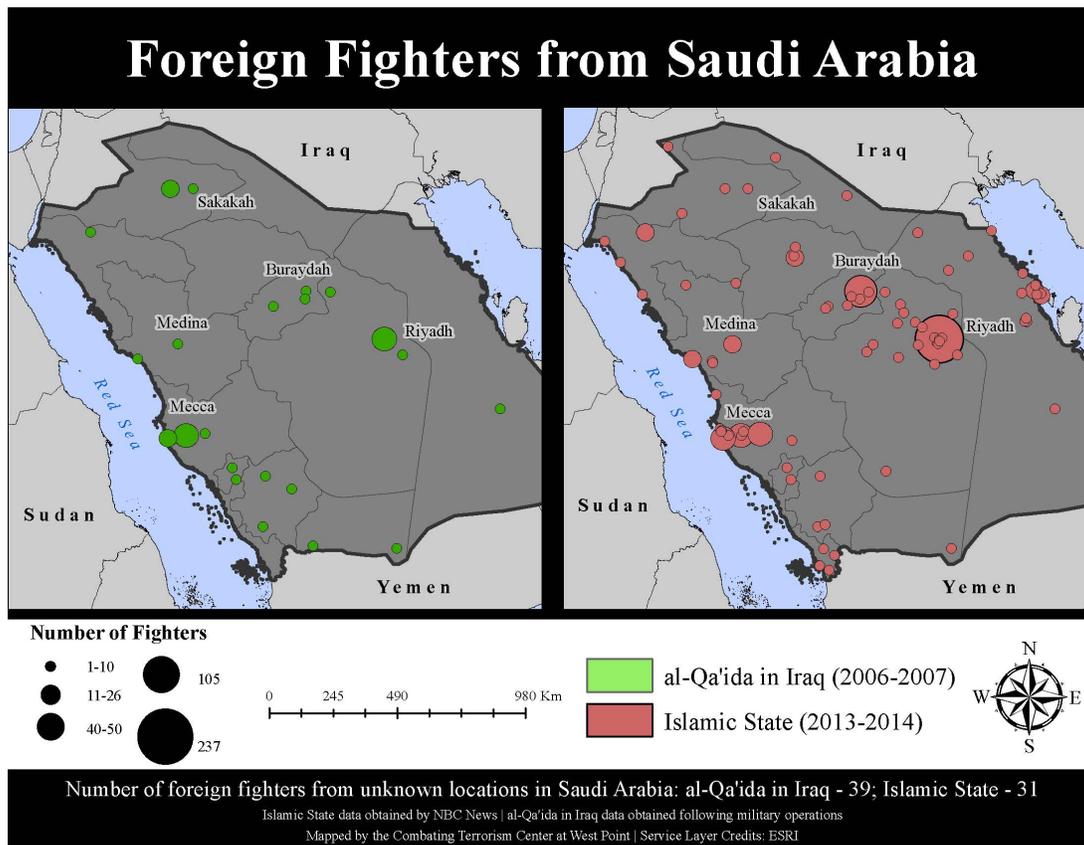
Figure 4: Comparison of Foreign Fighters from al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the Islamic State in Saudi Arabia

In Figures 4-6, we see three countries whose foreign fighter flows changed in three slightly different ways. The Saudi Arabia map in Figure 4 depicts the overall change in scale between the two eras, with significant growth throughout the country. There are a couple noticeable differences, however, with Buraydah and Al-Qassim Region being elevated from an average contributor in the Sinjar documents to the clear second rank behind Riyadh in the Islamic State cache. This is not surprising, however, given the city's history of radicalism.[9] In fact, that its rank was not higher in the Sinjar documents is perhaps more of a shock than the newer totals. We can also see a significant growth in the fighters coming from locations along the Persian Gulf, from where no fighters emerged to join AQI. Most of these fighters emerged from Dammam or towns nearby. This area is host to the largest concentration of Shi`a in Saudi Arabia, and Dammam was also the site of a May 2015 Islamic State bombing of a Shi`a mosque.[10]

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9   Maseeh Rahman, "Saudi Arabia in the Balance," *Time*, April 24, 2003.

10   Scott Shane, "Saudis and Extremism: 'Both the Arsonists and the Firefighters,'" *New York Times*, August 25, 2016.
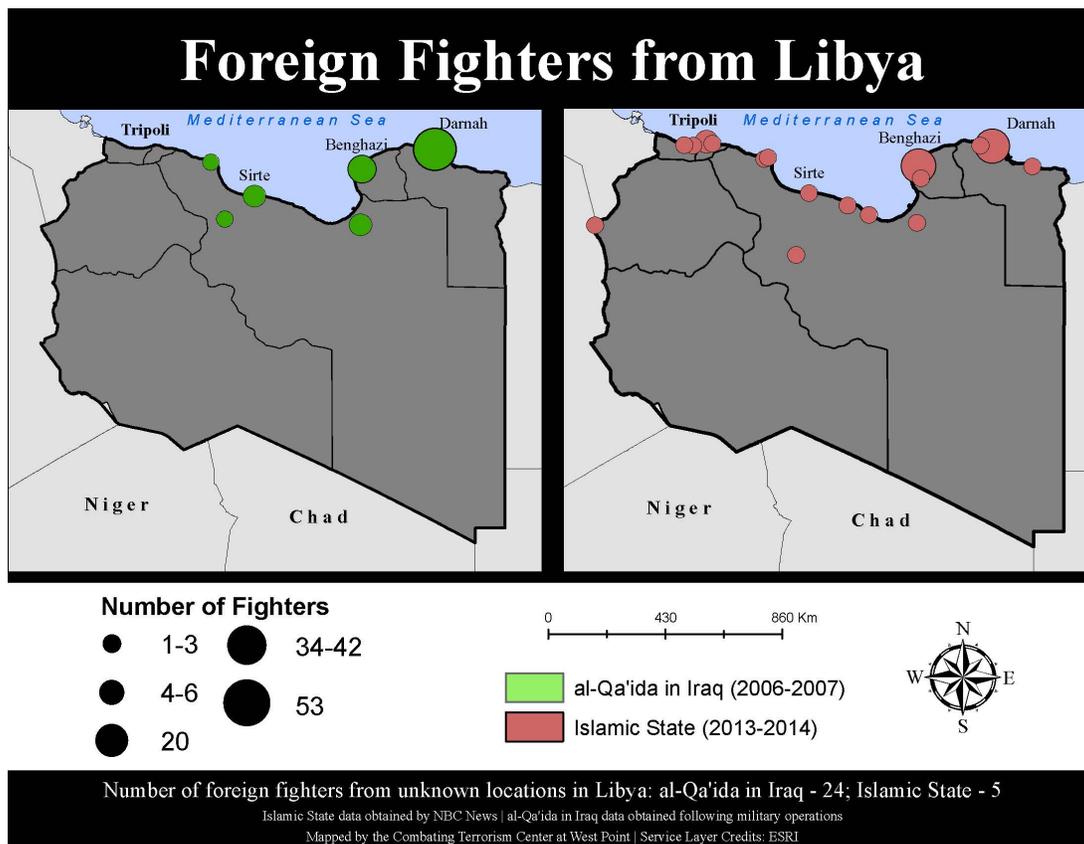
Figure 5: Comparison of Foreign Fighters from al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the Islamic State in Libya

In the Libya map in Figure 5, we see comparable numbers of volunteers across the two datasets coming from the traditional sources of jihadism in Libya: Darnah and Benghazi. There was, however, significant growth in one area in the Islamic State documents: Tripoli. This is likely explained by the fact that Qaddafi exerted much more control over the west of Libya during his reign than he did over the east, so aspiring jihadis from the east had greater mobility than those in Tripoli during the AQI era. With Qaddafi gone, jihadis in Tripoli were able to travel more freely. Also, the lack of governance that followed the revolution certainly contributed. Tripoli International was the largest airport in the country (before it was mostly destroyed during fighting in the summer of 2014), but between 2011 and 2014, there was almost zero customs and border control. In addition, there were regular flights from Tripoli to Istanbul, with several a day going out during the peak period after the revolution.[11]

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11   Based on authors' conversations with Dr. Geoff Porter of North Africa Risk Consulting, September 2016.
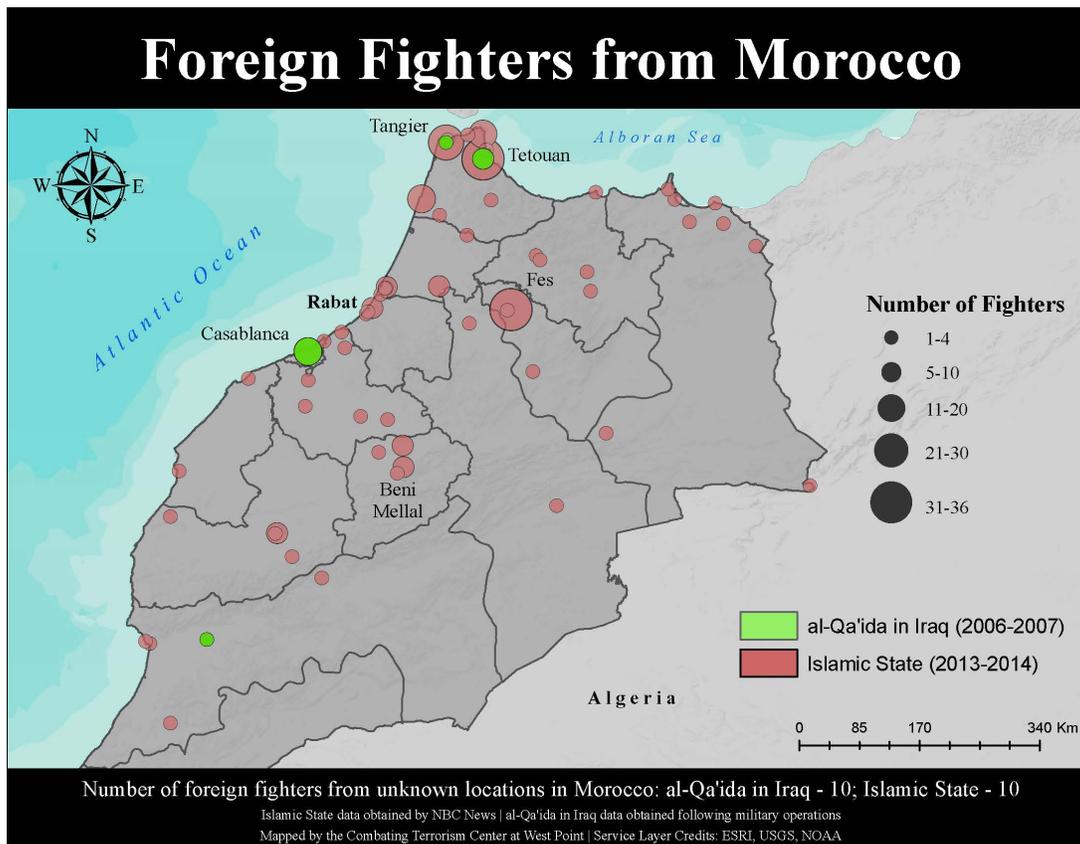
Figure 6: Comparison of Foreign Fighters from al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the Islamic State in Morocco

Finally, Morocco (Figure 6) presents a case of a country with both a dramatic overall increase in fighters and an interesting geographic shift. Morocco contributed only 36 fighters from four cities[12] during the AQI era, but as the map illustrates, interest in traveling to fight exploded throughout the country in the ensuing decade. (Given the small numbers from the Sinjar records, both were able to be represented on the same map.) Between the two datasets, Morocco experienced a remarkable 606% increase. Morocco contributed 254 fighters from 63 different locations to the Islamic State. In addition to the change in scope, there were differences between the geographic patterns in the two datasets. Morocco's most populous city, Casablanca, was also its largest contributor to AQI, with 65% (17 out of the 26 who listed a city) of Moroccan fighters hailing from there. Eight fighters came from the Tangier-Tetouan region in the north. Interestingly, in the Islamic State cache, Casablanca dropped off considerably, with only 4.5% (11 individuals) of the fighters hailing from the country's largest city. Instead, it was the second-most populated city, Fes, that contributed the most fighters (15%, or 37 fighters), despite not contributing any in the AQI era. The other major shift was in the Tangier-Tetouan region, with 32 fighters from Tetouan (despite being only the ninth most populated city in the country) and 23 from Tangier.

We cannot be certain of the reasons for these shifts, but there are a variety of possible explanations. First, there is a chance that the Casablanca figures for AQI are inflated due to fighters listing it as their last point of departure rather than their place of origin. It is not clear why that would have changed so dramatically for the more recent set of travelers. Significant improvements in Moroccan transportation infrastructure could play a role, with improved highway systems and, more significantly, regional

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12   Ten Moroccan fighters did not list a city of origin.

airports with international flights, built to allow tourists direct access without passing through Casablanca, but obviously facilitating outbound traffic, too.[13]

Of course, conversely, it would not be a surprise to see jihadist elements hailing from Casablanca, given that the homegrown terrorist attacks in Morocco all had a Casablanca component, with the suburbs of the city being well-known for radical Islamism. Regarding the decline in the Casablanca numbers by 2013-2014, one explanation could be that counterterrorism capabilities, and police activity in general, have improved significantly over the years, especially after a series of failed bombings in Casablanca in 2007, including one down the street from the American Consulate.[14]

Regarding Fes, perhaps the real surprise is the lack of contributors in the earlier era rather than the proliferation more recently. Fes has always had an Islamist element, to include some linked to violence. The mastermind of the 2003 Casablanca attacks was from Fes. And economic conditions in Fes have only deteriorated for many who are not linked to the tourism industry or a couple other key sectors. This relative lack of opportunity, tied with a significant remaining university population could possibly be a contributor to an increase in political radicalism.[15] The Islamic State data seems to provide some support for this explanation (although there is rarely only one explanation). Of the Fes residents in the data, 59% reported elementary/middle school level education, only 5% had high school education, but 16% had some college-level work. This is compared with averages of 46% elementary/middle school, 30% high school, and 11% college for the rest of Morocco. Despite the relatively high levels of college education in Fes, only 5% had high-skilled occupations, with 68% having unskilled or low-skilled positions (compared with 52% for the rest of Morocco).

The Tangier-Tetouan region in the north of Morocco also has a known history of radicalism, possibly influenced by lack of economic opportunity, ease of access to Europe, and familiarity with criminality and clandestine organizations (in part due to an active narcotics trade).[16] The most oft-cited example of this is that 11 of the 27 individuals implicated in the 2004 Madrid train bombings were from this region, although it is important to note that while their heritage may have influenced their networking, they were living in Spain at the time and had radicalized in Spain via a mix of local and international influences.[17]

Operational Experience

The analysis now turns to some of the categories in the two sets of documents where comparison is a bit more challenging but still insightful. A comparison of the two collections indicates that both represent a diverse group of recruits, although due to the sheer size of the Islamic State recruiting pool, there is a much wider range of backgrounds represented.

Interestingly, while both groups contain some individuals with significant jihadist and/or military/police experience, the vast majority of both groups have little experience as fighters. Assessing this category for the Sinjar records is difficult given that the entry forms did not specifically collect information regarding previous jihadist experience. Although one individual in the Sinjar data, a Yemeni, claimed that he had prior experience fighting in Afghanistan, the young age of these volunteers suggests a relative lack of experience; however, this cannot be validated in the data.

In the Islamic State data, only 10% stated that they had prior experience conducting jihad. Given the size of the Islamic State recruitment pool, however, 10% represents over 400 experienced jihadists. And those with experience came from a variety of backgrounds and geographic locations. The stories

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13   Ibid.

14   Ibid.

15   Ibid.

16   Ibid.

17   Fernando Reinares, "Jihadist Radicalization and the 2004 Madrid Bombing Network," *CTC Sentinel* 2:11 (2009).

of an Egyptian, Faruq Ibrahim Husayn Zahrun, and a Tajik citizen, Muhammad Amin Muhammad Kamil, help put this dynamic into context. Zahrun, born in 1960, together with an older Egyptian recruit, joined the Islamic State after having already participated in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Thus, both of these individuals, and several others like them, came to the Islamic State with experience they gained in a foreign battlefield decades prior. On the other end of the age spectrum is Kamil, born in 1997, who had already fought with the Pakistani Taliban before arriving in Syria.

A significant number of individuals joined the Islamic State after having spent time with other Syria-based organizations like Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) and the Free Syrian Army. In fact, the 10% jihadi experience figure for the dataset likely undersells the recruits' overall level of experience as the data includes numerous individuals who said they served with other Syrian militant groups but did not indicate they had prior jihad experience.[18]

An additional metric of "fighting" experience, or operational proficiency, is the amount of experience the prospective fighters had in military, police, and security services in their home countries. Both forms asked about prior occupation, although only 156 out of 584 fighters in the Sinjar dataset answered this question, whereas 3,676 out of 4,119 Islamic State fighters did so. Of the 156 Sinjar responses, seven, or 4.4%, said they had experience in a police, military, or security position (6 military, 1 police). Of the 3,676 Islamic State responses, 111, or 3%, cited experience in these fields (76 military/police, 35 security). Although the percentages are similar, given the small size of the Sinjar sample, it is difficult to draw any broader conclusions from this data, other than that in both datasets it was not common for recruits to have prior security service experience.

As a whole, both recruitment pools appear to have had relatively little operational experience that they could bring to bear in fighting roles for AQI or the Islamic State. However, as stated above, the sheer number of Islamic State recruits means that small percentages still yield a not insignificant number of individuals with experiences that the Islamic State could exploit. And given how Islamic State officials highlighted these experiences in their own notes on the forms, it is clear that they attempted to take advantage of this resource.[19]

Occupation

As noted above, the Sinjar records and Islamic State documents both contain information about the jobs or profession that recruits had prior to joining the Islamic State. However, the categories that were used to code the occupation field across the two datasets were not consistent and are slightly different. This limits the number of direct comparisons that can be made across the two sets of data, and the broader 'comparative utility' of the occupation category. Another limiting factor is that only 156 (out of 584) fighters in the Sinjar dataset provided occupational data, a much smaller ratio when compared to the Islamic State documents. Compounding this problem is the fact that the Islamic State documents, as a general rule, included more specific occupational details.

To facilitate general comparisons of some of the occupational data across the two datasets, the CTC divided the coding schemes used for each data collection into three analytical categories (see Table 1). The first category contains coding terms that were the same in the two datasets and that can be directly compared. The second includes coding terms that if bundled in one dataset can be compared to a broader coding term that was used in the other dataset. And the third category contains the coding terms that were used to code the Islamic State documents, but that have no corresponding equivalent in the Sinjar records and where no comparison can be made.

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18   It is unclear why the recruits or the Islamic State did not include this information, but it could be because they believed the prior jihad question on the form was asking about their experience before arriving in the Syrian conflict zone, and thus their Syrian experience was recorded elsewhere (usually in the notes section).

19   See discussion of talent scouting in *The Caliphate's Global Workforce*, pp. 18, 24.

Table 1: Occupational Data

Sinjar Records (N = 156)			Islamic State Documents (N = 3,676)		
Occupation	Number	Percent	Occupation	Number	Percent
Categories that are Coded the Same That Can be Directed Compared					
Student	69	44.2%	Student	646	17.6%
Teacher	7	4.5%	Teacher	71	1.9%
Other	18	11.5%	Other	217	5.9%
Unemployed	4	2.5%	None/Unemployed	252	6.9%
Comparisons that Can be Made When Sinjar or Islamic State Occupation Fields are Combined					
Skilled Worker*	11	7.1%	Low-skilled or trade*	690	18.8%
Administrative	4	2.5%			
Self-Employed	12	7.7%	Business/Self-Employed	629	17.1%
Business	5	3.2%			
Unskilled worker	6	3.8%	Unskilled or Laborer	742	20.2%
Laborer	4	2.5%			
Military	6	3.8%	Armed Forces or Police	76	2.1%
Police	1	0.6%	Security Guard or related	35	1.0%
Professional	6	3.8%	High-skilled/White Collar	103	2.8%
Medical	3	1.9%	Non-Profit/Social Service	17	0.5%
			IT, Computer, Tech	69	1.9%
			Media and Comms	28	0.8%
Specific Categories Not Included in Sinjar, but Were Used to Code Islamic State Documents					
			Non-Security Gov	81	2.2%
			Religious Field	67	1.8%
			Energy Sector	17	0.5%

*Despite appearing dissimilar, these categories were matched because they contained similar job types and represented the mid-level of skill in the two taxonomies.

An analysis of the first category of coding terms reveals that the Sinjar records contained more students and teachers, as a matter of percentage, than those recruits who joined the Islamic State during the 2011-2014 time period. One thing noticeable in both datasets, however, was the prevalence of students in the Saudi group, with that category being by far the most populated in both sets of Saudi fighters. Saudis were more likely to have listed student as their occupation than the average Islamic State recruit (28% versus an overall average of 17.6%). In the Sinjar dataset, 47% of the Saudis who listed the occupation were students (compared with a 44% average for the overall group). This category of 'direct comparison' data also indicates that more recruits who did not have a job joined the Islamic State than joined AQI.

The second category shows that more recruits who were self-employed or worked in the field of business joined the Islamic State in 2011-2014 than did those who worked as laborers or were otherwise unskilled. A similar trend can be observed with those recruits who were low-skilled or worked in trade professions. Lastly, the combination of various coding fields in each dataset—'professional' and 'medical' in Sinjar and 'High-Skilled/White Collar,' 'Non-Profit/Social Service,' 'IT, Computer, Tech,' and 'Media and Comms' in the Islamic State documents—yields a broader category that contains people across the two datasets with the same type of occupations. For example, in the Sinjar data, those recruits included in the 'professional' category included three engineers, two lawyers, and one recruit who worked for a non-governmental organization (NGO). In the Islamic State documents, engineers and lawyers were coded as 'High-Skilled/White Collar,' as were doctors (an occupational group that the Sinjar records coded as 'medical'), and those who worked for NGOs or other social service organi-

zations were coded as 'Non-Profit/Social Service.' When these categories are evaluated in relation to each other, it appears that both datasets had similar proportions from more high-skilled professions, although the limited number of Sinjar cases in this category limits the inferences that can be made.

Overall, the size of the Islamic State recruiting pool provides for a larger number of occupational backgrounds present and therefore more diverse resources available to Islamic State leaders. Due to this larger pool, there is a greater number of "interesting" occupations with more experience and exposure to what one might describe as sensitive industries, like the commercial aviation sector, or industries that could also provide pathways to future Islamic State attacks.[20] While one individual in the Sinjar records had a job "making F15 parts,"[21] the Islamic State documents included an airplane mechanic, an employee for an airport grounds services company, someone responsible for aircraft security who was affiliated the Saudi Ministry of Interior, and three pilots. This can also be seen in the number of individuals entering with experience in the computer, technology, and media fields.

Travel, Flow, and the Issue of Trust

Both groups used multiple pathways to smuggle in foreign recruits. Using multiple points of entry into Iraq and/or Syria functioned as a form of diversification and redundancy. As a manual released on the jihadi forums in 2005 revealed, during that time AQI had broken down its Syria-based Iraq smuggling network into four main sectors: "the Habur crossing near Zakhu in the north; the Tal Kujik and Sinjar border crossings west of Mosul; the Al Qaim entry point in western Anbar; and the southern crossing at Al Tanf west of Rutbah near the Jordanian border."[22] Due to conditions on the ground, the manual noted that the Al Qaim entry point was the most preferred.[23] This is possibly related to the fact that AQI's main smuggler, an individual who went by the *kunya* Abu Ghadiyah, was based out of the nearby Syrian border town of Albu Kamal.[24] While the Sinjar records provide extremely little insight into the specific Syrian/Iraqi crossing points AQI used, the other evidence cited above indicates that while Al Qaim was arguably the most preferred, AQI also used other Syrian-based entry points to get foreign recruits into Iraq.

A similar but somewhat different pattern emerges in the Islamic State documents. Foreign fighters joining the Islamic State entered Syria via at least seven main crossing points: Ar Ra'i, Atimah, Bab al Hawa, Azaz, Jarabulus, Latakia, and Tal Abyad. While some of these Syrian entry points are located close together, others are more geographically dispersed, indicating that the Islamic State had—at least during the 2011-2014 timeframe—more geographically diversified pathways to bring in foreign recruits than AQI. Also, given that almost all of the Islamic State's high-frequency local travel facilitators were active in relation to a specific crossing point (e.g. Abu Muhammad al-Shamali in Jarabulus and Azaz, Abu Ilyas al-Maghribi in Latakia and Ar Ra'i, and Abu al-Bara' al-Shamali in Tal Abyad) and were likely responsible for the group's travel facilitation networks at those points, the logistics pipeline leading to the Islamic State appears to be more redundant than that which existed during the Sinjar time period. From a counterterrorism perspective, this means that stemming or stopping the flow of foreign Islamic State recruits was a much harder and more complex task during that timeframe, especially when that task is viewed in relation to the foreign fighter pipeline during AQI's heyday. The United States and its allies have made progress restricting travel for foreign fighters seeking to enter

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20   For example, some who joined the Islamic State had worked at Saudi ARAMCO or for other companies in the energy or resource extraction sector.

21   See *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout*, p. 43.

22   Bill Roggio, "The Ratline Manual," Long War Journal, August 2, 2005.

23   Ibid.

24   Sean D. Naylor, "Killing Abu Ghadiya," *Foreign Policy*, August 31, 2015.

Syria via some of these routes after the period covered by the Islamic State documents.[25] It is also clear that the flow of foreign fighters to the group has slowed dramatically, likely as a result of these actions as well as other counterterrorism measures that seek to prevent aspiring Islamic State recruits from leaving their host nations in the first place and, of course, recent military action that has reduced the Islamic State's controlled territory.[26]

Travel Groups and Hometown Clustering

There is evidence from both collections that individuals traveled together and arrived in groups. Of the 201 AQI recruits that recorded their date of arrival in Iraq, close to 47% of them arrived on the same day as another individual from their hometown.[27] As noted in the CTC's original Sinjar study, "such evidence strongly suggests that the individuals traveled together and, in some cases, may have been recruited simultaneously."[28] The largest known travel group to arrive at AQI was a group of five from Darnah, Libya.[29]

The Islamic State data shows that there is also a group travel effect. Of the 3,205 Islamic State fighters for whom we have entry dates and cities of residence, 974 (30.4%) entered Syria on the same day with at least one other person from their hometown. Of those 974 entries, more than half (564 or 57.9%) were instances when exactly two fighters from the same hometown entered on the same day. This means that roughly 40% of same day, same hometown arrival cases were those when a recruit arrived in Syria with a group consisting of more than two people from their local place of residence. Even though traveling with a hometown companion is still a fairly regular phenomenon for Islamic State recruits, the data suggests that a higher percentage of recruits are traveling to the Islamic State individually than those who joined AQI several years earlier.

Yet, the data also reveals that the groups arriving at the caliphate are larger than they were during the time period covered by the Sinjar records. A couple of cases of group travel to Syria stand out in this regard. On March 24, 2014, 11 recruits from Malang, Indonesia arrived, and on July 23, 2014, seven from Hamburg, Germany did the same. Also, in some cases, groups from the same hometown arrived on adjacent travel days—as typified by a group of five recruits who arrived in Syria from Strasbourg, France on December 18, 2013, and another cluster of four fighters from that same town who crossed the border one day later.

While some hometowns only had one or two groups arrive in Syria, other hometowns were more frequent contributors to the Islamic State. For example, the Saudi city of Riyadh had multiple fighters show up on the same day on 45 different occasions. Istanbul was also a frequent contributor with groups of recruits arriving in Syria from that town on the same day 13 separate times. Benghazi, Moscow, and Paris were regular hometown travel group contributors as well, with recruits arriving in Syria from those cities on 10, six, and four different occasions, respectively. Table 2 features the top 10 cities that were repeat contributors of Islamic State recruits.

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25   Mark Schliebs, "Islamic State Forced to Turn Back Wannabe Fighters," *Australian*, January 2, 2016; Carla Babb, "US Allies Closing Off Extremists' Gateway into Syria, Carter Says," Voice of America, May 13, 2016.

26   Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Number of Foreign Fighters Entering Syria Drops by 90 Percent, Pentagon Says," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2016.

27   *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq*, p. 23.

28   Ibid.

29   Ibid.

Table 2: Top 10 Cities of Residence for Groups of Islamic State Recruits Arriving on the Same Day

Residence City	# of Fighters Entering With At Least One Other From Hometown	# of Times Multiple Fighters Came From Same Hometown
Riyadh	121	45
Buraydah	33	13
Istanbul	31	13
Gaziantep	38	12
Tunis	31	12
Hotan	29	11
Aksu	22	10
Bizerte	27	10
Benghazi	22	10
At Ta'if	16	7

The repetition of recruitment flow from these cities, and others further down the list, suggests that either there is a steady state of interest in the Islamic State in these locales, resulting in a 'push' of groups of people to the caliphate, or that the Islamic State's recruitment infrastructure is more present and potentially has more reach in these places, resulting in a greater 'pull' of people to Syria. Since the influence of these basic factors are not mutually exclusive, the higher the Islamic State group-producing frequency of these cities could also be due to the interplay between these two factors, among others.

When one examines the same 3,205 records and additionally controls for border entry point—something that was not done in the CTC's analysis of the Sinjar records because specific Iraqi border arrival points were not listed—the data about travel companions looks almost identical. Of the 3,205 fighters for whom we have entry dates, cities of residence, and border entry points, 916 (slightly more than 29%) arrived at the same border entry points on the same day as at least one other person from their hometown. For example, a group of six Riyadh residents arrived on November 21, 2013, but four went to Atimah and two went to Azaz. So, some fighters from the same hometown arrived in Syria on the same day but entered the country via different border crossing points. This could have been done for operational security reasons or these two groups might not have known each other and just decided to pursue different entry paths.

The days with larger numbers of Islamic State recruits arriving also merit closer reflection, as they speak to the broad appeal of the group and how the makeup of those arriving were mixed, both in terms of solo travelers versus those with travel companions, and the regions of the world that recruits represented. The 43 fighters who arrived in Tal Abyad on June 11, 2014, not long before the formal establishment of the caliphate, put this dynamic into context. The crossing that day included one recruit each from Algeria, Bosnia, Egypt, France, Georgia, Iraq, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; two recruits each from Azerbaijan, Belgium, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Turkey, and the United Kingdom; four recruits from both Saudi Arabia and Tunisia; six from China; and nine from Russia. The Islamic State documents also contain evidence that in some cases recruits traveled with members of their families to Syria (sometimes reflected in notes in the documents)—a factor for which the figures above do not account and that would make travel group size even larger (the forms were only used for fighters and not for non-fighting family members).

Flow, Points of Entry, and Travel Timing

An analysis of the regularity or consistency of the flow of recruits to the Islamic State indicates that the flow to al-Baghdadi's group was both stronger (a larger number of fighters) and more consistent (over a more sustained period of time) than those who joined AQI. Before delving into the data, some context about the structure and completeness related to dates of entry in both the Sinjar and the Is-

lamic State datasets will prove helpful in understanding the following section.

When it comes to the Sinjar data, part of the challenge is that only 202 of the 584 fighters (34.5%) provided an entry date. The beginning month in the Sinjar data is August 2006, while the final month in which a date of entry was recorded is August 2007. In other words, the Sinjar data spans 13 months. The fact that there is so much missing data makes calculating a monthly flow rate challenging. Dividing the number of fighters for whom we have an entry date (202) over the timespan of the data (13) yields a monthly flow rate of 15.54 for AQI, which almost certainly understates the average number of monthly entries. For this reason, we believe a more accurate monthly arrival number for the Sinjar data divides the total number of fighters in the dataset (584) by the number of months (13), with the result being that the average number of fighters arriving per month is 45.

The calculation challenge is a bit different for the Islamic State data, which is spread out over a very wide time period. If we take the first month with a recorded entry in the Islamic State dataset, February 2011, and subtract the month of the last recorded entry, December 2014, the resultant timespan is 47 months.[30] If we divide the number of total number of fighters in the dataset (4,119) by the timespan in which fighters entered (47), the result is that this calculation *suggests* a monthly fighter flow rate of about 88 fighters, a number nearly double that of the number of fighters who appear to have come during the Sinjar era. The methodological challenge with the Islamic State data, however, is that although the timespan between the first and last entry dates is large, the actual data itself is heavily clustered around a smaller set of dates. If we take the 14-month time period from July 2013 to August 2014, it captures 97% of the entries. During this core period, which corresponds more closely in terms of length with the 13-month Sinjar window, the average number of fighters who entered the Islamic State each month was 252. This suggests that, in the period of time preceding and immediately following the fall of Mosul and declaration of the caliphate in June 2014, the number of fighters entering Syria to join the Islamic State was almost six times the average monthly flow rate of fighters entering during the time period covered by the Sinjar dataset. The biggest month of arriving fighters in the Islamic State data was July 2014, when 683 fighters arrived. In other words, the largest month of arriving fighters for the Islamic State was almost 18 times larger than the largest month in the Sinjar data.

Monthly flow rates are a common feature to both the Sinjar and Islamic State datasets, but the Islamic State arrival date contains information, which allows for a more detailed examination. Specifically, the Islamic State data lists the border entry point of incoming fighters. When the Islamic State arrival data is evaluated in relation to specific Syrian arrival locations, a number of interesting trends also emerge. For example, the data indicates that on average smaller-sized groups entered Syria via that country's northwestern (Latakia and Atimah) and north-central (Azaz and Ar Ra`i) crossing points, while larger recruit groups made it to Syria via Jarabulus and Tal Abyad in the northeast. The importance of these two northeastern Islamic State arrival locations to the group's operations is reflected both in terms of the total amount of recruits that flowed through each arrival point (versus those in the other parts of the country) and the average number of fighters who flowed through them per day.[31]

To calculate the average number of fighters entering per day, we took the Islamic State data and calculated the total number of fighters entering in a month and divided this number by the total number of days in a month in which at least one fighter entered. This calculation was done for each border point and resulted not in an average number of fighters entering per day, but an average number of fighters entering per travel day, with travel day being defined as a day on which at least one fighter entered. The highest rate of entry was found in Jarabulus, where 8.5 recruits arrived per travel day during the time period that this entry point was operational (February 2013 to November 2014), while 5.47

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30 Although there was one entry in the Islamic State dataset listed in February 1989, the authors assumed this was an error and used February 2011 as the starting point for the time range.
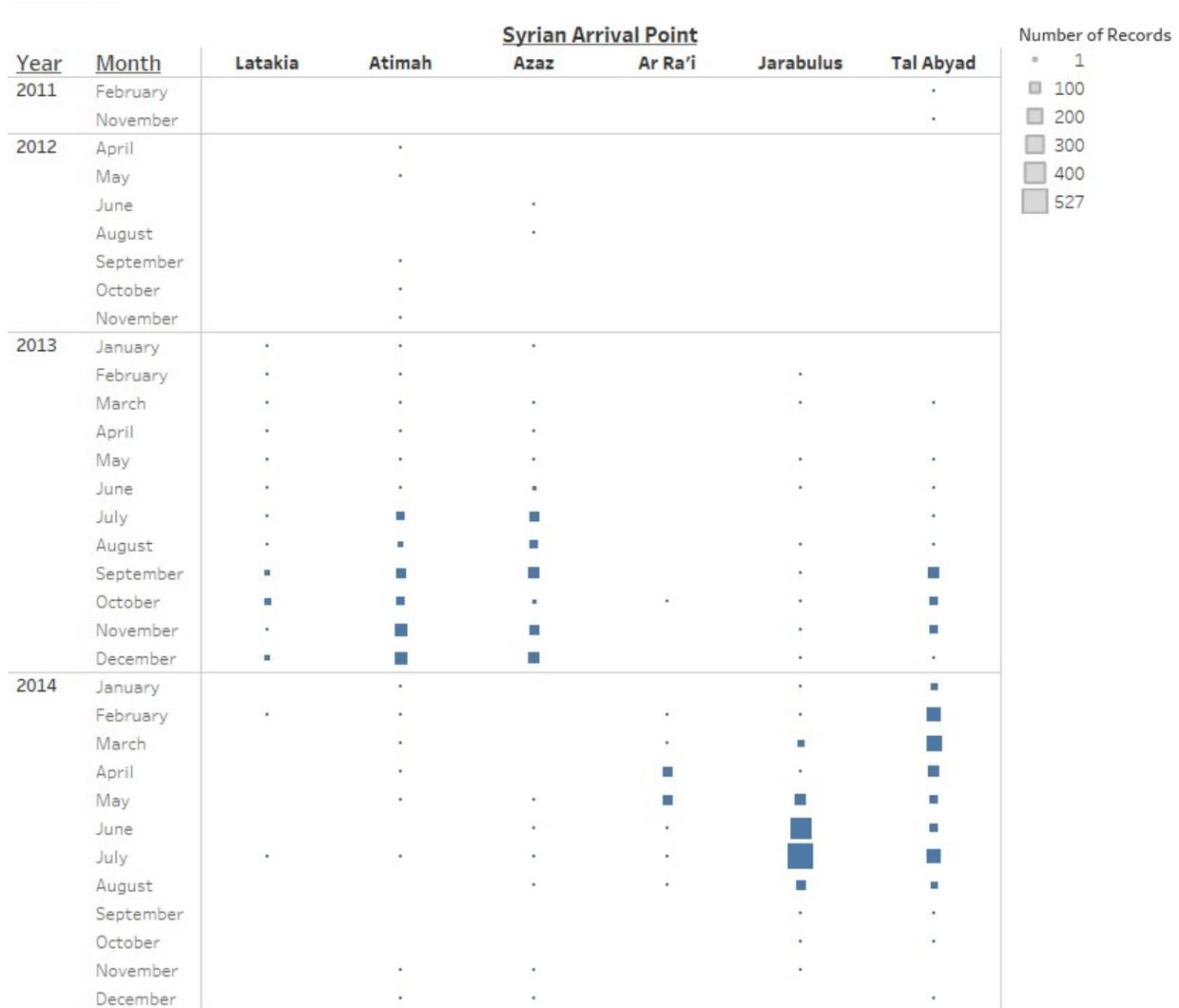
31 For background on the general flow of Islamic State recruits through each of these locations, see *The Caliphate's Global Workforce*, p. 26.

arrived per travel day in Tal Abyad during its operational period (March 2013 to December 2014[32]). The northwestern and north-central arrival points saw lower rates of daily entry. In the northwest, Latakia had an average rate of 2.03 recruits arriving on each travel day during its operational period (January 2013 to July 2014), while Atimah's number is slightly higher at 3.18 (from April 2012 to December 2014). In the north-central part of Syria, Azaz has an average rate of 2.96 recruits per travel day (operational from June 2012 to December 2014), while Ar Ra`i has a rate of 3.4 (operational from October 2013 to August 2014). It is difficult to compare these rates with the Sinjar data, however, due primarily to the low percentage of fighters who provided an entry date (34.5%). For the 202 fighters who provided this data, they arrived at a rate of 3.26 fighters per travel day, although this figure likely underrepresents the actual level of activity due to the low reporting rate. Overall, this data indicates that when recruit arrival flow is compared across AQI and the Islamic State during the respective time periods for which we have data, a lot depends on what specific arrival point one is evaluating, as different arrival points tell different stories.

A comparison of travel patterns, as reflected by months during which recruits arrived, can also be made across the two datasets. For AQI, the fall and summer, and the months of November and July specifically, were the highest frequency arrival months for new volunteers. The fall and summer were also high frequency arrival times for Islamic State recruits, and although this month's popularity varied by year, it was during July 2014 when the Islamic State saw its highest number of recruits arrive. But just like the arrival data explored in the paragraph above, the highest frequency arrival months—and in some cases the most popular season of arrival—varied by specific Islamic State points of entry. For example, while the fall and summer were generally popular across Islamic State arrival points, the highest density of recruits arriving at Ar Ra`i occurred during the spring. The Syrian town of Tal Abyad had the most consistent flow of recruits across seasons and across a defined one-year period. Figure 7, which illustrates the temporal and seasonal dynamics for each major Islamic State arrival location, is provided below for context. (Additional details for each arrival location are included in the Appendix.)

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32   This period excludes the two entries that were recorded during 2011. It is not clear if these dates were entered in error or not, but since no additional entries were recorded between December 2011 and February 2013, those entries were discounted for the purpose of this daily average.

Year	Month	Latakia	Atimah	Azaz	Ar Ra'i	Jarabulus	Tal Abyad
2011	February						·
	November						·
2012	April		·				
	May		·				
	June			·			
	August			·			
	September		·				
	October		·				
	November		·				
2013	January	·	·	·			
	February	·	·			·	
	March	·	·	·		·	·
	April	·	·	·			
	May	·	·	·		·	·
	June	·	·	·		·	·
	July	·	■	■			
	August	·	·	■		·	
	September	▪	■	■			■
	October	▪	■	·	·	·	▪
	November	·	■	■		·	▪
	December	▪	■	■		·	·
2014	January		·			·	▪
	February	·	·		·	·	■
	March		·		·	▪	■
	April		·		▪	·	■
	May		·	·	▪	▪	▪
	June			·	·	■	▪
	July	·	·	·	·	■	■
	August			·	·	▪	▪
	September					·	
	October					·	
	November		·			·	
	December		·	·			·

Syrian Arrival Point

Number of Records: 1, 100, 200, 300, 400, 527

Figure 7: Monthly and Yearly Islamic State Recruit Arrival Patterns by Syrian Town

The graphic above is also useful in that is provides a geographic and temporal overview of the Islamic State's foreign fighter mobilization infrastructure, at least as viewed from Syria, and how the pipeline has changed over time. The major Syrian arrival points used by the Islamic State are arranged by geographic location from northwest to northeast Syria as one moves from left to right across the graphic, and the data reveals that the more northwestern arrival points of Latakia, Atimah, and Azaz were used more frequently by Islamic State recruits during the 2013 timeframe. Then, in January 2014, there was a major drop-off in the use of those arrival locations and a shift to arrival points further east, specifically the towns of Ar Ra`i and Jarabulus. The timing makes sense, as this shift east happened at the same time that the Islamic State was suffering loses in and was retreating from Aleppo (in January 2014) and then Azaz (March 2014).[33] It was also around this time that the group began to consolidate its forces around Raqqa and several months later enhance its presence in Iraq, specifically in Samarra and Mosul.[34]

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33 For background, see "'Hardly Any' Qaeda Militants Left in Aleppo," Al Arabiya, January 8, 2014, and Liz Sly, "Renegade al-Qaida Faction withdraws from Syrian Border Town of Azaz," *Guardian*, March 4, 2014.

34 For background, see Suadad al-Salhy and Tim Arango, "Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul," *New York Times*, June 10, 2014.

Another major trend that can be observed in the data is a precipitous drop-off in Islamic State recruits arriving after August 2014. But the drop-off is likely the result of an internal change initiated by the Islamic State, whereby there was an adjustment in form or process used,[35] or another individual or cell took over recordkeeping for the group. Such a change could have resulted in post-August 2014 recruit arrival data being stored in a different place and thus not reflected in the documents acquired by NBC News.

Trust, and Recruit Vouching

Another main difference between the Sinjar and Islamic State documents is how each organization bureaucratically approached the issue of trust. As evidenced by the form it used, the Islamic State took a more formalized and structured approach to trust, as after each new recruit arrived they were asked to provide a name(s) of the person who recommended, or who could vouch for, them. AQI, on the other hand, took a less formal and unstructured bureaucratic approach to this issue, as the one similar question that they asked their recruits called upon them to identify how they met their local travel coordinator. Unlike the recruits from the Islamic State documents, who provided specific names in their responses, the responses that the AQI recruits provided were vague and not useful. For example, instead of providing the name of an actual person, which an organization could verify, the most frequent response AQI recruits provided to the question was that they met their local travel coordinator through "a brother," meaning an Islamic co-religionist.[36] The second most popular response provided was that they linked up with their coordinator through "a friend."[37]

As discussed above, the difference between the forms used by the two groups could also be considered an evolution or maturation in bureaucratic process, as instead of having recruits fill out a question with an answer that likely was not that useful, the Islamic State has chosen to take a more structured approach to this issue. This suggests that when it comes to coming in contact with their group, trust-based networks might be a more important factor. This is not to say that trust was also not an important issue for AQI, but rather that that group appears to have made an organizational decision—due to security reasons or otherwise—that it did not want to systematically collect and catalog that information.[38] AQI's less structured approach to this issue could also reflect the time and place AQI found itself in—a period when AQI was a relatively young organization, and the pipeline and networks used to facilitate the flow of foreigners to its organization was still being worked out.

Fighter Preferences/Roles

Similar to AQI, al-Baghdadi's group had its recruits fill out or express a preference regarding the primary role they wanted to play within the organization. The preferences for those who joined AQI fell into three categories: fighter, suicide bomber, and other.[39] Recruits who joined the Islamic State were asked two questions about the roles they wanted to play; one was general, and the other was specific. For the first question, recruits were asked to select from three options: fighter, suicide bomber, and suicide fighter (*inghimasi*). While the first two options overlap with those found in the Sinjar records, the last option "suicide fighter" does not. This limits the strength of the direct comparison that can be made between these two datasets, especially since the term "suicide fighter" was not one that was

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35   The forms all have "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" in the header. It is conceivable that with the establishment of the caliphate on June 29, 2014, and the corresponding name change to the "Islamic State," a new form was being used by September 2014 to reflect the change.

36   For background, see *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout*, p. 45.

37   Ibid.

38   The authors recognize the possibility that AQI could have stored this information elsewhere, perhaps on another form.

39   As noted in *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq*, the types of work are listed in various ways in the original Arabic and in translation. Listings such as "combatant" and "fighters" were counted as "fighter." Listings such as "martyr," "martyrdom," "suicide," and "suicide mission" were counted as "suicide bomber." See p. 18.

heavily used during AQI's heyday. Thus, some of the individuals who expressed a preference to be a "suicide bomber" in that dataset might have selected "suicide fighter"—if that option or concept was available—instead. There is no way for one to reengineer the data, so what follows is a comparison of the data from several angles. Examining the data from these different perspectives will avoid emphasizing one interpretation over others and allow the reader to draw their own conclusions.

One of the most interesting things about the Sinjar records is the high percentage of individuals who wanted to be suicide bombers. Fifty-five percent of the recruits who joined AQI at the time and filled out this portion of the form expressed a preference to play this role, while only 43% wanted to be fighters.[40] As can be seen in Figure 8, this dynamic is much different than those who joined the Islamic State, as 89% of people who joined that group wanted to be fighters. Even if one combines the percentage of Islamic State recruits who wanted to be a "suicide bomber"—7%—and those who wanted to be a "suicide fighter"—5%—this broader 'suicide category' is still significantly lower than that found in the Sinjar records.

Another key difference between the two organizations—and the dynamic of suicide bombers—is that AQI had some of its incoming recruits "sign contracts pledging to commit suicide bombings in Iraq rather than become fighters, suggesting that AQI struggled with [some] entering fighters backing out of their pledge to become suicide bombers."[41] Based upon the available evidence, it does not appear that the Islamic State asked its recruits to sign the same type of pledge. Unlike the Sinjar records, however, the Islamic State documents did occasionally specify where some of its suicide-bomber recruits either wanted to conduct their operation or the geographic area where the organization planned to send them. This suggests that either the organization or the individual had clear ideas about where the suicide attack was to take place.
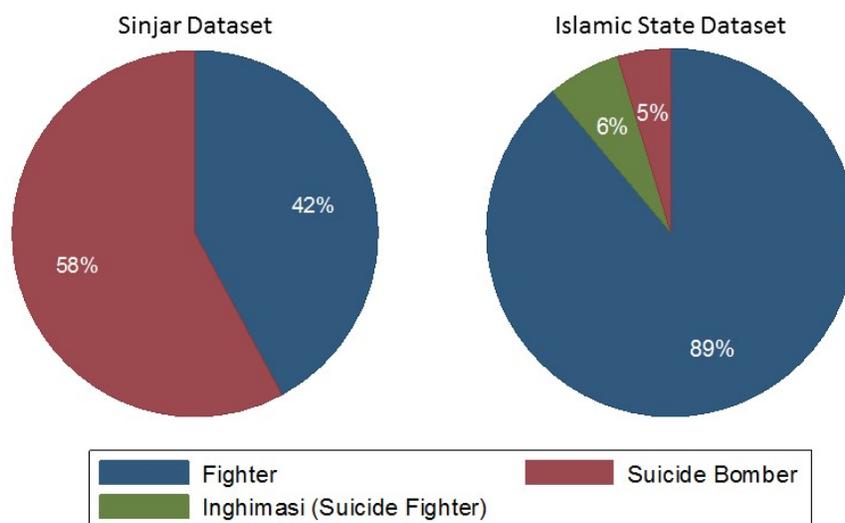
Figure 8: Comparison of Fighter Role Preferences

As discussed in the CTC's initial report on the Islamic State documents, a number of factors likely account for this apparent shift in role. One important reason is that the two iterations of the organization operated in vastly different environments. While the Islamic State holds significant territory, has self-declared the creation of its caliphate, and has been trying to build a functioning military and government, AQI was an insurgent group that held no real territory and struggled for survival against

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40   Three hundred seventy-six recruits out of a total of 588 filled out this portion of AQI's form.

41   *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout*, p. 57.

the United States, a superior military foe.

As a result, both entities had different needs when it came to additional manpower, a factor that has affected foreign fighter demand—and specifically how those recruits have been used and deployed. For example, given the Islamic State's desire to maintain control over territory where it has influence and to seize control and hold new areas, its manpower needs are more diverse. As while suicide bombers would help the group to take over a city and to defend it against attack, the Islamic State also needs people to help the group 'govern' those territories and to act as Sharia officials, administrators, etc.[42]

Another factor that has likely contributed to the shift in preferences is the creation of the caliphate itself and the narratives the Islamic State has constructed about the historic and grand nature of its project. Indeed, while "one cannot ignore the apocalyptic aspects of the organization's ideology, recruits coming to the Islamic State are being sold a narrative of success and the promise of a pure Islamic society and way of life for them and their families."[43] This has not only affected the supply of foreign fighters, but also likely the roles they want to play, as "many may be traveling to the Islamic State to live, not die (although certainly many are prepared to do the latter if the need arises, or if they have a strong desire for martyrdom)."[44]

The shift could also be tied to the Islamic State's ability to provide more robust military training to its new recruits, given its control over a greater swath of territory—and the perception that new recruits might have about the training options available to them. Another factor that could be contributing to this dynamic could be the Islamic State's media—and the type of operations that the group celebrates and glorifies in its publications. Both AQI and the Islamic State celebrated suicide-bombing operations in their media, but unlike its predecessor, it appears as though the Islamic State's media releases are more diverse in their battlefield coverage and that it has provided more video air-time showing armed attacks. The Islamic State has also done a better job of personalizing and celebrating lower-level fighters, a factor that could be having a tangible impact on how recruits perceive their role and the potential difference they might make.[45] In the past, if a foreign fighter joining AQI wanted to make a big or more noticeable difference, signing up to be a suicide bomber was likely a more certain pathway to accomplish that goal. Now, due to the Islamic State's own media, it appears that pathway is more diverse. One can also be a fighter and be noticed.

An analysis of the top suicide bomber and fighter producing countries across both datasets is also revealing. For the purposes of this comparison, the suicide bomber and suicide fighter categories in the Islamic State data were combined. In the Sinjar records, the top seven countries that produced the most suicide bombers as a percentage of respondents from those nations that expressed a preference, included (from highest to lowest percentage): Morocco (91.7%), Libya (85%), Syria (62.1%), Saudi Arabia (48.9%), Yemen (44.4%), Tunisia (41.7%), and Algeria (14.7%). Noticeably, all of the high suicide-bombing producing countries are located in either North Africa or the Middle East. Table 3 below compares Sinjar's top seven list with the top seven suicide-role producing countries from the Islamic State documents.

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42   As mentioned in the CTC's original analysis of the Islamic States' documents: "Although, it should be noted that given the significantly larger scale of this dataset versus Sinjar, the total number of suicide volunteers in this data (474) far outweighs that of Sinjar." *The Caliphate's Global Workforce*, p. 29.

43   *The Caliphate's Global Workforce*, p. 29.

44   Ibid.

45   For more on this and other dynamics associated with the Islamic State's media operations, see Daniel Milton, *Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, October 2016).

Table 3: Top Suicide Role Producing Countries

Sinjar Records			Islamic State Documents*		
Country	Number (total)	Percent Suicide Bombers	Country	Number (total)	Percent Suicide Role
Morocco	22 (24)	91.7%	Pakistan	4 (14)	28.6%
Libya	51 (60)	85%	Lebanon	8 (30)	26.7%
Syria	18 (29)	62.1%	Libya	25 (105)	23.8%
Saudi Arabia	71 (145)	48.9%	Netherlands	3 (13)	23.1%
Yemen	16 (36)	44.4%	Kuwait	4 (23)	17.4%
Tunisia	10 (24)	41.7%	Morocco	40 (247)	16.2%
Algeria	5 (34)	14.7%	Saudi Arabia	120 (766)	15.7%

* Totals only include those individuals who selected one of the three provided options: fighter, suicide bomber, or suicide fighter (inghimasi).

As one can see, the top suicide-bomber producing countries in the Islamic State documents are Pakistan, Lebanon, and Libya. Also, three countries—Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Libya—appear on both lists, which indicates that there has been some level of consistency with recruits from those nations wanting to serve as suicide bombers over time. Those who expressed a preference to be a "fighter" in the Sinjar records paint a different story. Similar to the high suicide-bombing producing countries, the top seven fighter producing countries from the Sinjar records are all countries in either North Africa or the Middle East.[46] As revealed below in Table 4, the same cannot be said for the Islamic State documents, in part because of the greater geographic diversity that existed among the records of incoming fighters.

Table 4: Top Fighter Producing Countries

Sinjar Records			Islamic State Documents*		
Country	Number (total)	Percent Fighters	Country	Number (total)	Percent Fighters
Algeria	28 (34)	82.4%	Kosovo	43 (43)	100%
Tunisia	14 (24)	58.3%	Canada	16 (16)	100%
Yemen	20 (36)	55.6%	Macedonia	16 (16)	100%
Saudi Arabia	71 (145)	48.9%	Albania	15 (15)	100%
Syria	10 (29)	34.5%	Denmark	13 (13)	100%
Libya	8 (60)	13.3%	Qatar	8 (8)	100%
Morocco	2 (24)	8.3%	France	115 (118)	97.5%

* Totals only include those individuals who selected one of the three provided options: fighter, suicide bomber, or suicide fighter (inghimasi).

While there are different country patterns that appear when we consider the individual's role preference in the organization, there is also another interesting pattern that appears when examining the ages of individuals by operational role. In the Sinjar data, the average year of birth for the 92 individuals who were categorized as fighters was 1982.6, or approximately 23-24 years old. The average year of birth for the 88 individuals categorized as suicide bombers, on the other hand, was 1981.9, or

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46   Similar to the Sinjar record suicide bomber statistic, this list reflects the top fighter-producing countries as a percentage of respondents from those nations that expressed a preference. For background, see *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout*, p. 57.

about 8 months older.[47] The Islamic State data, however, provides a sharp contrast. The average year of birth of 3,463 individuals categorized as fighters was 1986.9, or about 26-27 years old. Among the 451 individuals who volunteered for a suicide role (either as suicide bombers or as suicide fighters), the average year of birth was 1988.3, or nearly two years younger than the fighters.

In other words, there has been an interesting demographic change in terms of the age of individuals volunteering for different roles. In the Sinjar data, the fighters were either *younger or the same age* as those who volunteered to be suicide bombers. In the Islamic State data, fighters are *older* as compared to those volunteering for a suicide role. We can only speculate on the reasons for this shift, but the Islamic State's efforts to recruit through social media and to accept a wider range of individuals likely form part of any explanation.

Conclusion

This report and its findings confirm how the scale and scope of the flow of recruits to the Islamic State grew, and the make-up of those who joined the group diversified, as compared to the recruits for its predecessor organization. Not only did a significantly larger flow of recruits join the Islamic State during the latter period, but those who arrived came from more countries and more provinces and states within countries, indicating that the Islamic State was able to amplify its reach and appeal across the board and parlay that into more sustained mobilization. Those mobilization gains did not just bring more people; they also brought a more diverse collection of people, encompassing a broader range of ages, skills, and backgrounds. There were also important differences observed between how the two populations traveled, as those who joined the Islamic State later appear to have traveled alone more frequently and in larger sized groups.

While a lot has changed since the end of 2014 and the Islamic State—and its foreign fighter mobilization infrastructure—has been put under increased amounts of pressure, these findings still highlight the complex nature of the foreign fighter threat and the various counterterrorism challenges that they present. One of the most significant of those challenges is the variation and diversity in the backgrounds of more recent Islamic State recruits. And while there really has never been a standard or generalizable profile of a foreign fighter to aid counterterrorism practitioners in their pursuits, this report's findings indicate that the picture of who joins al-Baghdadi's group is even less generalizable than it was previously. And in some ways, knowing less about 'who' to look for complicates and problematizes counterterrorism actions that aim to prevent recruitment and radicalization in the first place as well as future attacks at latter stages.

A related challenge lies in other patterns that this report has identified. For example, counterterrorism investigators do not just need to be concerned about dealing with more Islamic State recruitment cases from across a broader range of backgrounds, but they likely also need to deal with challenges related to shifts that have taken place in the travel patterns of foreign recruits that have joined the group. Indeed, as this report highlights, during the 2011-2014 timeframe more individuals arrived at the Islamic State after traveling by themselves and in larger sized groups than those who arrived in 2006-2007. If these trends continue, they represent a mixed bag for investigators, providing them with both challenges and opportunities. On the challenge side, the rise in individual travelers means that counterterrorism agents are going to need to deal with, and find, more individual cases, a factor that is likely to require more resources. To aid them in those pursuits, localized network data about individual travelers and the level and type of relationships they potentially had with other individual

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47   If all of the individuals who listed "martyr" are categorized as suicide bombers, the total number of suicide bombers increases to 149 and the average year of birth increases to 1982, or about six months older than the average suicide bomber. While this difference may not seem very large, the most stringent interpretation suggests that there was no age gap between suicide bombers and fighters in the Sinjar data.

or group travelers will be essential, as will be taking a strategic approach to data management and mapping the inter-connectivity of disparate sets of data.

The fact that larger groups of recruits from the same hometowns arrived on the same days and points of entry presents a number of opportunities, however. The larger size of hometown travel groups, and the fact that some of these hometown group 'clusters' are traveling from select cities around the globe in higher frequencies, means that there could be chances to identify more sizeable recruit groups and to either monitor them or prevent them from traveling. Assuming that these larger groups are traveling, and not just arriving, together in Syria, their behavior should yield more identifiable signatures, which could be exploited. Action in this realm will require that countries like Saudi Arabia, Libya, Turkey, Tunisia, and China care enough about recruits leaving—and are incentivized enough to take measures to prevent that from taking place. Given that some of these countries might prefer to overlook the travel of radicalized individuals abroad so that they do not fester and cause trouble at home, gaining cooperation could be a tall order.

Even if that ends up being the case, the foreign recruits traveling from farther away were dependent on some form of international infrastructure (i.e. planes, trains, etc.) to gain entry into Syria via Turkey, although these dynamics have, of course, changed over the past year or two. Depending on the evidence available, there could be opportunities to either work in partnership with or take actions against the private sector transport providers that are indirectly facilitating the travel of foreign fighters globally. To facilitate such activity, an effort could be made to re-engineer the international travel data of those recruits found within both sets of data reviewed for this report so that travel patterns can be established and verified.

While the material and findings from this report provide an important, comparative first step regarding how the Islamic State-related foreign fighter problem has changed over two defined blocks of time, additional research will reveal other trends and enhance our understanding of how this problem has evolved. For example, when the data evaluated for this report is combined with other data about the mobilization of foreign war volunteers who engaged in jihad in other theaters of conflict (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Mali, etc.), it will highlight broader changes that have occurred across time and space. This will allow policy-makers and other decision-makers to 'scope-out' and gain a better understanding of the high-level dynamics, and patterns, that appear at the strategic level, which could lead to more effective strategies and policies.

At the same time, more localized and granular analysis of the Sinjar records and Islamic State documents in relation to specific geographic areas, such as looking at variation in travel group size across countries or at the cities that serve as higher-density group travel locations, will allow practitioners to 'scope-in' and uncover shifts and/or points of consistency that exist – but are currently not apparent in the data. Detailed network analysis of the roles played by border facilitators across both sets of data will likely also produce specific insights into how the structure of the Islamic State's cross-border foreign fighter mobilization infrastructure has metastasized, highlighting network attributes that have contributed to resilience or weakness over time. This type of data also has the potential to become even more powerful when it is evaluated in relation to specific countries, hometown locations, and/or recommenders, as this type of analysis could reveal new patterns that could be exploited or used to inform ongoing operations.

Appendices

Sample Personnel Records: AQI and Islamic State

Personnel File from Sinjar Record Collection

بســـم الله الــــرحمن الــــرحيم
الدولة الإســـلامية فـي العـــراق والشام
الإدارة العامـــــــــــــــة للحـــــــــدود
بيانات المجاهدين

الإدارة العامة للحدود

ضياء الحق عبدالحق	الإسم واللقب	1
ابو يوسف الخراساني	الكنية	2
حليمه	إسم الأم	3
B+	فصيلة الدم	4
1980/3/11م – استرالي	تاريخ الولادة و الجنسية	5
أعزب ( ) متزوج (*) عدد الأطفال (1)	الحالة الإجتماعية	6
استراليا – سدني – 17بروفنشل	العنوان و مكان الإقامة	7
ثانوي	التحصيل الدراسي	8
طالب علم ( ) متوسط (*) بسيط ( )	المستوى الشرعي	9
محاسب	ماهي مهنتك قبل المجيئ ؟	10
بلاد الحرمين – الصين – باكستان – استراليا	البلدان التي سافرت إليها وكم لبثت بها؟	11
الراعي	المنفذ الذي دخلت منه ؟ والواسطة ؟	12
ابو عمر الافغاني في مدينة سدني	هل لديك تزكية ومن من ؟	13
1435/7/16هـ	تاريخ الدخول ؟	14
لا	هل سبق لك الجهاد ؟ وأين ؟	15
مقاتل	مقاتل أم إستشهادي أم إنغماسي ؟	16
مقاتل ( ) شرعي ( ) أمني ( ) إداري ( )	الإختصاص ؟	17
	مكان العمل الحالي	18
هاتف	الأمانات التي تركتها ؟	19
	مستوى السمع والطاعة ؟	20
	العنوان الذي نتواصل معه ؟	21
	تاريخ القتل و المكان	22
الجواز وجميع الاغراض في تركيا عند ابو بكر	ملاحظات	23

مسؤول الحدود

الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام __ سري __

*Personnel File from the Islamic State Document Collection*

Comparison of Fighter Flows Across Three Countries

Saudi Arabia				Libya				Morocco			
Sinjar		Islamic State		Sinjar		Islamic State		Sinjar		Islamic State	
Town	#	Town	#	Town	#	Town	#	Town	#	Town	#
Riyadh	50	Riyadh	237	Darnah	53	Benghazi	42	Casablanca	17	Fes	36
Mecca	43	Buraydah	105	Benghazi	20	Darnah	34	Tetouan	6	Tetouan	32
Al Jawf	15	Mecca	42	Sirt	5	Tripoli	6	Tangier	2	Tangier	23
Jeddah	14	At Ta'if	42	Ajdabyiyah	4	Ajdabyiyah	3	Taroudant	1	Fnidek	12
At Ta'if	10	Jeddah	42	Misratah	3	Sirt	3			Casablanca	11
Medina	10	Ha'il	26	Al Burayqah	1	Jubalylah	2			Larache	11
Buraydah	8	Tabuk	18	Wadi an Naqah	1	Zawiya	2			Marrakesh	8
Al Qasim	6	Ad Dammam	16							Sale	8
Tabuk	5	Medina	14							Kasbat Tadlah	7
Al Bahah	4	Al Qasim	9							Beni Mellal	6
Others (13)	19	Others (79)	184			Others (12)	12			Others (54)	87
Unknown	37	Unknown	26	Unknown	23	Unknown	2	Unknown	10	Unknown	9

## Temporal and Flow at Each Major Islamic State Syrian Point of Arrival
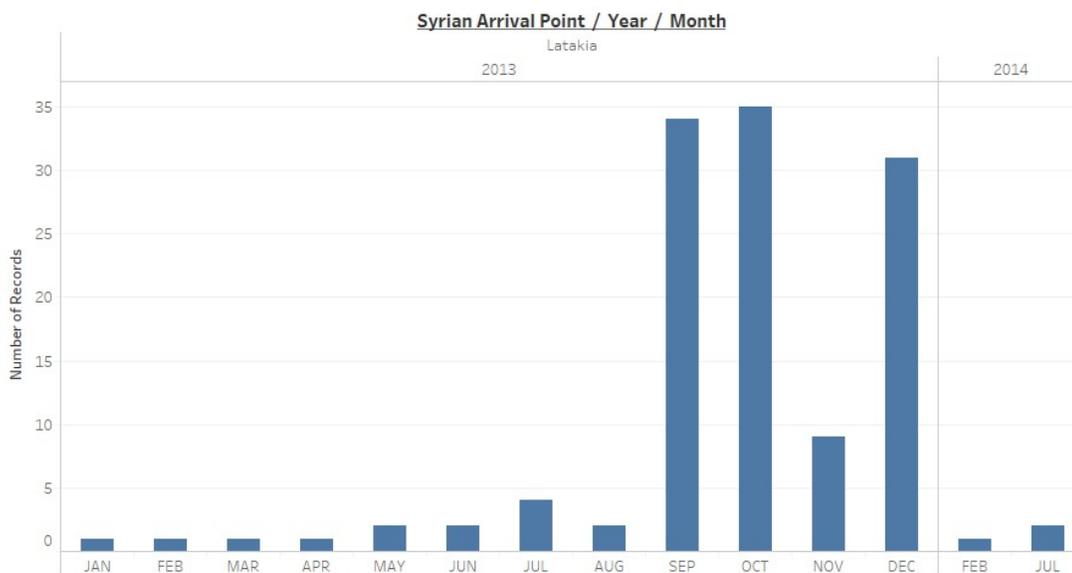
Latakia Border Crossings (1/13-7/14)
Description: The graph includes all crossings at Latakia. Mean number of recruits per travel day = 1.97

Syrian Arrival Point / Year / Month
Atimah
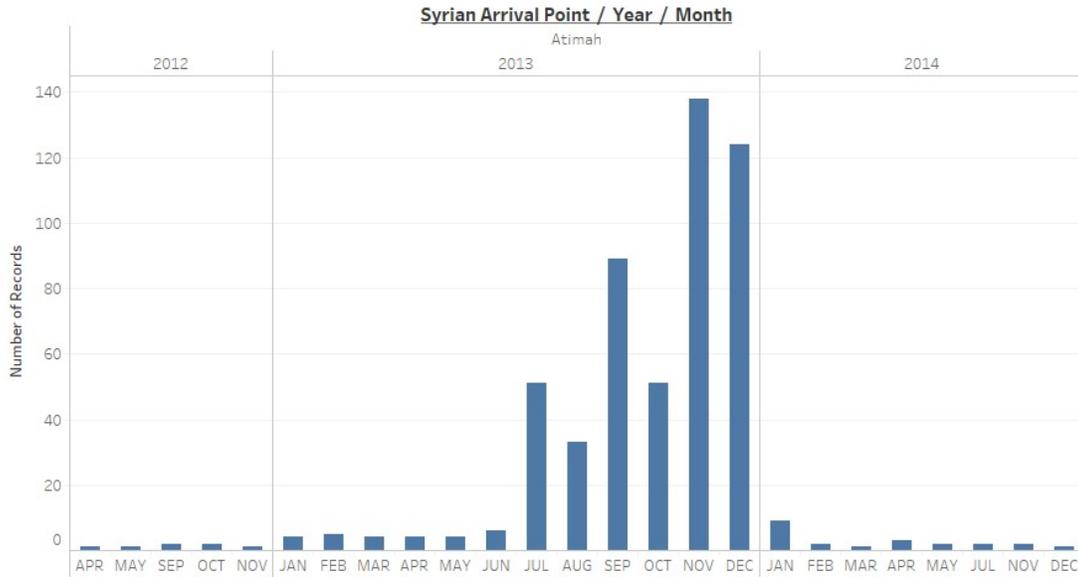
Atimah Border Crossings (4/12-12/14)
Description: Includes all incidents. Mean number of recruits per day = 3.16
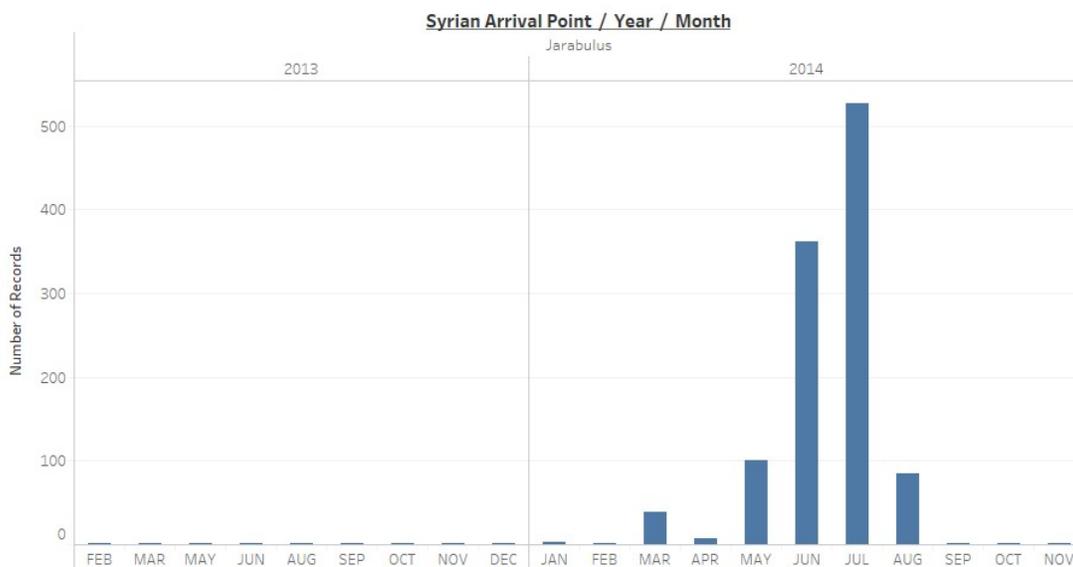
Syrian Arrival Point / Year / Month
I'zaz
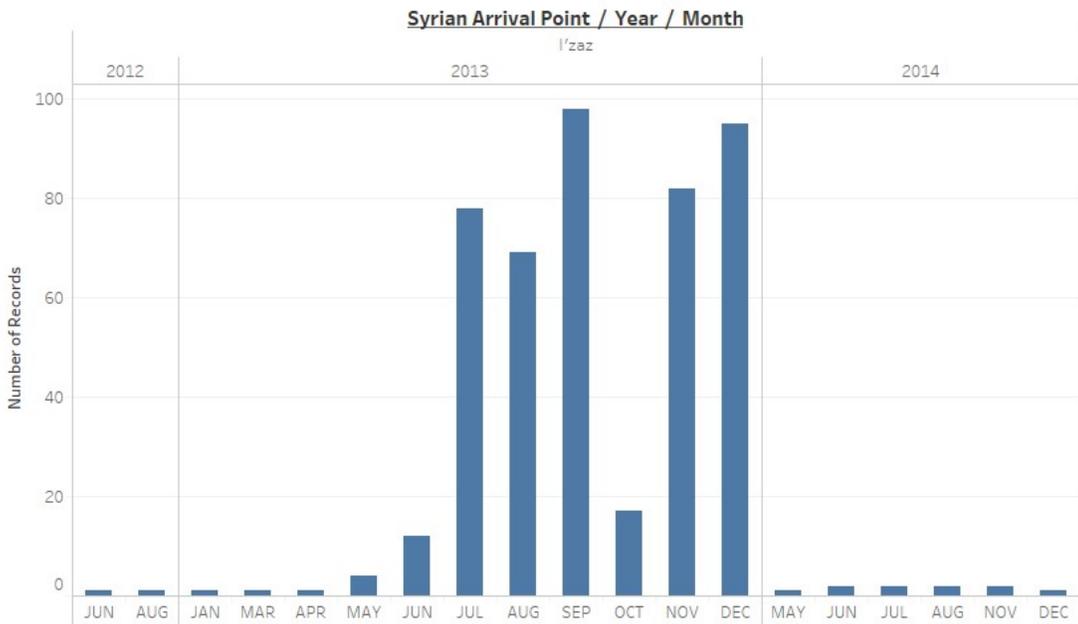
Azaz Daily Border Crossings (6/12-12/14)
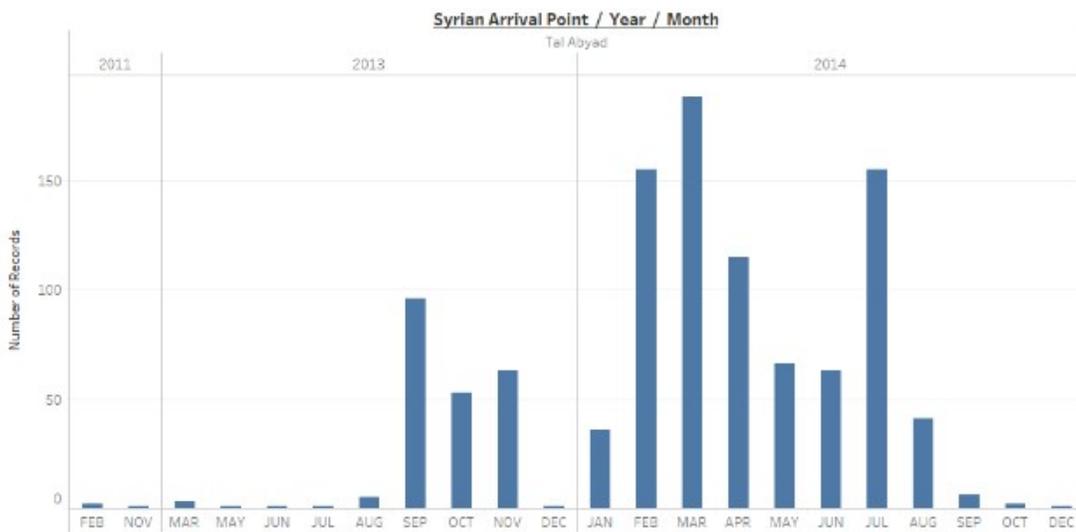Description: Includes all incidents. Mean number of recruits per day = 2.91
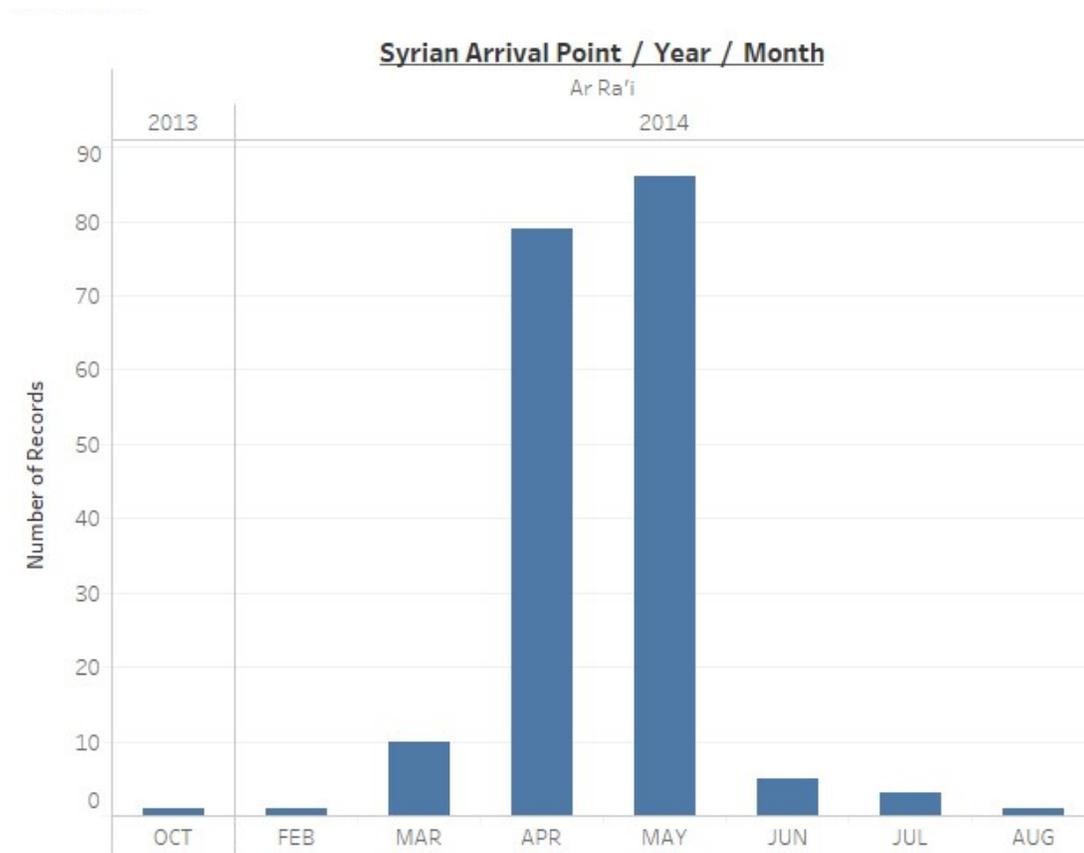
Ar Ra`i Daily Border Crossings (10/13-8/14)
Description: Includes all incidents. Mean number of recruits per day = 3.38

Jarabulus Daily Border Crossings (2/13-11/14)
Description: Includes all incidents. Mean number of recruits per day = 8.5

Tal Abyad Daily Border Crossings (2/13-12/14)
Description: Includes all incidents. Mean number of recruits per day = 5.47