PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume X, Issue 6 (December 2016) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* at http://www.terrorismanalysts.com. Our free online journal is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna (Austria), and the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies (CTSS), headquartered at the Lowell Campus of the University of Massachusetts (United States). Now in its tenth year, Perspectives on Terrorism has nearly 6,700 regular subscribers and many thousand more occasional readers and website visitors worldwide. The Articles of its six annual issues are fully peer reviewed by external referees while its Research Notes, Policy Notes and other content are subject to internal editorial review.

This Special Issue was prepared by guest editor Petter Nesser and his colleagues at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI, in Oslo, Norway) in collaboration with Alex Schmid (The Hague, Netherlands) and James Forest (Lowell, Mass., USA), the regular editors of Perspectives on Terrorism. It contains papers from the FFI – hosted conference "European Jihadism in the 'Caliphate' Era," held in Oslo on 1-2 September 2016. It has been made possible by funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Defence and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Opened by Minister of Defence Ine Eriksen Søreide[1], the conference brought together academics, policy makers, practitioners and journalists with the aim to assess the status of jihadi militancy in Europe following the rise of the so-called "Islamic State" (IS).

Presentations covered attack plots and operations, foreign fighting, radicalization, social media usage and country-specific variations. Some of the contributors were encouraged to make forecasts about medium-to-long-term future trends, considering three dimensions: 1) the rise of IS, 2) the refugee crisis, and 3) polarization within Europe.

Since the September conference, IS has come under pressure in Iraq, and the influx of refugees into Europe has slowed down. We do not yet know for sure whether these developments will continue and how they might affect polarization of host societies. These fourteen articles provide nearly up-to-date insights about the IS-induced effects on European jihadism; they contains well–informed thoughts on what could be the future trends.

The contributions in this issue demonstrate how the study of European jihadism has moved beyond 'either-or'-explanations, such as debates about whether the threat is either international or home-grown, or whether it is driven either by social grievances or ideology. The contributors take into account the interplay between different drivers and highlight both continuity and discontinuity regarding the evolving threat and responses to it. Findings are based on empirical research, ranging from qualitative interview to, content and quantitative data analysis.

Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen and Emilie Oftedal offer an empirical overview of the terrorist threat to Europe since the rise of IS, focusing on network dynamics, modus operandi, and the financing of plots. Viewing developments from a historical perspective, they find that, apart from the broadening scope of the jihadist phenomenon, "less is new than most assume".

Then, three articles address what *is* actually new in recruitment and terrorist cell formation. Rajan Basra and Peter Neumann highlight the growing presence of criminals in IS's European networks. Clare Ellis examines how the IS threat in Europe involves new, "hybrid" forms of lone actor terrorism, whereas Nico Prucha looks at how the encrypted social media platform *Telegram* has emerged as IS' new "information highway" and recruitment tool for European jihadis.

Another three articles shed light on European foreign fighters. Jakob Sheikh who interviewed Danish foreign fighters, noticed that the very idea of a new Islamic "State" was a major pull-factor for them. Philip Verwimp makes a case for the role of socio-economic factors in radicalization, noticing that the unemployment rate gap between native citizens and immigrants on the one hand and foreign fighter exodus on the other hand correlate per country. Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn discusses the need for looking beyond the terrorist threat and beyond Europe when assessing the consequences of the European foreign fighter phenomenon.

Four articles present case studies of how the broader dynamics of European jihadism play out locally. Jean-Pierre Filiu illustrates the historical continuity of European jihadi networks and how seasoned veteran militants act as guides for new generations of IS terrorists. Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen discusses a development towards a 'plebeian' form jihadism in Denmark–something that already preceded the rise of IS. Carola García-Calvo and Fernando Reinares present data on the characteristics of IS-linked militants in Spain, using a three-tier model to conceptualize the dynamics of Spanish jihadism. Brynjar Lia and Petter Nesser introduce a new framework to understand the emergence of jihadi networks in peripheral European countries, using Norway as a case study.

Last, three contributions address counter-measures and the future threat of jihadism. Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen makes a case for more flexible counter-measures adapted to different types of actors, pleading for a "networked governance approach" . Timothy Holman looks at the challenges states face in countering foreign fighter mobilizations, highlighting how national political interests and poor intelligence sharing hamper success. The Special Issue is concluded by Thomas Hegghammer, who offers a sobering forecast about what the future is likely to hold for us if present jihadist trends in Europe continue. A new bibliography about Islamist terrorism in Europe and the Islamic State from the experienced hands of Judith Tinnes rounds off this issue.

Note

[1] Ine Eriksen Søreide, "European jihadism and its international backdrop, " Speech/statement published: 2016-09-14; URL: https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/eriksen-soreide-european-jihadism-and-its-international-backdrop/id2511135/

Articles

Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect

by Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen and Emilie Oftedal

Abstract

The article examines the extent to which Islamic State (IS) has affected jihadi terrorism in Europe. We look at the scope of attack activity, perpetrators and their networks, modus operandi and funding. For all the talk of a new threat we argue that, apart from scope, less is new than most assume. IS wants largely the same as al-Qaida did by attacking Europe. Their tactics are similar and their networks overlap in time and space. The core dynamics of the threat endure. It is premature to talk of a new paradigm in recruitment, but more terrorists are instructed online than before. Patterns in funding remain relatively stable, but there is an increase in plots financed from abroad. Despite military setbacks, IS remains a formidable terrorist actor, with territorial control, economic muscle and thousands of Europeans in its ranks. These things, combined with the group's skillful social media usage, are exhausting European security services' capacities. So is the refugee situation, which is exploited by IS to transfer personnel. If IS's territorial control persists, we foresee attempts at large-scale operations, including attempts at using improvised chemical or radiological devices. If IS continues to lose ground, small-scale attacks by single actors will become even more frequent.

Keywords: Terrorism; jihadism; militant Islamism; Islamic State; al-Qaida; foreign fighters

Introduction

Europe is facing an escalating threat from jihadi terrorism.[1] There has never been higher numbers of attack plots per year than in 2014-16. An increasing proportion of plots goes undetected and result in deadly attacks. More people have been killed by jihadi violence in Western Europe in 2014-2016 (273 people) than in all previous years combined (267 people). This is due to a small number of highly deadly incidents: The Paris attack on 13 November 2015 (130 killed), the Brussels bombing in March 2016 (32 killed) and the Nice truck attack in July 2016 (84 killed). The period also saw the first example of two mass casualty attacks being launched successfully in a row, namely those in Paris and Brussels.

Beginning in the winter 2013-14, the vast majority of plots involve links to the Islamic State (IS).[2] These links range from cells trained and directed by the group, to individuals answering calls from IS spokesmen to execute attacks on their own. The elevated threat is covered extensively in international media.[3] There are several reports by think tanks and governmental agencies, as well as academic studies of IS's international operations.[4] However, there exists no systematic analysis of the extent to which IS has changed the threat to Europe, which is what we offer here.

Each IS attack in Europe has generated talk of new trends in modus operandi, perpetrator profiles and radicalization. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the many debates. We stick to presenting solid data and more anecdotal evidence on what has changed, and what has not. We caution against making generalizations based on the latest attack. We highlight the value added of including historical data and perspective when analyzing IS's terrorism in Europe.

This empirical article first addresses the scope of terrorist plotting in Europe since the turn of 2013, specifying how much can be attributed to IS. It then goes on to probing possible reasons why IS attacks in Europe, as reflected in the group's official statements and propaganda. After that we discuss network dynamics and perpetrator profiles. We then examine modus operandi, comparing and contrasting plots

in 2014-16 with trends in 1994-2013. Last, we discuss continuity and discontinuity in financing, before concluding by forecasting what could happen next.

In the analyses we compare data from a new chronology of plots and attacks by jihadis in Europe in 2014-16 (Appendix 1)[5], with findings from three previous studies by FFI's Terrorism Research Group: a book on the history of European jihadism by Nesser (2015), an article on the modus operandi of European jihadis by Nesser and Stenersen (2014) and a report on the financing of jihadi terrorist cells by Oftedal (2015). [6] We employ the same methodology that was used in those studies. It implies that we seek to extract as much information we can from foiled plots in addition to executed attacks, to create a broader basis for the analyses. A focus on executed attacks only – which has been the norm, especially in quantitative research – will neither sufficiently grasp the threat level nor trends in terrorist cell formation, tactics and targeting.

Starting Point and Scope

We contend it makes sense to talk about an "IS-effect" on jihadi terrorism in Europe from the turn of 2013. From that point onward the majority of plots are linked to IS, and much fewer ones to al-Qaida.[7] So how does the IS-effect in 2014-16 compare to attack plotting in Europe over time? Overall, we have registered 135 well-documented plots in Europe from 1994 to 1 November 2016, which makes an average of six plots per year (see figure 1).[8] In 2014-16 alone we have registered 42 well-documented plots: 9 in 2014, 17 in 2015 and 16 so far in 2016. Jihadis have launched 50 attacks in Europe in total since 1994. One-third of those attacks have been launched in 2014-16: 2 in 2014, 6 in 2015 and 10 so far in 2016.

Of the 42 well-documented plots in 2014-16, 38 are reported to involve some kind of IS-link. In four cases we found no information of IS-links, but there were links to, or inspiration from al-Qaida-affiliated actors. In one case, the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack, there were links both to al-Qaida and IS. And, as we shall come back to, many people involved in IS-related terrorism in Europe, have been part of al-Qaida affiliated networks until recently.

Figure 1: Number of Well-Documented Jihadi Terrorist Plots per Year in Western Europe
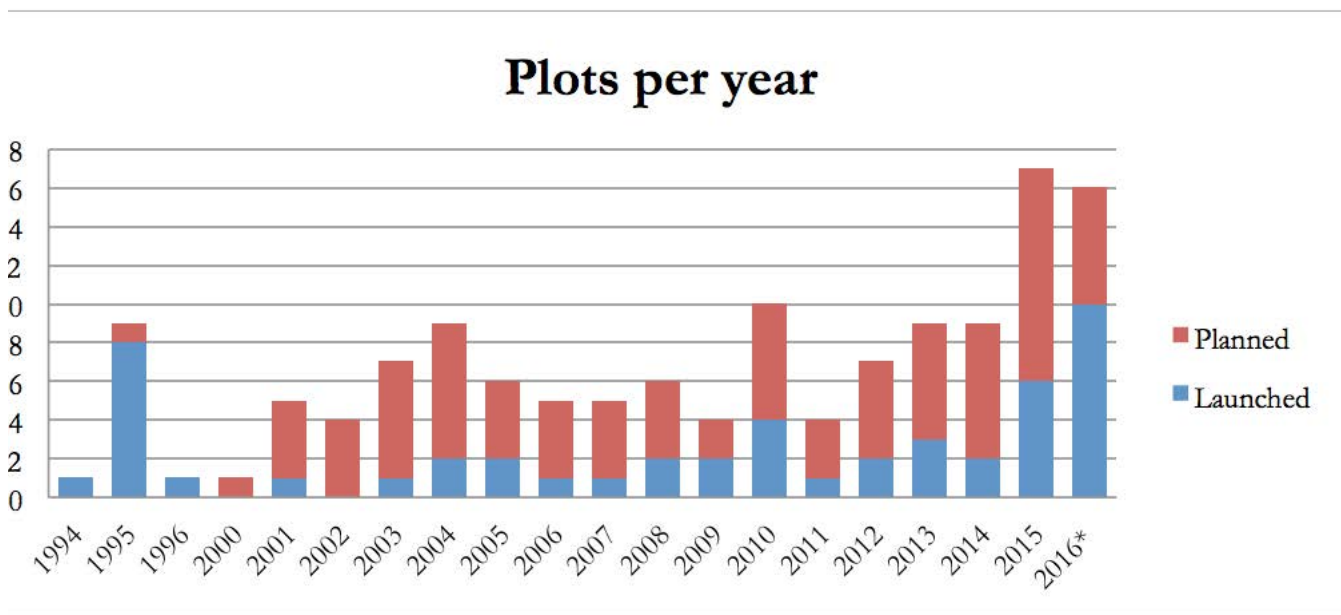
What IS Says About Its Campaign in Europe

The first statement announcing IS's intention to target Europe was given in September 2014 by spokesman and purported leader of international operations, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani. It came two months after the establishment of the 'Caliphate' in June 2014, and seven days after the announcement of the French-led coalition against IS. The statement vowed that IS would retaliate against aggression, and called upon followers in the West and Europe to strike.[9] The message has been reiterated by al-Adnani three times since, in January 2015, in March 2015 and in May 2016, with increasingly specific instructions for attacks. [10] There were three ISIS/IS-related attack plots in Europe in 2014 before al-Adnani's speech in September. [11] Because ISIS/IS had been evasive about attacking the West until then, there was initially uncertainty as to whether these plots could be attributed to the group, or if they were initiated by the perpetrators on their own. It has since been surmised that they marked the beginning of an attack offensive in Europe.[12] After al-Adnani had spelt out what should happen, the threat intensified and a spate of plots ensued. A few were merely inspired by IS, but most were directed, either by the organization or members of its networks. As we shall come back to, the plots varied in scope and modus operandi, from knife attacks to massive, "Mumbai-style" operations with mobile attack teams and combinations of bombs and firearms. Some plots were foiled or failed, but more and more resulted in deadly attacks (for an overview of all registered plots, see appendix 1[13]).

While IS has not claimed all operations attributed to the group, it has increasingly done so in 2015-16, especially when attackers have died, or escaped counter-terrorism operations. IS's media has claimed both large, lethal attacks such as those in Paris, Brussels and Nice, as well as smaller ones, like in Charleroi, Ansbach and Normandy.[14] In addition, several IS-films have praised the attacks in Paris and Brussels, echoing al-Adnani's message of revenge, threatening new attacks and displaying preparations for future operations.[15] These films also praise attacks that were not claimed by IS at first, such as Amedy Coulibaly's role in the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack.

As for IS's English-language Dabiq magazine, it does not refer to Europe until the October 2014 issue, which published excerpts of al-Adnani's September speech.[16] In the February 2015 issue, Coulibaly was praised again, and it was indicated that he, after swearing allegiance to IS, "sat in wait for instructions" without going to Syria.[17] It is also stated that he supplied the Kouachi brothers, who attacked Charlie Hebdo on behalf of al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), with money and weapons. Moreover, the February 2015 issue presented an interview with Belgian-Moroccan Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a central coordinator within IS's international operations network, linked to multiple IS-related attack plots in Europe in 2014-16. From February 2015 to July 2016, Dabiq contained praise for operations conducted in the name of IS in Europe, both plots known to have involved instructions from the group as well as plots in which interaction seems absent. Quotes from al-Adnani were reiterated throughout, and in Dabiq's July 2016 issue, his call for attacks by people prevented from reaching Islamic State is stressed.[18]

Seen in light of the investigations of IS-related plots in Europe, the official statements and propaganda leave little doubt that the group is leading an organized terrorist campaign of retribution and deterrence against its European adversaries, primarily motivated by European countries' participation in the war against IS in Iraq and Syria. While many think of the IS-threat in Europe as new and different, involving new networks and new types of terrorists, the real reason why IS has been so effective is that the group builds upon pre-existing networks and capacities that were already in place.

Network Dynamics and Perpetrators

The latest wave of attacks in Europe has generated ideas of a new kind of threat. Several of these ideas are reflected elsewhere in this special issue. As shown by Basra and Neumann, there is a striking presence of criminals in IS's European attack networks.[19] As indicated by Hegghammer, the refugee situation may

create a broader recruitment pool for jihadi networks in Europe, as the region faces challenges of integrating immigrants to society and job markets.[20] Coinciding with growth among European extremist networks as result of the Syrian jihad, this could influence future trends in radicalization. Much attention to the profile of the Islamized criminal and the refugee crisis has led to renewed focus on the role of European societies in producing terrorists, and notions that IS-terrorism in Europe is driven more by failed integration and social grievances than ideology and foreign policy. Also, because France and Belgium have experienced a spate of plots, it has been suggested that the IS-threat is confined to Francophone Europe and fueled by the French political culture of secularism.[21]

There is no doubt that failed integration and segregated suburbs create hospitable conditions for terrorist recruitment. And, the Islamized criminal has been a common character in the history of jihadism in Europe ever since the phenomenon emerged in the 1990s. Also, there is no doubt that Francophone Europe faces a higher threat for now than other parts of the region.

At the same time, structural aspects of European societies tell us little about when and where terrorists strike in the region, and there has never been one single profile among European jihadis, not historically and not today. Also, the threat to Francophone Europe has many, and the way we see it, more important explanations beyond French secularism.

We caution against overstating the newness of the threat. A preliminary review of plots in 2014-16 indicates a striking continuity regarding who the terrorists are, and what drives them. The IS-terrorists operating in Europe are not so different from al-Qaida's. In fact, many were agents of al-Qaida networks until recently. Moreover, the IS-threat to Europe does not only involve criminals from segregated suburbs, but also people described as resourceful, who hardly joined militancy for lack of options, but out of political motives and ideological fervor. Last, the threat it is not confined to Francophone Europe. Rather, we are facing a genuinely transnational threat with strong links to armed conflicts raging across the Muslim world.

In order to understand why and how IS-plots occur in Europe, and how to reduce the threat, we need to acknowledge that the main drivers lie outside Europe, in Middle Eastern conflict zones, *and pertain to Western interference in those conflict zones*. We also need to pay special attention to network dynamics: the interplay between local European extremist networks and armed groups in war zones – facilitated through foreign fighting. Last, we need to acknowledge that while a majority of European militants are disenfranchised migrants, a smaller number of entrepreneurs–resourceful and ideologically motivated terrorist cell builders–play a crucial role in formation of terrorist cells. The entrepreneurs operate on behalf of armed groups in conflict zones, making the threat more ideological, strategic and organized than many assume. Entrepreneurs tend to be veterans of jihadi activism within Europe and through foreign fighting, and there has been a "veteran effect" in European jihadism, which also applies to the IS-threat.

The Veteran Effect

As highlighted by several contributions to this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* there is a generational dynamic of European jihadism in the form of experienced veterans in the networks acting as leaders for new generations of recruits.[22] Therefore one finds that jihadi terrorist plots in Europe are linked over time through the people involved. This "veteran effect" is considerable in the way that militants who were in charge of networks and cells operating in Europe in the 1990s and 2000s continue to reappear in terrorism investigations today.

There are three main phases of jihadi terrorist plotting in Europe; and comparing what we know about dynamics over time, this might shed light on the current threat. The first phase was when the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) targeted France in the mid-1990s. The second was when al-Qaida plotted attacks across Europe in the 2000s, and the third is today's IS-threat. The three phases are interconnected

in that key members of GIA's networks in the 1990s joined al-Qaida's networks in the 2000s, and played a crucial part in recruiting and socializing a new generation of militants in Europe in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This new generation organized overtly in semi-militant movements such as the *Islam4/ Sharia4* phenomenon, or in covert support networks for al-Qaida, under the guidance of jihad veterans. Over time most of the veterans have gone in and out of prisons either for supporting terrorism, or for involvement in attack plotting. However, because of their status–derived from experience and ideological knowledge–they have been able to continue mobilizing behind bars.

The pattern is best exemplified with the Algerian militant Djamel Beghal who operated on behalf of GIA in the 1990s and was captured when running a terrorist cell for al-Qaida in 2001. He is known to have radicalized numerous individuals in jail who have become involved in terrorist plots, including Amedy Coulibaly who launched the attack on a Jewish Kosher deli on behalf of IS in January 2015, and Mehdi Nemmouche who attacked the Jewish Museum in Brussels on behalf of IS in March 2014. Boubaker el-Hakim, addressed in Filiu's article in this Special Issue, is another intriguing example of this dynamic. A recruiter among French jihadis in the mid-2000s he is now thought to hold a central position within IS's section for international operations.[23]

The generational dimension makes it hard to distinguish between al-Qaida and IS in Europe. European groups and networks, such as Anjem Choudary's *Islam4UK* and its offspring: *Sharia4Belgium*, *Fursan Alizza* (France), *Millatu Ibrahim* (Germany), *The Prophet's Ummah* (Norway),–or more secretive jihadi support-webs such as The Zerkani Network (Belgium) and the *Artigat Network* (France) stood for much of the recruitment of Europeans to the Syrian jihad. All of these emerged before the establishment of IS, and were set up by people who had been loyal to al-Qaida. The cooperation between Coulibaly working for IS and the Kouachi brothers who attacked Charlie Hebdo for al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) illustrates the blurry boundaries between the groups in a European context. Seeing how networks and plots overlap in time and space, one may think of the threat, in the past and now, as emanating largely from one and the same transnational network, evolving and expanding within Europe over time, and serving successive groups in conflict zones: GIA first, then al-Qaida and then IS.

Cell Dynamics

Not only do terrorist plots in Europe involve links to the same transnational networks; the cell dynamics are also consistent over time. Attack cells are built by entrepreneurs. This type of terrorist has reoccurred in the history of jihadi terrorism in Europe, linking European extremists with armed groups overseas and making them act as international terrorists on behalf of those groups.

Entrepreneurs reach out to what we refer to as misfits and drifters among their social networks, with a view to recruiting them for violent jihad.[24] The entrepreneurs are typically resourceful, politicized and activist-minded, and they serve as a link with groups in conflict zones. The entrepreneurs socialize, politicize and manipulate the misfits and drifters that commonly involve criminals and socially deprived people, and turn them into tools for terrorist groups. This notion of entrepreneurs explains why seemingly non-political and non-ideological people (such as petty criminals) end up engaging in political violence in accordance with the ideology of al-Qaida and IS. This pattern seems consistent over time. The main difference now is that more of the interaction between entrepreneurs and the other types happens online.

We only know the contours of the networks behind the latest wave of IS-terrorism in Europe, but we recognize the pattern: mostly misfits and drifters as foot soldiers, while entrepreneurs are in coordinating roles, both within attack cells and surrounding networks.

For example, several members of Abdelhamid Abaaoud's network (hereafter referred to as the Abaaoud-network[25]), such as the El-Bakraoui brothers, were misfits known for criminal activity, and many of them

did not appear to be particularly religious (e.g. smoking and drinking, doing drugs or keeping girlfriends out of marriage). Many hailed from segregated suburbs or working class areas, had low education and survived on odd jobs.

At the same time, there are reports that members of the network radicalized intensively and became fiercely religious after connecting with militants in prison or underground mosques. Also, several central plotters were students, some of them described as intelligent and resourceful, and the coordinator (or entrepreneur), Abaaoud, hailed from a relatively privileged background. Another IS-cell uncovered in the UK (2014 Surgeon plot) also involved well-educated and resourceful individuals, underlining how IS also appeals to such types. The involvement of a small, yet significant, number of converts and women in plots further complicates the picture of trying to establish a single profile.

A deconstruction of types of recruits to IS-cells according to roles they play in plots helps to gain a differentiated understanding of pathways to terrorism. This is important, because what characterizes the majority of recruits (the misfits and drifters) does not necessarily give clues as to why the militants behave as they do, when ideologically motivated entrepreneurs are the ones who shape the actions of terrorist cells, the movers and shakers.

The notion of the entrepreneur might also shed light on temporal patterns within IS's targeting in Europe. Historically, attack activity in certain European countries has risen when groups in conflict zones have managed to recruit a critical mass of entrepreneurs from those countries.[26] This pattern was seen when al-Qaida recruited among British-Pakistanis for attacks in the mid-2000s, or when the al-Qaida affiliated *Islamic Jihad Union* (IJU) enlisted German Turks and converts towards the end of the 2000s. Also, it is symptomatic that Sweden experienced its first suicide bombing after Swedish foreign fighters climbed the ranks of IS's forerunner al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI).

It is beyond doubt that France and Belgium face the highest threat from IS today. Both countries are long-time enemies of jihadis. France mainly because of its interference in Muslim countries (e.g. Algeria and Mali) and Belgium for supporting France in disrupting important jihadi support networks spanning the two countries ever since the 1990s. The intensity of the threat to these two countries today is clearly affected by their large foreign fighter contingents in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, there is evidence that especially French foreign fighters have taken on a special role within IS's section for international operations. A Frenchman is believed to have become overall director of IS's European operations, and several Frenchmen and Belgians appear to be in coordinating roles as entrepreneurs down the chain of command.[27]

The Plots and the Networks

Based on the sources at hand, we have not been able to conduct any full network analysis of the plots linked to IS in Europe in 2014-16. Neither do we, at this point, dare to categorize the cases according to Hegghammer's and Nesser's 2015 typology, as continuously emerging information swiftly makes our categorizations change.[28] We have rather tried to group the plots in clusters, partly according to geography and partly according to what is known by now about their linkage to IS, as shown in Appendix 2.[29]

What we can say with certainty is that although many think of the IS-threat to Europe in terms of inspired, so-called "lone wolf" attacks, a minority of the cases, six plots, seemed based on inspiration only–and no contact with IS's networks. That did not mean, however, that these IS-inspired plotters were totally detached from other militants. They usually had contacts in extremist circles, albeit not IS-related. The possible exception is that of the London subway stabbing by Muhaydin M. in 2015, who, as far as we know, had no such links, and may have been a genuine "lone wolf".

Twelve plots can with a high degree of certainty be linked to IS's section for international operations and the Abaaoud-network. Nearly all of them involve returning foreign fighters and all but two target France or Belgium (the last ones appear to have targeted public sites in Spain and the UK).

Another nineteen plots in France, Germany, the UK, Spain and Austria, cannot, based on the available information, be linked directly to IS's section for international operations and the Abaaoud-network with a similar degree of certainty, but all cases involve online instruction from members of IS's networks. These handlers may, or may not operate under IS's international operations section. In at least three of these nineteen cases, plotters had foreign fighter experience, but we cannot say for sure at this point whether they were trained and dispersed by IS on missions, or contacted online and "activated" after returning for other reasons.

What can be read from the chronology of plots in Appendix 1, however, is that the vast majority of incidents include links both to local extremist networks in Europe and foreign fighters linked to IS in Syria and Iraq. In tune with assertions that French and Belgian fighters have taken on a special role in taking IS's terrorism to Europe, many of the plotters instructed online have received directions from French and Belgian fighters (such as Rachid Kassim or Fabien Clain). However, foreign fighters from other countries have also acted as handlers from Syria (e.g. Junaid Hussain in the 2015 Junead Khan serviceman plot).

The attack activity is not confined to France and Belgium. IS-plots have occurred in at least eight different European countries where the group has capacity to strike. Moreover, if one takes a closer look at the cases, there is commonly cross-border interaction between network members within Europe. Examples include a visit to the UK by a key figure in the Abaaoud-network, to meet with British extremists before the 2015 November Paris attacks, and links between the purported terrorist cell that was uncovered in Germany in September 2016, and the Abaaoud-network.[30] Transnational interactions between network nodes and operational cells within Europe on one hand, and militant groups in conflict zones on the other, are not new. Rather, they are frequent and typical in the history of European jihadism–the 2004 Madrid attacks being one case in point.[31] However, while there is continuity in the actor landscape and core network dynamics endure, the European IS-threat does involve some new facets of terrorist cell formation.

Changing Facets of Terrorist Cell Formation

The IS-threat to Europe entails two main changes when it comes to network dynamics and terrorist cell formation. The first is an increase in the use of social media to recruit and instruct terrorist operatives and the second is the use of refugee streams to transfer operatives and recruitment efforts aimed at refugees.

The ways in which attackers are instructed via encrypted social media are unprecedented. There have been plots in Europe in the past where al-Qaida instructed terrorists via draft messages on shared email accounts, or by sending encrypted files. However, with plotters directed instantly via apps such as Telegram (see Prucha's contribution in this Special Issue)[32], sometime real time during attacks, IS has taken online instruction to another level. There also appear to be several examples of plotters having been recruited online before receiving a mission, for example the 2014 Vienna teenager bombing plot. In other words, IS-entrepreneurs can build cells online in a way never seen before. This opens up possibilities for a more volatile threat situation involving attackers with no prior connections to the network, even genuine "lone wolves", who have so far largely been a myth in European jihadism. Notably, the increased use of online instructions by IS coincides with a downturn in plots involving foreign fighters. In the period 2001-2007, 75% of all well-documented plots involved one or more cell members with foreign fighter experience. In 2014-2016 this proportion has decreased to 45% (see Figure 2). The increased use of online instruction also coincides with a continued increase in single-actor terrorism in Europe, although this development started well before IS's rise to prominence (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Presence of Foreign Fighters in Well-Documented Terrorist plots in Western Europe
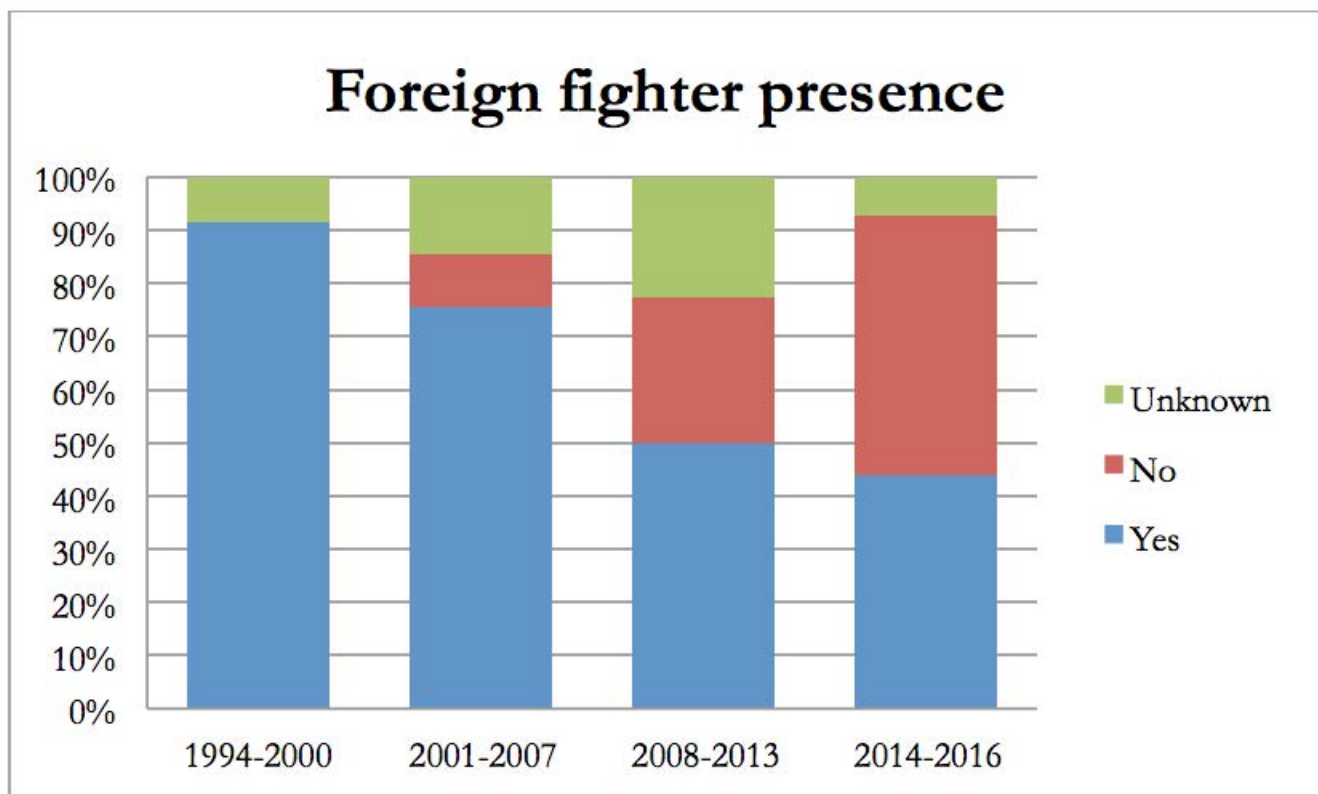
The reason for the increased use of online instruction is probably the combined effect of new technology making online recruitment and instruction easier, and an increased focus by security services on returning foreign fighters.

Another new aspect of plot dynamics is the use of refugee streams to transfer personnel. At least six well-documented attack plots in 2014-16 involve people with refugee status. In many instances plotters have instructed foreign fighters to pose as refugees upon their return to Europe. In other cases IS-plots have involved foreign nationals, perhaps also actual refugees, recruited in transit or after arrival in Europe.

In the data material reviewed for this study, the number of militants coming to Europe as refugees in well-documented plots adds up to at least nineteen individuals (twelve in the Paris and Brussels attacks, six in German plots, and one in a case linked both to Germany and France). However, many more refugee links are seen in the vague plots. Already in April 2016 European security officials interviewed by the *Washington Post*, said "more than three dozen" people linked to plots had posed as refugees.[33] It should be noted, however, that these new features of terrorist cell dynamics stem from adaptation to security regimes and exploitation of new technology and should not be seen as something unique to IS.

Turning to modus operandi, there is also much continuity in the way IS operates in Europe. IS-linked terrorist cells use attack methods previously established by al-Qaida and other jihadis. However, IS has displayed greater capacity to avoid detection and successfully launch attacks, and its operators have added their own twists and turns to terrorist plotting. This is further explored in the next section.

Modus Operandi

In midst of the latest wave of IS-inspired terrorism in Western Europe, many observers appeared to believe that the nature of the threat had fundamentally changed. Gone was the single-actor terrorism of 2008-2013 and the tendency to attack specific and highly symbolic targets. The attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in

2016 were both carried out by groups, and they were both simultaneous attacks targeting random crowds of people. Although firearms were introduced in the Paris attack as a supplementary weapon to bombs, the attacks were reminiscent of al-Qaida's targeting of random crowds in the Madrid and London attacks in 2004 and 2005.

Again, we caution about making generalizations based on a few, very recent events. Put in historical perspective, and by analyzing all jihadi terrorist plots in Europe over time (including the foiled and failed ones (see Appendix 3[34]), we see that there is indeed a small tendency towards more random targeting, compared to the previous period, but discriminate targeting still comprises about 40% of all plots. Moreover, single-actor terrorism has by no means become irrelevant as single actors still comprise about 55% of all terrorist plots (see Figures 3 and 4).

The cases from 2014-2016 paint a complex picture of the threat. In our study of trends in the modus operandi of European jihadism which was published in 2014, we found that weapons and tactics were becoming more diversified while targeting was becoming more discriminate.[35] Overall, this is still very much the case although the trend towards discriminate targeting is less clear than before. It shows, again, that jihadi terrorism in Europe cannot be reduced to either-or dichotomies but that we have to expect a full spectrum of threats in the years ahead.

Weapons

There are two significant developments regarding European jihadis' preferred choice of weapon. For the first time in history firearms have become more common than bombs. And, for the first time in history a vehicle has been used to conduct a mass killing. Both these trends – more use of handguns, and the use of vehicles as weapons – were predicted in our 2014 analysis.[36]

Prior to 2014, bombs was the weapon most often preferred by the terrorists, and after 2008 there was a development towards more home-made explosives (HME), and more variety in the types of HME used, or planned used. In 2014-2016, bombs were used, or planned to be used, in 33% of all well-documented plots. This is a significant decrease from the interval 2008-13, when bombs were present in 65% of the plots.[37] On the other hand it would be premature to dismiss bombs as a threat in the future. Bombs were indeed used in two of the most deadly attacks in 2014-16 – the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015 and the Brussels attacks on 22 April 2016. In the Paris attacks, only one of the 130 victims was actually killed by the suicide bombers attacking Stade de France, while the rest of the victims were killed with handguns in other parts of the city – but the number of victims at Stade de France could easily have been higher.[38] In the Brussels attacks, all 32 victims were killed by bombs.

With regards to trends in the use of explosives, HME are still the preferred form of explosive. Peroxide-based explosives are most common, followed by fertilizer-based ones. There have been no significant innovations within HME production over the past three years. This may be viewed as somewhat surprising, given the large number of Europeans who have attended training camps in Syria/Iraq – and presumably been trained by professional bomb-makers – in this period. The lack of innovation may be attributed to the fact that so far, IS has not been particularity obsessed with attacking airplanes, or other targets associated with stringent security measures. As we highlighted in our article from 2014, al-Qaida bomb-makers in Pakistan and Yemen made certain innovations in HME after 2001. These bombs were specifically designed to be smuggled onboard airplanes in Europe.[39] As for now, IS and IS-inspired terrorists in Europe have preferred «soft» targets, like crowds of people in public areas, where the access control is typically less strict. It must be underscored, however, that measures taken in Europe to prevent proliferation of common HME precursors have so far not obliterated the threat from HME.

The use of a truck to conduct mass killing was another, striking development in 2014-16. Eighty-four people were killed and hundreds were wounded when the Tunisian-French Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a 19-ton cargo truck into crowds celebrating the French National Day on 14 July 2016. While the scale of the attack was unprecedented, the modus operandi of using cars for an attack was not entirely new. The method of using vehicles as weapons was described in the propaganda magazine of al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Inspire, in 2010. Vehicles have previously been used by jihadi-inspired terrorists both in the UK, Canada and France. In 2013, two perpetrators rammed their car into a UK soldier on the street in Woolwich, UK, before slaying him with a meat cleaver.[40] In October 2014, a perpetrator rammed his car into two soldiers in Ottawa, Canada, resulting in the death of one of them.[41] In December 2014 there was a lesser-known car attack in France when a man rammed his car into pedestrians in the city of Dijon, France, injuring eleven, although the degree to which the attack had a jihadi motive remains unclear.[42] Finally, in June 2015, a French IS-supporter of North African descent attempted to cause explosions by ramming his car into installations at a gas factory in Lyon.[43]

In addition to car attacks, there has indeed been a rise in knife-plots. In 2014-2016, knives were used, or planned used in 31% of the plots, compared to 13% of the plots in 2008-2013. The use of cars as weapons, and the increasing use of knives, is in line with tactical advice given by IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani. In an audiotape released in January 2015, al-Adnani encouraged attacks with simple means, including "an explosive device, a bullet, a knife, a car, a rock, or even a boot or a fist."[44]

The trend towards simpler weapons that require little time for preparation – cars, knives, handguns – is coupled with an absence of plots involving technologically sophisticated weapons. So far in 2014-2016 we have not registered any plots to use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents (CBRN) and high-end weaponry, such as missiles. However, this observation needs certain modifications. The 2014-2016 period saw the first appearance of a rocket launcher in a jihadi plot in Europe (the launcher was apparently not used) and the first, successful «Mumbai-style» attack – namely, the attack in Paris in November 2015.[45] Moreover, after the Brussels attacks, investigations revealed that the cell possessed a 10-hour surveillance video of a Belgian nuclear scientist, giving rise to fears that the cell may have planned a CBRN-related attack. [46] So far there have not been any successful attacks by jihadis in Europe in 2014-16 involving drones, although IS are believed to have already used small, commercial drones in Iraq to drop bombs on targets.[47] Overall, terrorists operating in Europe over the past two years have demonstrated that they are adept at using modern technologies for communication and encryption. Terrorist plotting using CBRN, drones or other technologically advanced weapons and attack methods should therefore not be ruled out in the future.

Tactics

As the terrorists' preferred weapons have shifted from bombs towards handguns and knives, armed assaults have become the most common attack type. It should be noted that in three cases, armed assaults were combined with hostage taking: the Charlie Hebdo attack in January 2015, the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the attack on a church in Normandy in 2016 where a priest was beheaded and several nuns were taken hostage.[48] However, none of these cases involved negotiations over the fate of the hostages. It thus appears as if the purpose of hostage taking was to use the hostages as human shields, making it more complicated for anti-terrorism police to tackle the event.

None of the plots in 2014-2016 involved targets at sea or in the air – not even among vaguely documented cases. This corresponds with previous trends which indicated that terrorists are less and less interested in targeting airplanes. Sea-based targets have never been the focus of jihadi terrorists in Europe, with only one well-documented and one vaguely documented plot in the whole period studied (in 2002 and 2005, respectively).[49]

There are no indications so far that terrorists are planning to build bigger bombs than before. There were no confirmed plots involving car or truck bombs in the period studied – only plots involving bombs placed in bags or suitcases, or strapped to the attacker's body.

As we predicted in 2014, terrorists continue to use hand-held cameras (GoPro or phone camera) during attacks. In at least one case – the killing of a policeman and his wife at their home in Paris on 13 June 2016 – the perpetrator managed to upload the video to Facebook in real-time.[50]

In 2008-2013 we detected a trend towards more single-actor terrorism. After 2013 the relative increase in single-actor plots has continued albeit not as drastically as before. Single-actor plots are now almost equally common as group plots (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Single Actor Terrorism
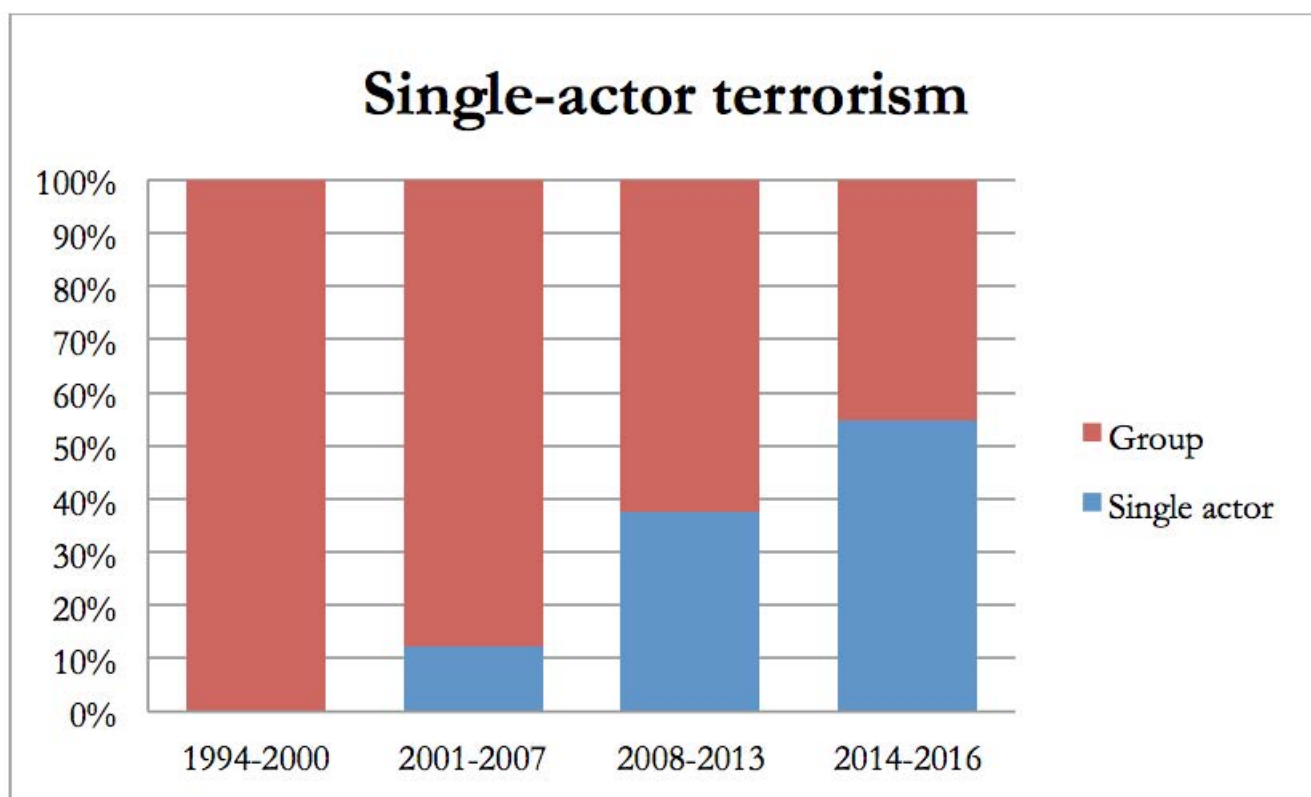
Out of eighteen launched attacks in 2014-16, thirteen were conducted by single actors while only five were conducted by groups.[51] This confirms the previously observed trend that single actors are harder to detect by security services than groups. Single-actor terrorists go undetected in 57% of the cases while groups go undetected in only 26% of the cases. Yet, the deadliest attack in Europe in this period, the 13 November Paris attack, was conducted by a group of eight terrorists, showing that even large groups of terrorists occasionally slip through the surveillance network of European security services.

It is also worth noting, as discussed by Ellis in this Special Issue [52], that the distinction between single-actor and group plots is becoming less and less clear-cut. Based on currently available information, it appears that only 6 out of 23 single actors in our dataset acted solely based on online inspiration.[53] The rest were connected to known networks in one form or another; or had received instruction from IS-handlers online, as addressed previously.

Targets

The geographical distribution of plots has changed to some extent, with a sharp increase in plots in France, followed by a rather constant number of plots in the UK and Germany. The number of plots in Scandinavia, however, has decreased drastically compared to previous years.

It thus appears as if the wave of terrorist plots in Scandinavia, which was witnessed especially in 2008-2011 and motivated to a large extent by the publication of the Mohammed Cartoons by the Danish Newspaper *Jyllands-Posten,* has abated. Instead, there is an upsurge of jihadi terrorist plotting in France, likely motivated by France's active role in interventions in the Muslim world – both in Mali from 2013 onwards and against the Islamic State from 2014. As for the two other countries most exposed to jihadi terrorist plotting – the UK and Germany – the number of plots since 2001 has been largely constant with zero to four well-documented plots per year since 2004. There appears to be a slight increase of plots in Germany, with five plots so far in 2016 (as of 1 November), but it is too early to say if this trend will continue.

With regards to target types, the most significant change from the previous period is that attack plans against public figures have decreased while there is a small increase in plots against public transportation. Apart from that, the dominant target types are public areas, in addition to military and police installations and personnel. There is yet no increase in targeting of Shia Muslims in Europe. In 2014-2016 there are two cases targeting churches, three cases (including one vaguely documented) targeting synagogues and two vaguely documented cases targeting a Shia mosque and a Sikh temple, respectively.

The clearest trend when it comes to targeting in 2014-2016 appears to be a renewed interest in targeting random crowds of people, as opposed to more specific targets with high symbolic value, such as police and military officers, Jews and cartoonists who allegedly insulted the Prophet Muhammed (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Discriminate versus Random Targeting
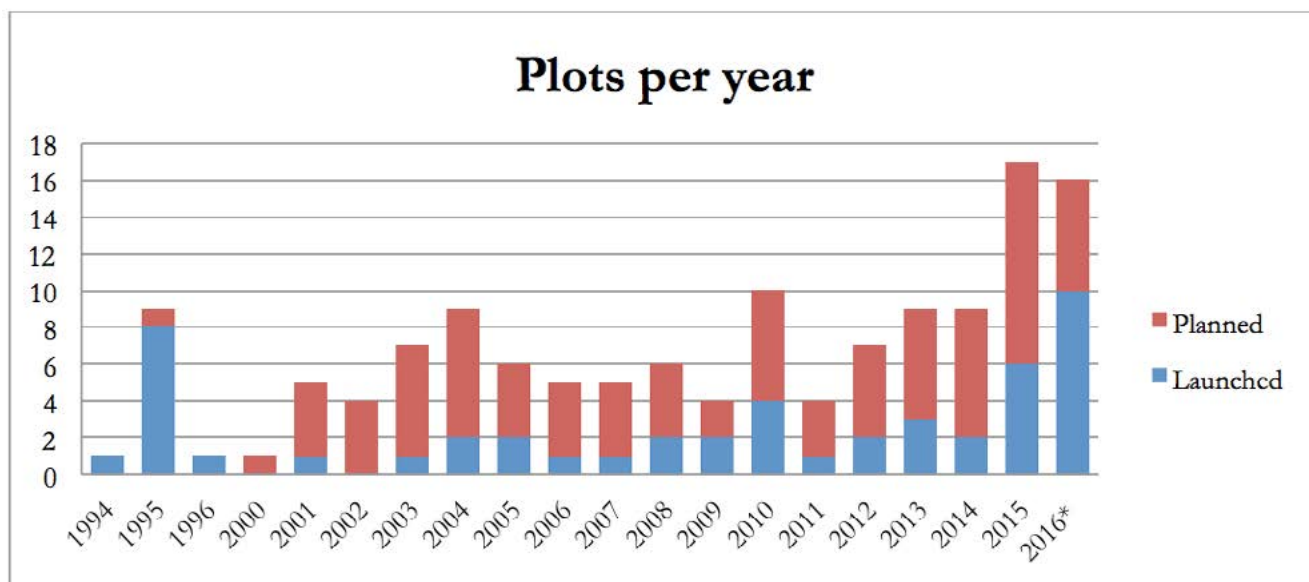
The attack on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 is a well-known exception from this trend. Notably, the perpetrators behind that attack were connected to al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and cooperated with a single actor who shot a jogger and a police woman and took hostages at a Jewish kosher deli on behalf of IS. We argued in our previous study of attack trends that a relative increase in symbolic targeting in Europe was connected to al-Qaida Central's need to appeal to an increasingly heterogeneous audience. This hypothesis has later been strengthened as al-Qaida's internal communications (the «Abbottabad documents» found in bin Laden's compound in 2011) have been released to the public.[54]

However, the recent wave of IS-related terrorism in Europe has made the trend towards discriminate targeting less clear. Prior to 2014, discriminate targeting was twice as common as random targeting while now, discriminate and random targeting are about equally common. The period has been characterized by three large attacks targeting random crowds of people, namely, the Paris, Brussels and Nice attacks. This is not to say that IS-inspired terrorism only targets random crowds of people. There are several examples of IS-inspired terrorists targeting selectively, including the targeting of a priest, Jews, military installations, and law enforcement.

Having discussed trends in weapons, tactics and targeting, we now turn to another aspect of the modus operandi of jihadi terrorism in Europe, namely, funding. How do plotters fund their activities and has this changed with the rise of IS?

Funding

Legal Funding Methods Remain Most Common

The analysis of patterns in funding was based on 36 cases from Appendix 1 registered before 1 September 2016 (i.e. plots after this date are not included). The trends seen in 2014-16 are compared with trends in 1994-2013, as identified in Oftedal (2015). [55]

Income sources, transfer methods and expenses for attack plots in 2014-16 largely follow the same patterns as for earlier ones. Legal income sources are still the most common method for financing plots. In 73% of the plots in Europe in 2014-16, the terrorists generated at least part of their income from legal sources such as salaries, welfare benefits, sale of property and loans.[56] This is the same proportion as for plots in 1994-2013.

In small and simple attacks conducted by one or two attackers, legal income is frequently the only source of funding. In these plots, attackers often use inexpensive weapons such as knives or a handgun, and have minimal expenses. For instance, the small amount of money needed by the perpetrator of the July 2016 Paris policeman home attack (three knives, a computer, a cell phone), was easily covered by income from the food delivery company he operated, "Dr. Food".[57] Other examples of simple plots funded with legal income sources include the 2015 Germany bike race plot by militants who appeared to be linked to al-Qaida's network rather than IS (they used their welfare benefits as funding), the 2015 Lyon gas factory attack (the perpetrator worked as a truck driver), and the 2015 London 7/7 anniversary bombing plot, also by an al-Qaida-inspired cell (funded by loans and salary).[58] Larger and more complex operations often combine legal income with other types of funding. A good example is the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack, which was funded by the proceeds of the sale of a used car; a 6,000 euro consumer loan obtained with forged documents; and the sale of counterfeit goods. In addition, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) said they financed the operation, and investigators believe Cherif Kouachi left Yemen in 2011 with $20,000 from AQAP to carry out attacks.[59] Finally, Amedy Coulibaly may have provided the Kouachi brothers with weapons and money on behalf of IS. He reportedly bought weapons for both himself and the Kouachi brothers from a Belgian arms dealer. In his video, Coulibaly said he gave the Kouachi brothers "a

few thousand euros" to supplement what they had raised to prepare for the newspaper attack. He did not, however, specify himself whether or not it was IS that gave him the money.[60]

Almost half the plots (43%) are entirely self-financed, meaning there is no evidence that they received external support (for now). Such cells are almost impossible to detect through their financial activity, especially when plotters rely on legal income sources only. They have no economic ties to established terrorist organizations, and few of their financial activities are in themselves suspicious. Self-financing was becoming gradually more common throughout 1994-2013. In 1994-2001, none of the plots were entirely self-financed. In 2002-2007, 44% were entirely self-financed, whereas in 2008-2013, 61% of the plots were entirely self-financed.[61] Since 2014, this tendency has apparently been reversed. This follows logically from the fact that international funding (from IS) has become more common in the same period. We address why and how this may have happened below.

Contrary to widespread notions of a crime-terrorism-nexus, criminal activities are not a very common source of funding for attack plots in Europe of late.[62] Only 23% of the plots in 2014-2016 were financed wholly or partly by money from crime. In comparison, 38% of the plots in 1994-2013 were financed at least partly from criminal activities. One likely explanation for this decrease is that funds from IS has lessened the need for attackers to engage in crime to fund plots. Another possibility is that criminal activities are under-reported in recent plots (2014-2016). Criminal activities are by nature covert, and it may take longer for information on such funding sources to surface. Finally, there has been considerable variation in funding from criminal activity from year to year historically, in other words, the apparent decrease could just be natural variability. In any case, there is little evidence of an *increasing* integration between criminal networks and terrorists in the area of attack financing.[63]

Turning from funding sources to transfer methods, we find that cash still is the most common way to move money for a plot. In 90% of the cases with known transfers, cash was the chosen method, although it should be noted that there is limited information on money transfers in many cases. Like in 1994-2013, there is no evidence that new digital currencies like BitCoin have been used.[64] In one instance, the Paris attacks of November 2015, the Abaaoud-network used *hawala* to transfer money to the attackers.[65] This is the first known example that an attack cell in Europe received money through *hawala* transfers. Part of the explanation could be that such transfers are difficult to trace and therefore under-reported. In addition, people seldom use the *hawala* system for transfers *to* Europe. The flow of remittances generally goes the opposite direction, from workers in the West to their families in the developing world. It is probable that this general trend of *hawala* use is reflected among jihadis, so that *hawala* is used more often by support networks that send money to terrorist organizations abroad, than for attack plotting within Europe.[66] Finally, in many instances there is no need for money transfers from abroad – whether through *hawala* or other methods – simply because attacks are so inexpensive.

We estimate that 83% of the plots in 2014-16 cost less than $10,000.[67] In 1994-2013, 76% of the plots were estimated to less than $10,000.[68] In other words, there is no evidence that IS, with its deep war chests, has led to more expensive attacks on average. This reflects the broad range of attack types linked to the group. Many of the plots by IS-supporters who never made it to the war zone cost almost nothing, because they involved single actors with no expenses for travel or training, and simple weapons such as a knife or an axe. At the other end of the spectrum, the plots that were planned and prepared by the organization abroad were much more expensive and flex IS's financial muscles. Of the six plots estimated to have cost more than $10,000, five have been linked to the IS's section for international operations and the Abaaoud-network. These are the 2015 Verviers plot, the 2015 Sid Ahmed Ghlam church bomb plot, the November 2015 Paris attacks, the 2016 Brussels attacks and the 2016 Reda Kriket plot.[69] The high costs of these attacks are mainly due to the large number of weapons involved, and the expenses related to extensive travel to and from

Syria, and within Europe. All of these plots were funded at least partly by IS, and form part of the recent increase in funding from international terrorist networks to cells in Europe.

Increased Funding from Abroad

In 2014-16, funding from international terrorist organizations (mainly IS) applies to at least 35% of the plots (9 plots), an increase from 25% in the period 1994-2013. In fact, the increase is even more pronounced if we exclude all incidents in the 2000s (when al-Qaida's section for international operations was most active in plotting attacks in Europe). For instance, between 2010 and 2013, no cells appear to have received funding from international terrorist networks.[70]

The increase in funding from international terrorist networks likely stems from a combination of factors. First, since at least 2014, IS has pursued a strategy of conducting centrally directed attacks in the West through its section for international operations.[71] This entails that the organization has been prioritizing attacks in Europe. Second, IS has more capacity to act on this strategy than al-Qaida and like-minded actors that share the same intention. IS has – or at least had – more money at its hands than al-Qaida ever did. [72] In addition, the unprecedented influx of European foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq has provided IS with large numbers of potential operatives that can be instructed, trained and funded in Syria, before being dispatched to Europe.

All of the attack cells that received money from IS in 2014-16 involved perpetrators who had been to Syria. This aligns with the analysis of plots in 1994-2013, which found that cells composed of at least one foreign fighter were more likely to receive funding from international terrorist networks. This is arguably because a would-be-attacker's presence in a jihadi conflict theater fulfils several functions relevant to economic support. It helps establishing contacts and trust, and functions as vetting processes to convince leaders that recipients are sufficiently competent. In addition, it facilitates the transfer of money, which can be provided directly to the attacker in cash.[73]

The analysis of plot financing in 1994-2013 also found that funding from international terrorist organizations decreased gradually after 2001, and attributed this in part to increased counter-measures against financing that made it more difficult for al-Qaida and affiliates to transfer money to attack cells.[74] It is possible that the recent increase in funding from IS reflects that it has again become easier to move money to attack cells in Europe. The large number of foreign fighters in Syria reduces the need to wire money from the conflict zone to Europe. Instead, IS's section for international operations can give cash directly to the attackers in Syria, before they depart back home. This is how it was done in most of the plots attributed to the Abaaoud-network.[75]

Looking at the plots attributed to this entity, we can identify a characteristic modus operandi. IS typically provides operatives with several thousand euro in cash before they leave Syria.[76] In addition to cash, operatives sometimes also receive forged documents, and IS-affiliated facilitators or human smugglers help arrange their travel.[77] It is possible that IS transfers additional funds as needed to the operatives en route, but this is poorly documented.

Examples include the November 2015 Paris attacks and 2016 Brussels attack, the 2015 Reda Hame French concert hall plot, the 2015 Verviers plot and the 2014 Riviera plot. In the Verviers plot, one of those involved, Mohammed Hamza Arshad, used money from IS in Syria to provide crucial logistical support. He had travelled from Belgium to Syria to join IS in September 2014. After a three-week stay, he left Syria with 10,000 euro from IS, a number of photos to create forged identity papers, and a mission to find housing outside Brussels in Belgium. After Arshad returned to Europe, he stayed in regular contact with Abdelhamid Abaaoud. Abaaoud instructed him to buy arms and get hold of forged documents. Arshad bought three assault rifles, four handguns, police uniforms, walkie-talkies, material to produce explosives and rented a safe

house in Verviers. He also collected two jihadi fighters in France and Germany, before the plot was disrupted by Belgian police in January 2015.[78]

Interestingly, there seems to be substantial geographical variation in the extent of funding from international terrorist networks in 2014-16. 40% of the plots in France received such funding, compared to only 17% in the UK. In 1994-2013, there were similar geographical variations, with France distinguishing itself as the country with most plots financed by terrorist networks. Looking at the UK, France and Scandinavia, the three countries/regions with most plots in 1994-2013, terrorists operating in France had received funding from international terrorist networks more often (50%) than in Scandinavia (29%) and UK (15%).[79] One possible explanation for the variation between France and the UK is the latter's position as an island, which makes it harder to smuggle cash into the country, in much the same way as it is more difficult to smuggle weapons. Another reason is probably that jihadi networks in France and the UK have historically been involved in different types of activities. Both countries have extensive and well-established jihadi networks, but their functions have differed. Whereas networks in France and Belgium have long been involved in sending people, weapons and money to conflict zones, UK-based networks have typically been more focused on ideology, radicalization and recruitment.[80]

Money from IS Can Backfire

An increasing number of plots go undetected and result in attacks. Does the increase result from increased funding? One could assume that attackers who are financially backed by IS have better chances of success because they can pay off suspicious border guards, buy high-quality forged documents and large numbers of weapons. Our data suggest that this is not necessarily the case. In fact, in 2014-16, we find that plots funded by IS are the least likely to result in attacks. Only 29% of the plots known to have been funded by IS were launched, compared to those that were financed through legal funding (53%) and crime (67%).[81]

There is, however, little evidence that the low launch-rate for IS-funded plots is caused by the financing as such. Rather, receiving funding from IS appears correlated with other plot characteristics that lead to higher risk of detection or failure. Compared to attacks that are self-financed, IS-funded plots tend to be more expensive, more complicated and involve larger cells. More people and higher attack complexity present more opportunities for errors and increase the risk of detection. Furthermore, cells with foreign fighters are overrepresented among the cells that receive funding from IS. Participation of foreign fighters in itself increases the risk of detection, since they are more likely to be known to security services or connected to networks under surveillance. A case in point is the Verviers plot that was foiled in January 2015. It was uncovered not because of funding from IS, but because Belgian security services began surveillance of the network after discovering that one of the members had recently returned from a brief stay in Turkey, suggesting he may have gone to Syria.[82]

The increase in funding from IS constitutes the most noteworthy change in financing patterns for plots in 2014-16. It has superseded criminal activity as the second most common source of funding for plots in Europe. Still, the larger picture of plot financing is one of continuity. Legal funding sources are still the most widespread; cash is still the most common transfer method; and the vast majority of attacks still cost less than $10,000.

Future Trends

There are three peaks in jihadi attack plotting in Europe, linked to the GIA, al-Qaida and IS. The first peak was in 1995 when GIA launched a bombing campaign in France to deter the country from supporting the military regime against the Islamists during the civil war. The second peak was in connection with the Iraq war in 2003-2004, when al-Qaida and affiliates staged attacks to deter European countries from contributing

militarily in Iraq. The last peak came with the Syrian war and the rise of IS, and aims to deter European countries from participating in the anti-IS coalitions. Deterrence and retribution appear to be the primary drivers all along.

The rise of IS does not appear to have changed the core dynamic of terrorist cell formation in Europe. Plots are hatched in an interplay between European extremists, foreign fighter contingents in the Middle East and IS's section for international operations. The networks involve a combination of veterans and new recruits, and the al-Qaida-IS-distinction is vague in Europe. We do not know enough about how the overall socio-economic profile of Europeans has been affected by the exodus of foreign fighters to Syria. We do neither have the information to conduct a full scale study of the socio-economic profile of IS-terrorists across Europe in 2014-16. What we can say, however, is that IS's terrorist cells in Europe (as those of the GIA and al-Qaida), do not only involve criminals and outsiders, but also resourceful people, who could easily have chosen different paths in their lives, had they not come under sway of militant networks. What also is beyond any doubt, however, is that more of the recruitment and instruction of terrorists happen via social media than ever before. If this continues, and there is no reason it should not, terrorist acts by people with very few or no prior connections to known networks is likely to become more frequent than in the past. The generational dimension and veteran effect of European jihadism implies that some of today's foreign fighters in the Middle East might be tomorrow's entrepreneurs, and as elaborated on by Hegghammer in this Special Issue, this might profoundly affect future mobilization.

The weapons, tactics and targets of jihadi terrorists in Europe have not changed drastically. The most significant change in recent years is the increase in gun and knife attacks as well as the increase in single-actor terrorism. It is important to emphasize that these plot types have not replaced bomb plots and group plots. They come in addition to the traditional forms of plots; making the threat more heterogeneous and unpredictable than ever before. A bit surprisingly, despite IS's resources and shrewdness in use of communication technology, the overall picture regarding modus operandi is a tendency towards technologically and tactically simpler attacks.

Similar things can be said about patterns in financing. Despite IS's impressive capacities, attack plotting in Europe remains quite inexpensive and low-tech, and plotters seek to fund their attacks in ways hard to detect for the law enforcement agencies, relying much in legal funding sources, or cash brought in by foreign fighters posing as refugees. While IS can direct plotters real-time online, there is no evidence yet that they turn to online tools in attack financing, e.g. internet currency BitCoin.

The following forecast is based on the following methods: As a starting point we extrapolate current trends in weapons, tactics and targets among jihadis operating in Europe. But we also take into consideration the interplay between terrorism in Europe and jihadi groups in conflict zones: Which groups will have intentions and capabilities to attack Europe in the next three to five years? What type of capabilities are these groups likely to develop within that time frame? And what strategies are these groups most likely to pursue in Europe?

We surmise that in the next three to five years, IS will remain the dominant jihadi protagonist of attack plotting in Europe despite being currently on the defensive. IS will have a reason to conduct attacks in Europe as long as European countries participate in the coalition against the 'Caliphate'. IS will also have capability to attack Europe, primarily due to the unprecedented number (5,000-6,000) of European foreign fighters. Even if only 1% of these individuals survive the current war and continue to fight for IS, it still constitutes a group of 50-60 hardcore European jihadis who will be able to operate as entrepreneurs and recruit many more through their online and real-life social networks, for many years to come.

IS has developed certain tactics on the ground in Syria that may, or may not be transferred to Europe. The most worrying development is IS's active interest in, and use of, improvised chemical weapons such as

chlorine bombs and mustard gas.[83] If IS decided to use similar weapons in Europe, the biggest challenge would be to smuggle chemical materials or weapons across borders. Historically, jihadi terrorists in Europe have rarely relied on smuggling weaponry from abroad. Instead, they have relied on weapons that are available inside the region as this decreases the likelihood of detection. A more likely scenario is that IS bomb-makers devise a way to make improvised chemical bombs from available materials, and teach these techniques to foreign fighters while they are in Syria or Iraq.

Al-Qaida did something similar in Afghanistan in 2000-2001, and this led to a subsequent increase in CBRN-related terrorist plots in Europe.[84] Al-Qaida's techniques were not very sophisticated, however, and were hardly suitable for conducting mass-casualty attacks.[85] However, IS's CBRN capabilities today are likely to be more sophisticated than al-Qaida's in 2001. Al-Qaida relied on a Malaysian with a B.Sc. to lead its experimental laboratory in Kandahar in 2001, and had to procure basic laboratory equipment from scratch. The situation with IS is quite different. The group is financially far more robust than al-Qaida. It controls modern infrastructure including university laboratories and hospitals, and reportedly managed to recruit weapons engineers from Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons program.[86]

IS has also used commercially available drones during warfare – both to conduct surveillance and more recently, in attempts to drop bombs onto targets. There is serious concern among Western security services that commercial drones may be used by terrorists in Europe to conduct attacks.[87] However, we caution against over-estimating the drone-threat. IS's modus operandi has so far been to carry out mass-casualty shooting and bomb attacks against civilians in Europe. Given the abundance of possible targets, such attacks can easily be carried out by one or several operatives on foot or by car. The use of a drone, in such cases, would only complicate the operation with no obvious value added, as commercial drones can only carry small amounts of explosives. If IS wants to escalate its terrorist campaign against Europe, it is more likely the escalation will take the form of more bomb and shooting attacks – or attacks with improvised CBRN.

In the next three to five years we contend that shooting attacks will continue to be most common, or shooting attacks in combination with bombs, arson or car attacks. Hostage taking and «urban sieges» will probably become more frequent as a result of guns becoming the preferred choice of weapon. Single-actor terrorism will continue at an elevated level, and because of better opportunities to recruit and instruct via social media, a higher proportion of individual attackers than before may be little-, or un-known to the security services.

Targeting of crowds will continue, as will targeting of, and assassination plots aimed at, specific segments in society such as public figures, military personnel, police, and members of other religious sects, e.g. Shia Muslims. Targeting of symbols of «Western immorality» in general, and sexual minorities in particular, could emerge as a new trend. There has only been one example of this in Europe so far (the 2016 Swingers club plot in France), but on 12 June 2016, there was a large attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, during which a single gunman shot and killed 49 people. Moreover, IS has repeatedly issued anti-gay propaganda and engaged in executions of homosexuals in areas under its control.[88]

The most surprising trend in recent years is perhaps the absence of CBRN terrorism. We argue that the threat cannot be ruled out in the future, for the reasons stated earlier. It is worth noting that the cell connected to the Paris attack in November 2015 had conducted surveillance of a nuclear scientist, indicating a possible, renewed interest among IS-inspired terrorists for unconventional weapons – in this case a possible penetration of a nuclear power plant.

Overall, if IS's territorial control persists, we foresee attempts at large-scale operations (not excluding new "Mumbai-style" attacks, or attempts at using improvised CBRN). If IS continues to lose ground, small-scale attacks by single actors receiving online direction will become even more frequent.

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Notes

[1] "Europe" here refers to Western Europe, excluding Turkey and former Eastern Bloc states. The term "jihadi" refers to individuals, groups, networks and ideologies emanating from the Arab-based foreign fighter movement of the 1980s Afghan jihad: primarily al-Qaida and spin-offs (including IS).

[2] IS in this context refers both to the Islamic State (IS), declared in June 2014, and IS's predecessor, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL).

[3] For informative journalistic works, see e.g. "Inside Europe's Terror Attacks," BBC, 25 August 2016; URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07598xc and articles by Rukmini Callimachi such as, "How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze," New York Times, 29 March 2016; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html

[4] See for example "Changes in Modus Operandi of Islamic State Terrorist Attacks" (The Hague: Europol, January 18, 2016); URL: https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/changes-in-modus-operandi-of-islamic-state-terrorist-attacks; Robin Simcox, "The Threat of Islamist Terrorism in Europe and How the U.S. Should Respond" (The Heritage Foundation, 1 August, 2016); URL: http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2016/08/the-threat-of-islamist-terrorism-in-europe-and-how-the-us-should-respond ; "The ISIS Terror Threat in America," Homeland Security Committee, August 2016; URL: https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/August-Terror-Threat-Snaphot.pdf, Pieter van Ostaeyen ,"The Road to Orlando: Jihadist-Inspired Violence in the West, 2012-2016", CTC Sentinel, Vol 9, No 6 (2016); URL: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-road-to-orlando-jihadist-inspired-violence-in-the-west-2012-2016, and Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, «Assessing the Islamic State's commitment to attacking the West,» Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol 9, No. 4 (2015): 14–30; URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/440/html

[5] Appendix 1; URL: https://www.dropbox.com/s/z5q13wlocf7y6pn/APPENDIX%201.docx?dl=0

[6] Petter Nesser, Islamist Terrorism in Europe, a History. London: Hurst, 2015, Petter Nesser and Anne Stenersen, "The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe," Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol 8, No 6 (2014); URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/388/html ; Emilie Oftedal, "The Financing of Jihadi Terrorist Cells in Europe" (Kjeller: FFI, 2015); URL: http://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/14-02234.pdf

[7] There have been past terrorist plots in Europe involving links to IS's mother group al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) (e.g. the Doctors cell in 2007) and the Stockholm suicide bomber in 2010). There have also been plots and attacks involving links to IS's forerunners Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS during 2012-13: 'Cannes-Torcy network's grenade attack on Kosher supermarket' (2012), 'Lars Hedegaard attack' (2013) and 'Lyes Darani plot' (2013) and 'London "Mumbai" plot' (2013). See appendix of Nesser, Islamist Terrorism in Europe; URL: http://www.hurstpublishers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Islamist-Terrorism-in-Europe-Appendix.pdf

[8] Overall, we have registered 192 plots in total since 1994 (the year of the first attacks in Europe by a jihadi actor, the Algerian GIA). 57 of those have been assessed to be "vague plots", however. "Vague plots" refer to plots where there is uncertainty about jihadi affiliation, evidence of attack plans and target selection. Such cases cannot be used for a full worthy analysis of modus operandi, but they can say something about the geographical distribution of plots for instance. Some vague plots become well-documented after further investigations. There are also a few examples of cases that seemed well-documented at first, and turned out to be vague after investigations.

[9] Translation from the website of Pieter van Ostaeyen: Al-Adnani 22.09.2014 "Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful"; URL: https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2014/09/25/abu-muhammad-al-adnani-ash-shami-indeed-your-lord-is-ever-watchful/

[10] Translations from the website of Pieter van Ostaeyen: Al-Adnani 22.05.2016 "And Those Who Lived (In Faith) Would Live Upon Evidence"; URL: https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2016/05/22/abu-muhammad-al-adnani-as-shami-and-those-who-lived-in-faith-would-live-upon-evidence/; Al-Adnani 12.03.2015 "So They kill and Are Killed"; URL: https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2015/03/13/so-they-kill-and-are-killed-audio-statement-by-abu-muhammad-al-adnani-as-shami/; Al-Adnani 26.01.2015 "Say, Die In Your Rage"; URL: https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2015/01/26/audio-statement-by-is-spokesman-abu-muhammad-al-adnani-as-shami-say-die-in-your-rage/

[11] The Riviera plot in February, the Brussels museum shooting in May, and the Creteil plot in July.

[12] Rukmini Callimachi, "How a Secretive Branch of ISIS Built a Global Network of Killers",New York Times, 3 August 2016; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/world/middleeast/isis-german-recruit-interview.html?_r=0

[13] Appendix 1; URL: https://www.dropbox.com/s/z5q13wlocf7y6pn/APPENDIX%201.docx?dl=0

[14] See "IS Claims Paris Attacks, Warns Operation Is "First of the Storm"", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 14 November 2015; URL: https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/is-claims-paris-attacks-warns-operation-is-first-of-the-storm.html; "IS Claims Brussels Attack, Threatens States Participating in Anti-IS Coalition", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 22 March 2016; URL: https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-claims-brussels-attack-threatens-states-participating-in-anti-is-coalition.html; "IS' 'Amaq Says Nice Attack Carried Out by IS "Soldier"", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 16 July 2016; URL: https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-amaq-says-nice-attack-carried-out-by-is-soldier.html; "IS' 'Amaq Reports Charleroi Machete Attack Carried Out by IS "Soldier"", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 7 August 2016; URL: https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-amaq-reports-charleroi-machete-attack-carried-out-by-is-soldier.html; "IS' 'Amaq News Agency Reports Ansbach Attack Was Carried Out IS "Soldier"", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 25 July 2016; URL: https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-amaq-news-agency-reports-ansbach-attack-was-carried-out-is-soldier.html; "IS' 'Amaq Reports Normandy Church Attack Carried Out by IS "Soldiers"", Site Intelligence Group Enterprise, 26 July 2016; URL: https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-amaq-reports-normandy-church-attack-carried-out-by-is-soldiers.html

[15] Films about Paris attacks: "Kill Them Wherever You Find Them," Al-Hayat Media, January 2016; URL: http://heavy.com/news/2016/01/new-isis-islamic-state-news-pictures-videos-kill-them-wherever-you-find-them-et-tuez-les-ou-que-vous-les-rencontriez-french-english-translation-paris-attacks-full-uncensored-youtube/–Video featuring several perpetrators of the Paris attacks in November 2015; "As They Kill You Kill," Wilayat al-Jazirah, November 2015; URL: http://jihadology.net/2015/11/20/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-as-they-kill-you-kill-wilayat-al-jazirah/–Communicating that Paris was revenge for killing of Muslims – title of video resembles al-Adnani's speech from March 2015; "And Verily Our Soldiers Will Be Victorious," Wilayat al-Furat, November 2015; URL: http://jihadology.net/2015/11/18/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-and-verily-our-soldiers-will-be-victorious-wilayat-al-furat/–Highlighting revenge as motive for Paris. Displays IS-member making an IED and another preparing a sniper rifle for use. Yet another is putting on a suicide vest while images are suggesting it is for an attack in New York: "Here The Revenge Has Come To You;" Wilayat Dimashq, November 2015; URL: http://jihadology.net/2015/11/22/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-here-the-revenge-has-come-to-you-wilayat-dimashq/ ; "Paris Has Collapsed,"Wilayat Halab, November 2015; URL: http://jihadology.net/2015/11/20/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-paris-has-collapsed-wilayat-%E1%B8%A5alab/–video contains threat against the West from one of al-Adnanis speeches (likely the one from September 2014). Films about Brussels attacks: "And Cast Terror Into Their Hearts," Wilayat al-Raqqa, March 2016; URL: http://jihadology.net/2016/03/26/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-and-cast-terror-into-their-hearts-wilayat-al-raqqah/–features interviews with «civilians» in al-Raqqa; "An Eye For An Eye," Wilayat al-Furat, March 2016; URL: http://jihadology.net/2016/03/27/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-an-eye-for-an-eye-wilayat-al-furat/–features the same excerpt from al-Adnani speech as in the video "Paris Has Collapsed".

[16] «Excerpts from 'Indeed your Lord is ever watchful' by the official spokesman for the Islamic State,» Dabiq issue 4 (October 2014): 6–9. For safe PDF copies of Dabiq, consult the Jihadi Document Repository at the University of Oslo; URL: https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/jihadi-document-repository/index.html.

[17] 'The extinction of the grayzone,' Dabiq issue 7 (February 2015): 58.

[18] "Words of sincere advice," Dabiq issue 15 (July 2016): 28.

[19] Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (2016).

[20] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (2016).

[21 William McCants and Chris Meserole, "The French Connection," Foreign Affairs, 24 March 2016; URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-24/french-connection

[22] See, for example, Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The French « Iraqi Networks » of the 2000s: Matrix of the 2015 Terrorist Attacks?" and Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "Plebeian jihadism in Denmark: An individualisation and popularization predating the growth of Islamic State," Perspectives on Terrorism,10, no. 6 (2016)

[23] See also Kevin Jackson, and Jean-Charles Brisard. "The Islamic State's External Operations and the French-Belgian Nexus," CTC Sentinel, Vol 9, No 11 (2016); URL: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-islamic-states-external-operations-and-the-french-belgian-nexus.

[24] For an in-depth discussion of these types of terrorists, see Nesser, Islamist Terrorism in Europe, op. cit., pp. 12-18.

[25] For an overview of Abaaoud's role in coordinating attacks in Europe on behalf of IS, see for example Peter Taylor, John O'Kane and Ceri Isfryn, "IS in Europe: The race to the death", BBC, 23 March 2016; URL: http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35872562; "How Islamic State Infiltrated Europe", WSJ, 1 April 2016; URL: http://graphics.wsj.com/brussels-terror-network/

[26] Nesser, Islamist Terrorism in Europe; op. cit.

[27] See Jackson and Brisard. "The Islamic State's External Operations and the French-Belgian Nexus," and Daveed Gartenstein Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "Recent Attacks Illuminate the Islamic State's Europe Attack Network," Terrorism Monitor, 27 April 2016; URL: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45362&cHash=89f8c723f2eb291f6effb6d9ba332c8b

[28] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, «Assessing the Islamic State's commitment to attacking the West,» Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol 9, No. 4 (2015): 14–30; URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/440/html

[29] Appendix 2; URL: https://www.dropbox.com/s/y7f9u3hria5dyiu/APPENDIX%202.xlsx?dl=0

[30] "UK Terror Cell Linked to Paris and Brussels Attacks 'Planned to Attack Where Crowds Gather,'" Mail Online, 16 April, 2016; URL: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3543179/UK-terror-cell-linked-Paris-Brussles-attacks-planned-attack-crowds-gather.html and "An ISIS 'Sleeper Cell' Has Been Nabbed in Germany, Officials Say," NBC News, 13 September, 2016; URL: http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/germany-arrests-3-schleswig-holstein-suspected-isis-link-n647271

[31] See Fernando Reinares, ¡Matadlos!. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014.

[32] Nico Prucha, "IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram," Perspectives on Terrorism, 10, no. 6 (2016).

[33] "Tracing the Path of Four Terrorists Sent to Europe by the Islamic State," Washington Post, 22 April; URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-europes-migrant-crisis-became-an-opportunity-for-isis/2016/04/21/ec8a7231-062d-4185-bb27-cc7295d35415_story.html .

[34] Appendix 3; URL: https://www.dropbox.com/s/nihxjes9we59n0k/APPENDIX%203.xlsx?dl=0. The coding of plots and attacks is according to the methodology described in Nesser and Stenersen, "The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe," 5-6.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 18-19.

[37] Ibid., 6.

[38] "How combination of solid security at the Stade de France and quick thinking helped save dozens of lives–and why police can't explain reason attack unfolded as it did," Mail Online, 17 November 2015; URL: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3321531/Solid-security-Stade-France-helped-save-dozens-lives.html

[39] Nesser and Stenersen, "The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe," 11-12.

[40] «Woolwich attack UK soldier» (2013); see appendix of Nesser (2015)

[41] Ian Austen, "Hit-and-Run That Killed Canadian Soldier Is Called Terrorist Attack," New York Times, 21 October 2014; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/22/world/americas/canadian-soldier-run-down-in-what-officials-call-act-of-terror-dies.html?_r=0

[42] "Dijon car attack" (2014). The case was registered in our dataset as vaguely documented (C3); see appendix 1.

[43] "Lyon gas factory attack" (2015).

[44] "Say, "Die in Your Rage!" An Address by the Spokesman for the Islamic State The Mujāhid Shaykh Abū Muhammad al-'Adnānī ash-Shāmī," Al-Hayat, January 2015. Transcript accessed via the blog of Pieter Van Ostaeyen; URL: https://pietervanostaeyen.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/al-adnani-say-die-in-your-rage.pdf (on 29 August 2016).

[45] "Charlie Hebdo attack" (2015), "Friday 13th Paris shooting" (2015) see appendix 1. The weapon used in the Charlie Hebdo attack was apparently a M80 Zolja rocket launcher, probably smuggled in from the Balkans, "How did the Paris terrorists get hold of their weapons?" Telegraph, 17 January 2015; URL: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11351855/How-did-the-Paris-terrorists-get-hold-of-their-weapons.html

[46] «Isis suspects secretly monitored Belgian nuclear scientist, raising dirty bomb fears,» Independent, 19 February 2016; URL: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-dirty-bomb-nuclear-scientists-paris-attacks-a6884146.html

[47] "Islamic State fighters using drones with IEDs and spy cameras, says Pentagon," Telegraph, 7 July 2016; URL: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/07/islamic-state-fighters-using-drones-with-ieds-and-spy-cameras-sa/

[48] "2015 Charlie Hebdo attack", "2015 Friday 13th Paris shooting" and "2016 Normandy priest beheading" see appendix 1.

[49] "European Ferries plot" (2002) and "Bouhrama/GSPC Italy-Norway plot " (2005), see appendix of Nesser (2015). In the Italy-Norway case, "large-scale" attacks were, according to Italian media, believed to include targeting of a cruise-ship, consult "Terrorism: Another Trail Leads to Florence (in Italian)," Il Giornale (Milan), 24 November 2005, accessed via WNC. See also "'Do You Want to Put a Bomb on the Subway?' (in Italian)," Il Giornale (Milan), 21 November 2005, accessed via WNC.

[50] "French police chief and partner killed in stabbing claimed by Isis," Guardian, 14 June 2016; URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/13/french-policeman-stabbed-death-paris and "France in shock again after Isis murder of priest in Normandy," Guardian, 26 July 2016; URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/26/france-shock-second-isis-attack-12-days

[51] The four attacks conducted by groups were: "2015 Charlie Hebdo Attack", "2015 Friday 13th Paris shooting", "2016 Brussels attacks", and "2016 Normandie priest beheading" see Appendix 1.

[52] Clare Ellis, "With a little help from my friends: an exploration of the tactical use of single-actor terrorism by the Islamic State," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (2016)

[53] The 6 plots are: "2014 Ziamani beheading plot", "2014 Tours knife attack", "2015 Copenhagen attack", "2015 London subway stabbing", "2016 German girl police stabbing", and "2016 Knife attack police Brussels".

[54] For example, the Abbottabad documents confirm that al-Qaida intended to recruit and train operatives to carry out an attack on the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, in 2010, but the attack never materialized because the plotters were intercepted and arrested. Consult Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Bin Laden's Bookshelf"; URL: https://www.dni.gov/index.php/resources/bin-laden-bookshelf?start=1

[55] In 2015, the FFI published a study of the financing of 40 jihadi cells that plotted attacks in Europe between 1994 and 2013; see: Oftedal, "The Financing of Jihadi Terrorist Cells in Europe". When comparing the findings from the period 2014-2016 with the findings from the previous report, it is worth noting that there are some differences in methodology. The 2015 study only included the most well-documented plots (C1), whereas for the period 2014-2016, plots that were less well-documented (C2) were also included in order to increase the amount of data on which to base the analysis about how European jihadis work to ensure funding (consult appendix 1 for an explanation of the three-tier classification system of plots according to level of documentation). To rule out that the apparent changes in funding are due to systematic differences between C1 and C2 plots, we repeated the analysis of the most recent period without the C2 plots. This did not significantly alter the results. For example, the proportion of C1 plots that received terrorist funding was 38% (compared to 35% for C1 and C2 plots combined) and legal funding was at 81% (compared to 73% for C1 and C2 plots). Cash was the transfer method used in 90% of the transfers for C1 plots, compared to 86% for C1 and C2 pots combined. The relative consistency in financing between C1 and C2 plots indicates that the changes since 2014 are most likely real, and not simply due to our inclusion of less well-documented plots. Nevertheless, it should be underscored that the findings from the most recent period are more uncertain.

[56] Of the 36 plots studied, six had to be excluded from the analysis of income due to insufficient information and four were excluded because no income was needed for the plot (the plot was disrupted before any costs had incurred). The remaining 26 plots form the basis for the analysis of income sources.

[57] Nadia Sweeny, "Larossi Aballa, entre livraison de nourriture à domicile et terrorisme", ZamanFrance.fr, 14 June 2016; URL: https://www.zamanfrance.fr/article/larossi-aballa-entre-livraison-nourriture-a-domicile-terrorisme-22092.html.

[58] Susanne Schröter, "The Rhine-Main Area as a Base of Salafist-Jihadist Operations" (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Forschungszentrum Globaler Islam, May 2015); Philippe Sotto and Lori Hinnant, "Suspect handed preliminary charges over beheading in France", AP, 30 June 2015; Tom Whitehead, and David Barrett, "Middle class daughter of magistrate who turned to suicide bomb plotter", Telegraph, 30 December 2015; URL: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/12073343/Islamist-fanatic-dubbed-Silent-Bomber-and-wife-guilty-of-77-anniversary-terror-plot.html

[59] Magnus Normark and Magnus Ranstorp, "Understanding Terrorist Finance. Modus Operandi and National CTF-Regimes" (Stockholm: Swedish Defence University, December 2015); Catherine E. Shoichet and Josh Levs, "Al Qaeda branch claims Charlie Hebdo attack was years in the making", CNN, 21 January 2015.

[60 "Emails from Paris Kosher Store Gunman to 'handler' Revealed," France 24, 7 November 2015; URL: http://www.france24.com/en/20151107-emails-paris-kosher-store-gunman-handler-revealed; Jack Moore, "Charlie Hebdo Paris massacre: Belgian arms dealer admits to supplying Kouachi brothers and Amedy Coulibaly", International Business Times, 14 January 2016; URL: http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/charlie-hebdo-paris-massacre-belgian-arms-dealer-admits-supplying-kouachi-brothers-amedy-1483391; Carol Matlack, "Why France's Terror Attacks Were Probably Self-Financed", Bloomberg, 12 January 2015; URL: http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-12/why-frances-terror-attacks-were-probably-selffinanced

[61 Oftedal, "The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe", op.cit., p. 19.

[62] On the crime-terrorism nexus, see for example Peng Wang, "The Crime-Terror Nexus: Transformation, Alliance, Convergence", Asian Social Science, Vol 6, No 6 (2010) and Steven Hutchinson and Pat O'Malley, "A Crime–Terror Nexus? Thinking on Some of the Links between Terrorism and Criminality", Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol 30, No 12 (2007), see also Basra and Neumann in this special issue of Perspectives on Terrorism.

[63] This finding does not, however, exclude that there is in fact a growing crime-terrorism nexus. There might still be an increasing convergence in other areas, such as recruitment (petty criminals recruited in prison) or weapons (terrorists cooperating with organized crime networks to acquire weapons).

[64] In the wake of the 2015 November Paris attacks, several media outlets published articles claiming that IS militants linked to the attacks had a Bitcoin address with 3 million dollars. These reports were based on an interview with a member of Ghost Security Group, an anti-IS hacking group. However, Ghost Security Group only said that IS in general used crypto-currencies, and that the group had uncovered various Bitcoin addresses used by people affiliated with IS, including one address with 3 million dollars. A representative from Ghost Security reportedly clarified later that the accounts it discovered "are in no way connected to the Paris attack"; see "Bitcoin, Paris and Terrorism: What the Media Got Wrong", Coindesk.com, 20 November 2015; URL: http://www.coindesk.com/bitcoin-paris-and-terrorism-what-the-media-got-wrong/

[65] Rukmini Callimachi, Alissa J. Rubin and Laure Fourquetmarch, "A View of ISIS's Evolution in New Details of Paris Attacks", New York Times, 19 March 2016; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/world/europe/a-view-of-isiss-evolution-in-new-details-of-paris-attacks.html . Hawala is an alternative remittance channel that exists outside of traditional banking systems. It is a method of transferring money without any actual movement of money, and the system is heavily based on trust, see definition on Investopedia; URL: http://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hawala.asp#ixzz4Hgbu9tdA)

[66] Oftedal, "The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe," op. cit., p. 23.

[67] The estimates of expenses are on the low side, since many plots were disrupted in an early phase. The estimates only include expenses accumulated at the time of disruption, and not planned or possible future costs. This is because it is very difficult to predict what costs may have been accumulated if the plots were executed, but suggests that the actual costs would have been higher than our estimates.

[68] Oftedal, "The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe"., op. cit.

[69] The sixth attack estimated at over $10,000 is the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack, linked to AQAP. Although the attacker at the kosher store pledged allegiance to IS, there is no firm evidence that he received money from IS.

[70] Oftedal, "The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe," op. cit. p.19.

[71] See for example "How Islamic State Infiltrated Europe", WSJ, April 1, 2016 and Callimachi, "How a secretive branch of ISIS built a global network of killers".

[72] See for example Robert Windrem, "ISIS Is the World's Richest Terror Group, But Spending Money Fast", NBC News, March 20 2015; URL: http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/isis-richest-terror-group-world-n326781

[73] Oftedal, "The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe," 21, op. cit.

[74] Ibid, 45.

[75] Examples of plots were attackers received cash from IS while they were in Syria/Iraq/Turkey include the November 2015 Paris attack and the 2016 Brussels attack, the 2015 Reda Hame French concert hall plot, the 2015 Ghlam church bomb plot, the 2015 Verviers plot and the 2014 Riviera plot.

[76] The highest amount reported is from the 2015 Verviers plot, where one of the members left Syria with 10,000 euro. The lowest amount reported was in connection with the 2014 Riviera plot, where Ibrahim Boudina was stopped at the Turkish border returning from Syria with "a mission". In his luggage, the officers found 1,500 euro and a French document titled "How to Make Artisanal Bombs in the Name of Allah." See Callimachi, "How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze" and "Arms dealer threw police uniforms into the bargain", FlandersNews.be, 11 May 2016; URL: http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.english/News/1.2652977

[77 See for example Callimachi, Rubin and Fourquetmarch, "A View of ISIS's Evolution in New Details of Paris Attacks".

[78] "Arms dealer threw police uniforms into the bargain"; "Cellule terroriste de Verviers–Arshad, l'homme qui avait tout préparé à Verviers à son retour de Syrie (2)," Bruzz.be, 10 May 2016; URL: http://www.bruzz.be/fr/node/121141.

[79] Oftedal, "The financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe," 20.

[80] Nesser, Islamist Terrorism in Europe, op.cit.

[81] For al-Qaida-funded plots the launch rate is 100%, but there is only one case in the sample: the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack (launched). One of the plots funded by international terrorist organizations had to be excluded from this analysis since we do not know if the funding came from al-Qaida or IS: the 2014 UK possible Khorasan plot (not launched). Media only reported that a British jihadist returned from Syria with a "substantial amount of cash" from unknown militant Islamists. See for instance Duncan Gardham, "Revealed: Briton who was jihadi in Syria and came home to bomb UK streets", Mail Online, 6 July 2014; URL: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2681957/Revealed-Briton-jihadi-Syria-came-home-bomb-UK-streets.html)

[82] "Terror Suspects Go on Trial in Belgium Over Failed Plot", Wall Street Journal, 9 May 2016; URL: http://www.wsj.com/articles/terror-suspects-go-on-trial-in-belgium-over-failed-plot-1462816512.

[83] "Forgotten Lessons: The Return of Mustard Gas", Huffington Post, 6 October 2016; URL: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/forgotten-lessons-the-ret_b_12272666.html.

[84] Nesser and Stenersen "The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe" op.cit.

[85] For an in-depth analysis of al-Qaida's CBRN effort, see Anne Stenersen, Al-Qaida's quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction: The History behind the Hype (Saarbrucken: VMD Verlag, 2008).

[86] Anne Stenersen, "Toxic Taster: Jihadists' chemical weapons use remains crude," Jane's Intelligence Review (April 2015): 44-49.

[87] See for example, "UK should prepare for use of drones in terrorist attacks, says thinktank," Guardian, 11 January 2016; URL: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/11/drones-terrorist-attacks-security-thinktank

[88] IS has also praised Omar Mateen, the perpetrator behind the Orlando nightclub attack. "Why we hate you and why we fight you," Dabiq issue 15 (July 2016): 30–33; "The Islamic State's shocking war on gays," Washington Post, 13 June 2014; URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/13/the-islamic-states-shocking-war-on-homosexuals/

Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus

by Rajan Basra & Peter R. Neumann

Abstract

The prevalence of criminal backgrounds amongst European jihadists is remarkable. Whether amongst 'foreign fighters' that have travelled to Syria and Iraq, or amongst those involved in terrorism in Europe, criminal pasts are common. Yet, they remain unexamined. This article presents a unique empirical examination of 79 European jihadists with criminal backgrounds, examining the relevancy of their criminal pasts in relation to their terrorist futures. The results fall into four themes. Firstly, jihadism can affect a criminal's radicalisation process in two ways: it can offer redemption from past sins, or it can legitimise crime. Secondly, prisons offer an environment for radicalisation and networking amongst criminals and extremists. Thirdly, criminals develop skills that can be useful for them as extremists, such as access to weapons and forged documents, as well as the psychological 'skill' of familiarity with violence. Finally, white-collar and petty crime is often used to finance extremism. The results challenge conceptions on radicalisation, and can affect counter-terrorism responses.

Keywords: *Terrorism; Islamic State; radicalisation; crime-terror nexus; terrorist financing*

Introduction

On the morning of Wednesday, 31 August 2016, two plain-clothed police officers approached a suspected drug dealer in Christiana, an alternative life-style district in Copenhagen, Denmark. Without warning, the man opened fire at the police with a pistol and ran away. He was eventually tracked down and died from wounds that he received during a police shootout.[1] His name was Mesa Hodzic, a 25-year old Danish-Bosnian, who was known to the police as a drug dealer. Two days later, the jihadist [2] group Islamic State (IS aka ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) claimed responsibility for Hodzic's actions, proclaiming him a 'soldier' of the Caliphate.[3] It turned out that Hodzic was not just a prolific drug dealer, but also a member of a Salafist group who had expressed sympathies for the Islamic State and appeared in its propaganda videos.[4] At first, this appeared like a flagrant contradiction. Were jihadists not meant to be religious, and refrain from drug peddling and 'ordinary' crime? Yet his case demonstrates how blurred the lines between crime and extremism have become.[5] Was he a criminal, a terrorist, or both?

Mesa Hodzic was not a unique case. German Federal Police stated that of the 669 German foreign fighters about whom they had sufficient information, two-thirds had police records prior to travelling to Syria, and one-third had criminal convictions.[6] The Belgian Federal Prosecutor said that approximately half of his country's jihadists had criminal records prior to leaving for Syria.[7] A United Nations report suggests a similar pattern amongst French foreign fighters.[8] Officials from Norway and the Netherlands told us that 'at least 60 per cent' of their countries' jihadists had previously been involved in crime.[9] It is for this reason that Alain Grignard, the head of Brussels Federal Police, described Islamic State as 'a sort of super-gang'.[10]

This phenomenon may not be entirely new. In the mid-1990s, French newspapers referred to operatives of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) as 'gangster terrorists' because many of its Algerian members had previously been involved in local gangs.[11] Likewise, several of the perpetrators of the Madrid train attacks in 2004 were former criminals, and financed their operation by selling drugs, among other sources of income.[12]

The merging of terrorism and crime is therefore not without precedent. However, we can offer no reliable statistics by just how much the share of 'gangsters' in terrorist groups may have risen. Yet it seems clear that their role has become more pronounced, more visible, and more relevant to the ways in which groups like

IS operate and frame their message. Furthermore, we believe that the crime-terror nexus has been under-researched, and that its political and practical implications have not been understood.

The purpose of this article is not to quantify this nexus, but to describe its nature and dynamics, and understand what it means for the terrorist threat and the ways it should be countered. How does criminality facilitate radicalisation and recruitment? What is the role of prisons? Do criminals possess skills that make them more effective as terrorists? How does the convergence between crime and terrorism affect the financing of terrorist attacks?

To help answer such questions, a multi-lingual team of ICSR researchers compiled a database containing the profiles of 79 recent European jihadists with criminal pasts. As far as we know, it is the first data collection that focuses on criminals who have become jihadists in the post-2011 period. By analysing their pathways, motivations and actions, we were able to establish some key factors and dynamics that define the terror-crime nexus in the context of the current jihadist threat.

Our conclusions are clear. The convergence of criminal and terrorist milieus – what we call the *new* crime-terror nexus – is real, and has profound implications for how jihadist groups in Europe operate. For the first time, there is complete alignment between a group like Islamic State and criminals who are attracted by its core counter-cultural message of redemption through strength, power, and violence. Rather than in universities or among religious students, Islamic State and/or its successors increasingly find recruits in European 'ghettos', in prisons, as well as among the European 'underclasses' and those who have previously engaged in violence and illegal acts. Those who are thus becoming part of the jihadist counter-culture can apply their criminal skills to terrorist purposes. Indeed, many individuals continue their involvement in crime whilst radicalising. This, we believe, should compel us to re-think long-held assumptions about radicalisation and how it needs to be countered.

Literature

The concept of a crime-terrorism nexus is not new. It emerged in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of the Information Age. Amidst shifting geopolitics and newfound transnational reach, non-state actors adapted criminal *modus operandi* to further their aims. As early as the 1980s, during the rise of Pablo Escobar and the Colombian drug cartels, scholars tried to define 'narco-terrorism' and debated whether it represented a true case of blurring criminal-terrorist lines.[13] In more recent years, the term 'criminal insurgency' has been used to describe the way in which criminal organisations represent strategic security threats to states.[14] Moreover, it is no secret that the Taliban have taxed, organised, promoted, and protected Afghanistan's heroin production; that Hezbollah has invested into South America's illicit narcotics industry since the 1980s; and that groups like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) have been involved in smuggling petrol, cigarettes, and counterfeiting consumer goods.[15]

Despite these developments, the concept has not only failed to gain significant traction among scholars, many have dismissed it as being overly broad. Among its major deficiencies are the assumptions that terrorist or criminal groups operate as monolithic, hierarchically structured entities, and that ideological and criminal motivations are mutually exclusive.[16]

In our view, the crime-terror nexus is a useful concept, but its nature and dynamics are different from how it has traditionally been conceived. What we have observed in the case of jihadist recruits in Europe is not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as organisations but of their social networks, environments, or *milieus*. In other words: rather than being one or the other, criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences for how individuals radicalise and operate. This is what we call the *new* crime-terror nexus.

Database

To analyse this issue, a multi-lingual team of ICSR researchers compiled a database containing the profiles of 79 recent European jihadists with criminal pasts. As far as we know, it is the first database of its kind. While this is not a representative survey of European 'gangster' jihadists, it has provided the source material for the different dynamics and developments that follow. By analysing their pathways, motivations and actions, we were able to ascertain some characteristics that define the crime-terror nexus in the context of the current jihadist threat.

Our database only includes individuals who have: 1) travelled, or attempted travel, to a foreign 'battlefront' as a jihadist foreign fighter and/or have been involved in terrorism in Europe; 2) had a history of crime prior to their mobilisation into extremism; 3) been active as jihadists any time after the start of the current 'wave' in the year 2011.

All data was gathered from open sources, such as newspaper articles, court documents, and government reports. Having obtained ethical approval from King's College London, [17] we then conducted a series of interviews with current and former counter-terrorism officials, in order to assess the implications of the findings, and check database entries. This became necessary as information concerning criminal pasts is often unknown, incomplete, classified, or forthcoming. This also allowed a check on journalistic biases – where the most 'headline-worthy' criminal pasts receive the most attention. To prevent some cases from distorting the overall picture, we omitted individuals whose trajectories we judged to be too incomplete to allow for a systematic evaluation.

Data collection took place from March to July 2016, and the resulting database (n = 79) includes individuals from Belgium (13), Denmark (11), France (13), Germany (15), Netherlands (11), and the UK (16). For details, see Appendix to this article.

These profiles were then coded according to 30 variables which sought to capture three aspects of an individual's profile or pathway: (1) biographical information; (2) involvement in jihadism; (3) criminal history.

To assess individuals' criminal histories, we coded for time spent in prison (as well as the number of stays); criminal convictions; involvement with firearms; types of crime, such as violent (for example, assault, robbery) or petty crime (for example, trespassing, theft), drug dealing, trafficking, and white-collar crime (for example, identity theft or financial fraud).

These categories were sufficiently broad to mitigate the limitations of the data, which often did not allow for further sub-categorisation. For example, open-sources may disclose that an individual was *involved* in drugs but do not reveal his specific role (for example, user or dealer). As a result, it was difficult to analyse the range of criminality *within* particular categories. It was also often not possible to reconstruct exact dates and timelines, which makes it impossible to determine whether they ceased, continued, or escalated their criminality whilst radicalising in some cases.

Results

No uniform profile emerges from the sample, though it is possible to discern patterns. All individuals are male and predominantly young: the average (as well as median) age was 25. The high proportion of converts (19-22 per cent) is in line with estimates of converts amongst jihadist foreign fighters from the European Union.[18]

Of the 79 individuals, two-thirds (67 per cent) had travelled, or attempted to travel, to Syria as foreign fighters. Many of these also figured among the 38 percent involved in domestic plots. 9 percent were

convicted of terrorism-related offences without, however, having travelled to a jihadi zone of conflict or participated in a specific plot.

The intensity of criminality varies, from 'one-time' criminals, to repeat offenders, and more sustained 'career criminals'. Given the age of those involved, it is likely that many stood at the beginning of their criminal 'careers'. The vast majority are low-level, local criminals. There are very few that operated on a national or transnational level. Whilst the majority were at some point involved in petty crime (68 percent), the prevalence of violent histories (65 per cent) is notable.

Prisons play an important role, with the majority of the individuals in our sample (at least 57 percent) having been incarcerated on at least one occasion. In twelve cases (15 percent of the total, or 27 percent of those who spent time in prison), we are confident that individuals embraced jihadism in prison, though most of them continued (and intensified) their radicalisation after being released. Notably, seven of those individuals were subsequently involved in a domestic plot, which means that those who radicalised in prison are significantly overrepresented amongst those involved in domestic plotting.

Nearly 30 percent of the individuals in our sample had experience with firearms, while half of them subsequently became involved in domestic plotting. By contrast, 'white-collar crime' seems to be a marginal issue, with just 6 percent involved in this.

In the following sections, we will examine some of the key dynamics for which we have found evidence in our database: (1) recruitment and radicalisation; (2) prisons; (3) 'skills transfers'; and (4) criminal financing.

Radicalisation and Recruitment

The recent mobilisation of foreign fighters for the conflict in Syria has been extraordinary: over the past five years, an estimated 5,000 Western Europeans have travelled to the Middle East, joining jihadist groups such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra. No other conflict involving jihadists has attracted as many foreigners.[19]

Both 'returnee' fighters and 'stay-home supporters' have played a prominent part in the recent 'wave' of terrorist attacks throughout Europe, and both groups include a significant number of people with criminal pasts. One of the most compelling questions, therefore, is how criminal pasts contribute to processes of radicalisation, that is, the personal circumstances, experiences, narratives, networks and other factors that explain an individual's involvement in extremism and their mobilisation to engage in violence.[20]

The profiles and pathways that emerge from our database offer some tentative answers. They suggest that the jihadist narrative is surprisingly well-aligned with the personal needs and desires of criminals, that it can offer 'redemption', and can also license criminality. There is only sporadic evidence, however, that jihadists groups are reaching out to criminals as a deliberate strategy.

The Redemption Narrative

Recurrent among criminals in our database was what we termed the 'redemption narrative'. These were criminals who had experienced what Quintan Wiktorowicz termed a 'cognitive opening', a shocking event or personal crisis that prompted them to re-assess their lives and become open to a radical change of values and behaviour.[21] In our case, they realised a need to break with their criminal past, and make up for their 'sins'. This then provided the rationale for their turn to religion and justified the involvement with jihadist groups.

That they sought redemption in jihadism instead of other, more mainstream forms of religion or spirituality, may be explained by the strong alignment of needs and narratives. In other words: involvement in jihadism

offered redemption from crime while satisfying the same personal needs and desires that led them to become involved in it. Just like the criminal gangs of which they used to be members, jihadist groups offer experiences of power, violence, adventure, and provide them with a strong identity, and – not least – a sense of rebellion and being anti-establishment. This made the 'jump' from criminality to terrorism smaller than is commonly perceived – especially when considering that, unlike al-Qaeda, Islamic State requires practically no religious knowledge or learning, and – at least in the recruitment phase–cares less about the complexities of theological discourse. For a criminal with a guilty conscience, the jihadism of the Islamic State could seem like a perfect fit.

Among the most prominent examples is Abderrozak Benarabe, locally known as 'Big A', a long-time criminal from Copenhagen who decided to turn to jihadism after his brother had been diagnosed with cancer. When explaining why he became a foreign fighter, he immediately referred to his criminal past: '… some people have died of my hands. This is a big problem when I meet Allah … It's not good enough just praying with all the shit I've done'.[22]

Legitimising Crime

While the jihadist narrative can be a source of redemption, it may also serve as to legitimate crime. This is nothing new. Anwar al-Awlaki, the influential radical cleric, repeatedly told his followers that 'stealing from your enemies' in the dar al-harb ('lands of war') is permitted, and, in certain cases, obligatory.[23] This has the potential to be enormously effective because it offers criminals an opportunity for 'redemption' without requiring any change of behaviour.

The most prominent example is the network around Khalid Zerkani. Born in Morocco in 1973, Zerkani moved to Belgium as an adult. Whilst he had engaged in petty crime and shoplifting, his greatest talent was as an Islamic State recruiter. He encouraged young men, mostly with Moroccan backgrounds, to commit petty crimes and robberies in Brussels.[24] This was justified on religious grounds: as a witness in his trial testified, Zerkani reassured recruits that 'to steal from the infidels is permitted by Allah'.[25] The proceeds were then redistributed amongst the group, leading to Zerkani's nickname of Papa Noël (Father Christmas).[26]

Prior to his 2014 arrest, Zerkani had become a hugely influential figure within the Brussels jihadist scene, being responsible for the mobilisation of up to 72 foreign fighters.[27] His most infamous protégé was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a key coordinator of the network that carried out the high-casualty attacks in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016. More than any other example, how he operated illustrates the idea behind the new crime-terror nexus, because it produced a near-perfect merging of the two milieus.

Recruitment

Does this mean that criminals are deliberately targeted and recruited by extremists? The evidence for this remains sporadic, with terrorist propaganda specifically targeting criminals being relatively rare. Rayat al-Tawheed, a group of British jihadists that joined the Islamic State in 2014, is the only jihadist group which has consistently adopted this tactic. The group used the slogan 'sometimes people with the worst pasts create the best futures', alongside text explaining that 'jihad is a purification no matter who you are or what sins you have, no good deeds are needed to come before it'.[28] Despite these attempts, it is unknown how effective they were, given that all the Rayat al-Tawheed supporters we know of were recruited through real-world clusters.[29]

When it comes to face-to-face engagement, the research sample yields limited examples beyond the Zerkani network. The case study of Shiraz Tariq, leader of the Danish Salafist group Kaldet til Islam (Call to Islam), is indicative.[30] He would write letters to imprisoned members of immigrant gangs in Copenhagen, appealing

to their guilty consciences. The group's Facebook page publicised their prison outreach, writing that Muslims in prisons '[are] getting off track, so we thought we could write letters to [them] and remind them of Allah. They have plenty of time to read'.[31] While it remains unknown how effective this was – the group did also see non-prison recruits travel to Syria – it marks a novel attempt at reaching out to criminals.

Overall, therefore, extremists' efforts to target criminals – whether through propaganda or via direct face-to-face engagement – appear limited, and there is no evidence as to how successful such approaches have been. This suggests that the outreach isn't systematic but – rather – results from the (mostly unintended) merging of criminal and jihadist milieus and narratives. Both criminals and jihadists are recruited from the same demographic milieu – and often in the same places.

Prisons

For nearly a decade, European prisons have been in the spotlight as places where extremist radicalisation, recruitment, and – in some cases – operational planning have taken place.[32] That prisons are significant meeting places for people with criminal pasts is all too obvious. 57 percent (45 out of 79 profiles) in our sample had been incarcerated for a variety of offences prior to their mobilisation, with sentences ranging from one month to over ten years. More significantly, at least 27 percent of those who spent time in prison (12 out of 45 profiles) radicalised there, though – in the majority of cases – the process continued and intensified after their release. Given the recent surge in terrorism-related arrests and convictions, and in the light of the rapidly expanding number of convicted terrorists in custody, prisons are likely to become more – rather than less – significant as centres of gravity for the jihadist movement. By extension, prisons are also likely to become more relevant as places where criminals and terrorists mix.

The cases in our database highlight different ways in which prisons matter. First, they are places of vulnerability in which extremists can find plenty of 'angry young men' with criminal pasts who may experience cognitive openings and are, therefore, 'ripe' for extremist radicalisation and recruitment. Second, prisons bring together criminals and terrorists, and therefore create opportunities for collaboration and 'skill transfers'. And finally, they often leave people who have served their sentences with few opportunities to re-integrate into society and become productive citizens, creating yet more opportunities for continued involved in crime and radicalisation.

Vulnerability

For many new inmates, the very fact of imprisonment is a personal crisis, which raises profound questions about their lives while providing ample time to search for meaning. They are cut off from their immediate family, friends, and wider society, while finding themselves in an environment which is often hostile, unfamiliar, and tribal in nature, with divisions along religious or ethnic lines. Prisons are places in which new inmates are mentally and physically vulnerable, and where they experience 'cognitive openings'–the willingness and desire to identify with new ideas, beliefs, and social groups.[33]

For the same reason, jihadist recruiters view prisons as places of opportunity. Not only are inmates vulnerable and experience cognitive openings, and thereby making them receptive to jihadist ideas, they also tend to be part of the demographic that jihadist groups are keen to attract: young men, from Muslim backgrounds (but rarely practicing), who are impulsive and willing to take risks, and have already been in conflict with established authorities.[34] Far from being an obstacle, their criminal pasts have desensitised them to law-breaking and violence, and may, in fact, have provided them with useful skills for a terrorist career. From the jihadists' perspective, prisons are the perfect 'breeding ground'.

One of the principal difficulties for prison authorities is to 'spot the signs' and distinguish between (legitimate) religious conversion and (potentially problematic) radicalisation. This is especially complicated given that the outward signs can be similar or – indeed – are the same. Harry Sarfo, who travelled to the Islamic State from Germany in April 2015, exemplifies this. His journey towards extremism began in prison, of which he said: 'Remembering Allah (SWT), reading Qur'an and praying salah, got me through my prison time in Germany. The time in prison as a Muslim brought me closer to my creator'.[35]

Sarfo's own account of his prison radicalisation emphasises the importance of belief, yet omits the face-to-face socialisation with René Marc Sepac, a German jihadist, that was pivotal. Sepac gave him Salafist books to read and sat down with him every day, working through the material. 'The books explained everything', Sarfo told his police interrogators: 'Very precise and to the point…. And I thought, wow, I didn't know any of this stuff. I hadn't had any knowledge [prior to meeting Sepac]'.[36]

His actions, once he had left prison, further underline the importance of social dynamics: he regularly visited a small radical mosque in Bremen, as part of a clique that eventually sent at least 27 people to Syria in 2014. Whilst prison marked the beginning of his radicalisation, it is important to point out that Sarfo required interactions outside of prison to solidify the process.

Networking

Unless extremists are entirely separated from the rest of the prison population, which may be neither possible nor advisable, prison environments have the potential to institutionalise a nexus between terrorists and criminals. This is of greater benefit to the extremists than the criminals: not only do they get access to potentially fruitful opportunities and targets for radicalisation, they can also take advantage of the criminals' skills and underground connections, facilitating access to forged documents, weapons, money, goods, or even safe houses. More so than anywhere in the outside world, prisons are places where criminal and terrorist milieus converge.

The most significant example is that of Chérif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly. The pair first met inside the Fleury-Mérogis prison near Paris in 2007 and formed a friendship after spending seven months on the same wing.[37] Coulibaly had a history of armed robberies, and was imprisoned for aggravated theft, receiving stolen goods, and using false number plates.[38] Kouachi, meanwhile, was awaiting trial over a 2005 attempt to travel to Iraq to become a foreign fighter.[39] The pair – one an 'ordinary' criminal, the other an extremist – were then mentored and (further) radicalised in prison by Djamel Beghal, an al-Qaeda recruiter. [40] In other words, prison allowed the initial network to be established, which culminated in Kouachi and Coulibaly coordinating the January 2015 Paris attacks, killing 17 people.

Despite this, it took more than eight years after their first encounter for them to engage in terrorist violence. In the meantime, many other events furthered their radicalisation: they continued to meet with Beghal on a regular basis after they had been released; [41] became involved in a planned jailbreak of a jihadist prisoner in 2010; [42] and Chérif Kouachi, along with his brother Saïd, travelled to Yemen in 2011, and received training in a camp run by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).[43] No doubt, therefore, that the developments after their release were just as crucial as those that came before.

Post-Release

In all the relevant cases in our sample, processes of radicalisation that started during stays in prison did not end there. In four cases, individuals had been 'flagged' for radicalisation by the prison authorities but somehow neither police nor intelligence agencies managed to follow up these warnings.

Particularly noteworthy is the case of Omar el-Hussein, who was involved in deadly shootings at a cultural centre and a synagogue in Copenhagen in February 2015. As a teenager, el-Hussein joined the Brothas gang in Mjølnerparken, Copenhagen, and was involved in burglaries, petty crime, and drugs.[44] In November 2013, he stabbed a man in an unprovoked attack, for which he received a two-year sentence.[45] In prison, he openly spoke of his desire to fight in Syria, prompting the authorities to flag him as potentially radicalised. [46] He was reported on three occasions, but none of these alerts were investigated.[47]

When el-Hussein was released at the end of January 2015, he was given no access to probation services because of a technicality (the prosecution was appealing the sentence while he was technically on parole). Homeless and jobless, he appeared at the local municipal centre, asking for a place to stay and something to do.[48] They could not accommodate his request, and scheduled a new meeting for 12 February. Instead of showing up, he carried out his attack on 14 February – just two weeks after he had been released.

El-Hussein's rapid mobilisation demonstrates how potentially 'explosive' the convergence between criminal background and jihadist motivation can become. Prisons are the place where the two milieus are at their closest, and where all the phenomena and social dynamics referenced in this article are most likely to manifest themselves. With increasing numbers of terrorists receiving sentences and becoming incarcerated, these problems are likely to become more pronounced.

Skill Transfers

One of the most disturbing aspects of the new crime-terror nexus is the potential for criminal 'skills' to be transferred to terrorists. Indeed, there are many possible skills that a terrorist with a criminal past may have developed, though our database illustrates three themes: first, that individuals with a criminal past tend to have easier access to weapons; second, that many are adept at staying 'under the radar' while planning new crimes; and third, that their experience and familiarity with violence lowers their (psychological) threshold for becoming involved in terrorist acts.

Weapons

As early as 2013, the Danish intelligence service warned that the strong presence of criminals amongst Danish jihadists would lead to the proliferation of firearms among them.[49] Two years later, the warning became true. Between Omar el-Hussein's two shootings, he went to his neighbourhood of Mjølnerparken and gave the M95 rifle that he had used during the first attack to a former fellow gang member for disposal.[50] This rifle had been stolen during a home robbery in 2013.[51] He also met with several other former gang associates, one of whom was in possession of the same ammunition that el-Hussein used in the second attack, making it plausible that he had supplied him with new ammunition. In short: without his gang connections, el-Hussein would have found it much harder to acquire the means with which he carried out his attacks.

The same is true for Amedy Coulibaly. Upon seeing the media reports that followed the attacks in January 2015, the arms dealer that sold Coulibaly his weapons pre-emptively turned himself in to the police, and confessed to supplying Coulibaly with Skorpion submachine guns, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, and the two AK-47s that the Kouachi brothers had used.[52] He calculated that the jihadist attacks would eventually have led the police to him anyway. Had he known Coulibaly's true intentions, he might have been more hesitant in supplying the weapons.

The Islamic State itself has acknowledged the value of their operatives appearing like 'ordinary' criminals. In the July 2015 issue of Dar al-Islam, their French language magazine, the group advised operatives to conceal all external displays of religiosity when acquiring weapons, and instead, adopt the look of a jeune de cité (a

man from the estate) who is 'looking to make a robbery with a weapon'.[53] This advice has proved to be unnecessary, as many of their supporters – including el-Hussein and Coulibaly – genuinely fit this profile.

Staying 'Under the Radar'

In addition to procuring firearms, access to criminal skills makes it easier for terrorists to 'stay under the radar'. This includes, for example, the use of fake documents and access to safe houses, which enable terrorists to evade the authorities, and therefore increase the likelihood of a plot turning into a successful attack.

What matters in this regard are not specific abilities that former criminals may (or may not) possess themselves, but – rather – their access to (criminal) networks through which these tools can be acquired. The production of forgeries, for instance, is difficult for terrorists to develop in-house. Indeed, our database contains only three criminals who used identity theft prior to their radicalisation.[54] Instead, it is more likely that terrorist networks would 'outsource' this task to people who are experts – and who can typically be found in criminal milieus.

The Paris and Brussels network, that carried out attacks in November 2015 and March 2016, frequently used forged documents throughout their attack planning. This allowed the network to: wire money, travel between countries, rent cars, and – crucially – acquire safe houses.[55] For example, Khalid el-Bakraoui used forged identification papers– adopting the name 'Ibrahim Maaroufi' – to rent an apartment in Charleroi, which was subsequently used by at least two of the Paris attackers.[56] Another apartment in Schaerbeek – rented under the pseudonym 'Fernando Castillo' – was used as a bomb factory to manufacture the TATP explosives and suicide vests used in the Paris attacks.[57]

Rather than becoming forgers themselves, the terrorists who launched attacks in Paris and Brussels used their contacts within the criminal milieu to reach out to forgers who serviced people traffickers. This is how they came across Djamal Eddine Ouali, an Algerian who ran a forgery operation in Brussels. The supposed 'profit vs. ideology' dichotomy, which is debated in the academic literature, [58] was no barrier in this case. There is no evidence that Ouali knew of their true intentions, or was even interested in them. Instead, they likely appeared as 'ordinary' customers from a criminal milieu. As the Belgian investigator in charge of Ouali's case said: '[He] was a professional document falsifier whose main goal was to make as much money as possible from his business'.[59]

Familiarity with Violence

These practical and logistical skills are supplemented by a more intangible 'skill': that of familiarity with violence. 65 percent of the individuals in our database were involved in violent crime. Among the 30 individuals who were involved in domestic plotting, this figure rose to 80 per cent.

This does not mean that criminals are necessarily using the same types of violence as terrorists: a terrorist using a knife does not always correlate to that person using a knife as a criminal tool. What we are suggesting is that routine engagement in violence as a criminal can lower the (psychological) threshold for becoming involved in violence as a terrorist. For someone who is familiar with violence and has become desensitised to its use, the 'jump' to committing an act of terrorism may be smaller, and the process of mobilisation, therefore, quicker and less difficult.

The argument is hard to substantiate based on individual trajectories alone, given all the other potential influences that may have caused a person to engage in terrorism. Nevertheless, our database shows that the period of mobilisation – that is, the time between joining a jihadist group and becoming involved in violence – among the 30 individuals involved in domestic plotting was often extraordinarily short, often less than four months or even just a few weeks. Furthermore, while there was no 'like-for-like' use of violence, the terrorist

use of violence was always more violent than someone's criminal use of violence. These findings support the idea that familiarity with (criminal) violence produces terrorists that are more volatile as well as more violent.

The case of Mohammed Merah – who killed 7 people, including three Jewish children, near his hometown of Toulouse in March 2012 – illustrates the often extreme histories of violence we found among the former criminals in our database. Merah was killed after a 30-hour standoff, during which he told police that he regretted 'not having claimed more victims'.[60] It was the culmination of a life story characterised by routine violence, which involved two stays in prison, and 18 convictions for assaults, robberies, and thefts.[61] As a teenager Merah was reported at least 15 times for acts of violence, and was described as having 'a violent profile from childhood and behavioural troubles'.[62] This would continue into adulthood: in 2006 after his uncle asked him to stop making noise with his quad bike, Merah beat him in the face with a fire extinguisher. [63] In 2010 he left a teenage girl blind after assaulting her.[64] By the time Merah had radicalised and received terrorist training in Waziristan in 2011, no one needed to 'persuade' him that the use of violence could be justified.

Financing

Just as criminal pasts facilitate access to weapons, help obtain forged documents, and lead to familiarity with violence, it is no surprise that they also enable terrorist financing. Solid empirical examinations of this phenomenon are surprisingly rare, though two recent studies have started cataloguing the funding of jihadist activities in Europe. A report by Magnus Normark and Magnus Ranstorp focuses on how European foreign fighters funded their travels to Syria. It was found that in addition to loans, private donations, bank fraud, and business fraud, they consistently emphasised the role of petty crime.[65] Emilie Oftedal's study examined the financing of 40 jihadist plots between 1994 and 2013: though nearly three-quarters generated at least some of their income from legal sources, [66] she shows that criminality played a significant role, with nearly 40 percent of the plots drawing on the proceeds of crime.[67]

It can be argued that funding through crime will become more important. Our argument consists of three inter-related points. First, the vast majority of terrorist attacks in Europe do not require large sums of money. Second, jihadists have encouraged the use of 'ordinary' criminality to raise funds. Combined with the large numbers of current jihadists with criminal pasts, this will make financing attacks through crime not only possible and legitimate but, increasingly, their first choice. Finally, our database suggests that jihadists continue to do what they are familiar with, and therefore terrorist funding by criminal means is likely to become more important as the number of jihadists with criminal pasts is increasing.

Strategy

For more than a decade, jihadist groups have encouraged their Western supporters to self-finance, while simultaneously promoting types of attacks that are cheap and easy to carry out. In the early 2000s, al-Qaeda's leading strategist Abu Musab al-Suri proclaimed the idea of 'individual terrorism jihad', with individuals and small cells raising their own money and operating 'completely and totally separated from each other'.[68] Al-Awlaki's Inspire magazine regularly provided instructions for what the magazine termed 'open source jihad'– teaching readers how to 'build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom'.[69] The Islamic State is not different: it has promoted loose networks, cell structures and 'low-cost' attacks among its supporters abroad. This is reflected in Oftedal's analysis, which found that 90 percent of jihadist plots in Europe involved 'an element' of self-funding, with nearly half being entirely self-financed. Jihadist groups are trying to keep financial barriers to entry low, making it possible for all their supporters – no matter how poor – to become involved.

This strategy works because jihadist activities in Europe are not expensive. Becoming a foreign fighter requires little more than buying an airline ticket to Turkey. An AK-47 machine gun can be acquired for less

than €2,000, and a pistol for less.[70] The costs of buying a knife or renting a vehicle are negligible. Oftedal's study found that three-quarters of European plots between 1994 and 2013 cost less than €9,000.[71] Even coordinated attacks are relatively inexpensive: the French Finance Minister stated that the November 2015 Paris attacks were financed by a 'sum not exceeding €30,000'.[72] These are amounts that do not usually require external funding or a dedicated terrorist fundraising operation; such sums of money can be raised from personal assets and savings, legitimate sources such as work or loans, or small-scale criminal activities that jihadists with a criminal past are already used to make their living with.

Ideology

For many would-be terrorists, it would not be necessary to become involved in crime to afford the (relatively modest) cost of travelling to Turkey or funding a terrorist attack. Yet curiously, jihadist groups often encourage their followers to do so.

This relates to an ideological doctrine which states that stealing from 'unbelievers' is not only permissible but worthy of commendation. Theft is equated with ghanimah, which translates as 'the spoils of war'. As mentioned earlier, al-Awlaki justified this notion in his 'Ruling on Dispossessing the Disbelievers', which sanctioned the use of crime for the sake of 'jihad' – 'whether by means of force or by means of theft or deception'.[73] He went as far as saying that living off ghanimah was preferable to seeking a regular salary, which would involve paying taxes to the 'disbelievers' and thereby funding their wars and oppression of the Muslim world.[74] The Islamic State shares this doctrine, and has turned it into practical advice by telling operatives to use forged documents to obtain cash. Its French-language magazine, Dar al-Islam, states: 'You should (if possible) try to obtain false documents, in order to reap the easy spoils, such as opening a bank account and paying by cheque in societies with low restrictions'.[75] Far from considering such offenses a sin, some jihadists actively encourage crime.

Our database contains examples where crime was explicitly justified in religious terms. The most prominent one is the Zerkani network whose 'godfather', Khalid Zerkani, encouraged young Moroccans to steal from 'disbelievers' by saying that doing so was permitted for the sake of 'jihad'. Reda Kriket, a French 'returnee' who was arrested in March 2016 whilst planning a terrorist attack, was 'living off ghanimah' by stealing jewellery.[76] And another Frenchman, who planned on travelling to Syria and had used false payslips to open bank accounts, tried to explain his actions by stating: 'Those are the spoils of war. And it is halal [permitted], you see!'.[77]

Continuity

A principal difficulty in detecting crime as a method of terrorist financing is that it does not involve a change of behaviour but merely one of purpose: individuals with criminal pasts often continue what they were doing in their earlier lives, except that the profits are used to finance terrorist attacks or trips to Syria. As a result, it can be difficult to separate funds that were raised for terrorism from money that is spent on other, often entirely mundane purposes.

Saïd Kouachi, for example, sold counterfeit goods and received money from AQAP. Not all of this money went into the funding of the Charlie Hebdo attack, but some of it did.[78] How is it possible to distinguish one from the other? Did Kouachi, in his own mind, separate the different streams of income?

Amedy Coulibaly, on the other hand, was selling drugs only a month before the attacks, in addition to being owed street debts worth €30,000.[79] Notably, he and his wife raised funds via two consumer loans: €6,000 from Cofidis in December 2014, and €27,000 from Financo in September 2014.[80] The Financo loan was used to purchase a car, which was then exchanged for weapons.[81] Though Coulibaly provided genuine ID

for the Cofidis loan, he used a forged payslip listing a monthly income of €2,978 at a company called Naxos. This is a well-established criminal tactic, and even a cursory check could have raised suspicions: publicly available records showed that Naxos had no employees, and that the phone number provided was not in use. [82]

The convergence of criminal and terrorist milieus, together with the self-financing of attacks, makes it hard to maintain traditional notions of terrorist financing. Rather than focusing on terrorism alone, it might be more useful, therefore, to concentrate on individuals, their backgrounds and financial histories. Indeed, the fundraising methods of many of the individuals in our database typically mirrored their criminal pasts. If Kouachi made money by selling counterfeit trainers, and still had the connections and ability to continue this trade, why would he not do the same to fund his attacks? Similarly, a group of would-be foreign fighters from the German city of Hamburg supplemented donations by stealing copper from a construction site, because that's where they worked.[83] In all of these cases, the common thread was not any particular source of funding (be it counterfeits or copper) but personal continuity. If today's jihadists are former criminals, we should not, therefore, be surprised if proceeds of crime are used to finance their 'jihad'.

Conclusion

The convergence of criminal and terrorist milieus – the *new* crime-terror nexus – is real, and has profound implications for how jihadist groups in Europe operate. For the first time, there is complete alignment between a group like Islamic State and the people who are attracted by its core counter-cultural message of redemption through strength, power, and violence. Rather than in universities or among religious students, the Islamic State increasingly finds recruits in European 'ghettos', in prisons, as well as among the European 'underclasses' and those who have previously engaged in violence and other illegal acts. Those who are become part of the jihadist counter-culture can use their criminal skills for terrorist purposes, circumventing the supposed 'profit v ideology' dichotomy.

As a consequence, terrorism coincides – and draws from – the existence of 'ghettos' and a 'Muslim underclass' in the big European cities. Countering terrorism, therefore, needs to address this social aspect of the problem. However, more attention also needs to be paid to prisons and to countering 'petty' and organised crime (as well as the people engaging in it). Institutional silos – for example, the separation between countering crime and countering terrorism, or between counter-terrorism and 'criminal' police, customs, and other agencies – need to be broken down. There may also be a case for more collaboration between security agencies and local authorities, as well as the private sector, for example in public-private partnerships.

Not least, many assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered, e.g. that a pious person is not likely to be also a criminal or that someone 'acting like a gangster' cannot possibly be also involved in terrorism. With criminal and terrorism milieus merging, the fight against crime has become – to a significant extent – a national security issue.

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Appendix: Indicating a Crime – Terrorism Nexus (Simplified Database)

#	Name	Country	Involved in plot	Foreign fighter	Time in Prison	Radicalised in prison	Involved in firearms	Violent crime	Petty crime	Trafficking	White collar crime
1	Ayoub El-Khazzani	BEL / FRA	X	X	X				X		
2	Reda Kriket	BEL / FRA	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
3	Salah Abdeslam	BEL / FRA	X		X				X		
4	Brahim Abdeslam	BEL / FRA	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
5	Mohamed Abrini	BEL / FRA	X		X		X	X	X	X	
6	Sofiane Amghar	BEL	X	X	X			X	X		
7	Khalid Ben Larbi	BEL	X	X				X	X		
8	Khalid Zerkani	BEL							X		
9	Abdelhamid Abaaoud	BEL	X	X	X			X	X	X	
10	Ibrahim El Bakraoui	BEL	X	Attempted	X	X	X	X		X	
11	Khalid El Bakraoui	BEL	X		X	X	X	X		X	
12	Fouad Belkacem	BEL							X		
13	Osama Krayem	BEL / SWE	X	X					X		
14	Moez Saleh	DEN			X					X	
15	Abderrozak Benarabe	DEN		X	X		X	X			
16	Cevdet Onurlu	DEN							X		
17	Ahmed Samsam	DEN		X	X		X	X		X	
18	Hamza Samsam (Andres Vo Riis)	DEN		X				X			
19	Ali Sakandar Malik	DEN		X	X		X	X	X	X	
20	Abdul-Magid Fadel al-Ali	DEN		X					X		
21	Omar Abdel Hamid el-Hussein	DEN	X		X	X		X			
22	Michael Chau	DEN		X	X	X		X	X		
23	O.S.	DEN		X	X	X	X	X			
24	(Name Unknown)	DEN	X	X	X			X			
25	Salim Benghalem	FRA		X	X	X	X	X	X		
26	Mohamed Merah	FRA	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
27	Flavien Moreau	FRA		X	X			X			
28	Mehdi Nemmouche	FRA	X	X	X	X		X	X		
29	Omar Osmen	FRA		X	X	X	X	X	X		
30	Kevin Chassin	FRA		X					X		
31	Alexandre Dhaussy	FRA	X				X	X			
32	Ismaël Omar Mostefaï	FRA	X	X				X	X		
33	Amedy Coulibaly	FRA	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
34	Chérif Kouachi	FRA	X		X				X	X	
35	Moussa Coulibaly	FRA	X						X		
36	Larossi Abballa	FRA	X		X			X	X		
37	Mohammed Lahouaiej Bouhlel	FRA	X					X			
38	Walid D.	GER		X			X	X	X		
39	Ebrahim H. B.	GER		X					X		
40	Marco René Gäbel	GER	X		X			X	X		
41	Samir A.	GER		Attempted				X	X		
42	Nils D.	GER		X	X			X	X		
43	Denis Cuspert	GER		X	X		X	X	X		
44	Emrah Erdogan	GER		X	X	X		X	X		

#	Name	Country	Involved in plot	Foreign fighter	Time in Prison	Radicalised in prison	Involved in firearms	Violent crime	Petty crime	Trafficking	White collar crime
45	Salim O.	GER						X	X		
46	Mustafa K.	GER		X					X		
47	Murat K.	GER	X		X			X	X		
48	Sebastian B.	GER		X					X		
49	Ismail Issa	GER		X					X		
50	Halil Ibrahim D.	GER	X				X	X	X		
51	Aria Ladjevardi	GER		X				X	X		X
52	Harry Sarfo	GER		X	X			X	X		
53	Mohamed Aden	NED		X	X		X	X			
54	Reda Nidalha	NED		X				X		X	
55	Abdellah Rahmani	NED		X					X		
56	Choukri Massali	NED		X					X		
57	Mourad Massali	NED		X				X	X		
58	Soufian El Fassi	NED		X				X	X		
59	Benyamine Fadlaoui	NED		X					X		
60	Nourredin Benzouagh	NED		X					X		
61	Az Eddine Benaissa	NED		X					X		
62	Jordi de Jager	NED		X					X		
63	Rudolph Holierhoek	NED			X			X			
64	Jermaine Grant	UK	X		X	X	X	X			
65	Hamayun Tariq	UK		X	X		X				X
66	Ali Almanasfi	UK		X	X			X	X		
67	Mohammad Emwazi	UK		X					X	X	
68	Mohammad El Araj	UK		X	X			X	X	X	
69	Choukri Ellekhlifi	UK		X				X	X		
70	Michael Adebowale	UK	X		X			X	X		
71	Michael Adebolajo	UK	X					X			
72	Aine Davis	UK	X	X	X	X	X				
73	Mohommod Nawaz	UK		X	X			X			
74	Ondogo Ahmed	UK		X	X			X			
75	Junaid Hussain	UK		X	X			X			
76	Imran Khawaja	UK		X	X				X		
77	Abdullah Deghayes	UK		X				X	X		
78	Daha Essa	UK		X	X				X	X	X
79	Brusthom Ziamani	UK	X		X			X			

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With a Little Help from my Friends: an Exploration of the Tactical Use of Single-Actor Terrorism by the Islamic State

by Clare Ellis

Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing focus on the threat from lone-actor terrorists; however, unless used with caution, the term can mask a more complex and nuanced situation. This article argues that in the era of the Islamic State (IS), a dichotomous classification of plots as either networked or 'lone-actor' is misleading, obscuring varied degrees of engagement. In addition to inspiring undirected attacks by its supporters, IS has produced a hybrid threat from individual attackers, detached from the broader network but able to benefit from its guidance and, in some cases, logistical support. In light of this finding, this article draws a distinction between inspired lone-actor- and other forms of single-actor- terrorism, offering a new framework for conceptualising individual attackers who act in the name of IS.

Keywords: Terrorism; single-actors; jihadism; Islamic State

Introduction

In September 2014, Islamic State (IS) spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani urged its supporters not to "let this battle pass you by wherever you may be", encouraging them to "kill a disbelieving American or European…in any manner".[1] This message was later echoed in the group's English-language magazine *Dabiq*, which stated "[t]he smaller the numbers of those involved and the less the discussion beforehand, the more likely it will be carried out without problems… One should not complicate the attacks by involving other parties, purchasing complex materials, or communicating with weak-hearted individuals".[2]

It is clear that the proposed attacks were to be committed by individuals, using readily available tools such as knives and cars. The focus was not on the externally directed, complex plots that had been the hallmark of al-Qaida throughout the early 2000s; instead, al-Adnani was alluding to the template subsequently established by al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), acknowledging that simple attacks were more likely to succeed.[3] Through such messaging, IS signalled a clear intent to adopt single-actor terrorism as a tactic.

At a time when the group's resources were focused on its territory in Syria and Iraq, undirected, unconnected, and logistically unsupported attacks in the name of IS offered an attractive means of striking beyond the Caliphate's borders and demonstrating its reach. However, it is important to recognise that this is only one tactic within a broad strategy. Examination of recent attacks reveals degrees of interaction, direction, and even logistical support from IS. Notwithstanding appearances, individual attackers are rarely alone.

Building on the author's previous work as part of the Countering Lone Actor Terrorism (CLAT) project[4] and the recent work of Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser,[5] this article examines the nature of the threat from radicalised individuals in Europe, and the implications of the decision by IS to adopt single-actor terrorism as a tactic. It will argue that in addition to inspiring undirected attacks by its supporters, IS has produced a hybrid threat from individual attackers, detached from the broader network, but able to benefit from its guidance and, in some cases, logistical support. In light of this finding, this article draws a distinction between inspired lone-actor- and other forms of single-actor- terrorism, offering a new framework for conceptualising individual attackers who act in the name of IS.

The article is structured in four parts: the first section presents the existing research upon which this work builds, section two presents the methodology, section three details the results, while section four considers the implications for our understanding of the threat from radicalised individuals in Europe.

Background

CLAT was an eighteen-month study conducted by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Chatham House, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and Leiden University. The research examined 120 instances of lone-actor terrorism across Europe between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2014, aiming to improve understanding of perpetrator behaviour and activities in the period leading up to their intended attacks. However, the timing of the research was such that data collection ended shortly after what may prove to be an important moment in the jihadist lone-actor threat: the prominent calls by IS for individual attacks from September 2014 onwards. As mentioned earlier, the tactic of inspiring individual attackers had previously been established by AQAP; however, the decision by IS to emulate this model is likely to prove significant given the group's substantial global appeal and increasing dominance in international jihadism. In their research examining the commitment of IS to attacking the West, Hegghammer and Nesser found evidence to support an evolving threat from this point:

> *"the number of "low-involvement plots" (or sympathiser attacks) has increased significantly in recent months. After two years with zero such plots, we had 21 in the last ten months of our timeframe (September 2014–June 2015). The cut-off date seems to be September 2014, which is exactly when IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani issued the first call for sympathiser attacks in the West. The trend is so striking that we strongly suspect al-Adnani's call contributed to the increase."[6]*

It should be noted that Hegghammer and Nesser's article examined all attack plots linked to IS in the West, neither restricted to lone-actor terrorists, nor to Europe. Nevertheless, the increase in plots by sympathisers provides a strong indication of the impact of al-Adnani's call.

Building on these previous works, this article therefore seeks to examine the nature of the jihadist threat from individual attackers in Europe from September 2014 onwards, examining case studies of recent plots and attacks that have been linked to IS.[7]

Methodology

The sample examined includes plots and attacks in Europe by individual attackers with alleged linked to IS, occurring after al-Adnani's speech in September 2014 and before August 2016. While acknowledging the continuing debates surrounding the definition of terrorism, this article takes a pragmatic approach and specifies only that attacks, or planned attacks, must be violent and intended to send a political message to a broader audience.[8] It is based on open-source research, using START's Global Terrorism Database[9] and Internet searches to identify and examine potential cases through news reporting. To be included, positive evidence must suggest an attack was, or was meant to be, executed by a single actor [10] with alleged links to IS or its ideology. As the intention of the research was to examine the nature of these links and therefore determine the suitability of the label 'lone-actor terrorism', more stringent criteria were not applied at this stage. In total, fourteen plots and attacks were identified as suitable for the sample. Five additional attacks were excluded due to insufficient evidence in the public domain to either link them to IS, or to assess the nature of those links.

There are a number of limitations to this method. First, the sample size is naturally small given the relative rarity of the incidents and the short timespan studied. Second, it is based on publically available information, meaning that some details will be missing, and that plots abandoned, or disrupted at an early stage, are unlikely to have been included. Third, as the focus lies on the current threat, the incidents examined are of recent nature. It may be years after an incident before we can state with confidence that no further information is likely to be discovered. Subsequently emerging details could therefore significantly alter the categorisation of some of the plots.

Results

Of the fourteen plots examined, six present no evidence to contradict their classification as lone-actor attacks with reported linked to IS, or its ideology, being conceived and carried out by an individual perpetrator. The following case has been selected as an illustrative example:

- On 7 January 2016 a man tried to enter a Paris Police station wearing a fake suicide vest, brandishing a meat cleaver, and shouting "Allahu akbar"; he was shot dead by police. The attacker was later found to be carrying a piece of paper with the IS flag, a pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi, and a claim of responsibility for the attack in Arabic which said he was avenging the dead in Syria.[11]

However, in six cases, examination revealed allegations of varied degrees of personal encouragement and direction. The following case has been selected as an illustrative example:

- In July 2016 27-year-old Mohammed Daleel detonated a suicide bomb near a music festival in Ansbach, south Germany, killing himself and injuring fifteen other people, four of them seriously. He had initially tried to gain entry to the festival, but was refused. Following the attack, IS released a video of Daleel pledging allegiance to the group and threatening new attacks. The Bavarian state's interior minister subsequently revealed that Daleel received specific instructions over his mobile phone just moments before the attack, that, among other things, offered advice on what he should do after having been refused entry to the music festival.[12]

This form of direct interaction with IS would undermine the classification of an attack as lone-actor terrorism. As in other areas of terrorism research, there remains disagreement regarding the definition of lone-actor attacks; however most scholars agree that the absence of direction from a wider network is a critical element.[13] The reported interaction in two cases was found to extend yet further, including elements of logistical support:

- In April 2015 French police arrested Sid Ahmed Ghlam on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks. Reports claim that he was communicating with IS members in Syria, who gave him directions to a car park where a vehicle was waiting containing firearms, ammunitions and tactical vests. The suggestion is that he did not meet directly with the local logistics network providing this support; instead, it was orchestrated remotely by members of IS, and he retrieved the items from an unattended vehicle. After obtaining the weapons, it is alleged that he shot and killed Aurelie Chatelain in Paris, in what prosecutors are claiming was a failed car-jacking as part of a plot to attack a church in Paris.[14]

There is increasing evidence that the external operations wing of IS has established procedures for encrypted communications with attackers in Europe, whether returning fighters or domestic supporters.[15] Wherever single-actor terrorists benefit from such mechanisms, it is clear that they cannot be considered as acting alone.

It is therefore suggested that the following typology provides a more differentiated understanding of the threat from radicalised individuals in Europe who plan attacks on behalf of IS:

- **Inspired lone-actor terrorist**: individual attacker, inspired by IS propaganda and messaging, but receiving no personal direction or instruction from the group.

- **Remotely directed single-actor terrorist:** individual attacker, receiving remote direction and personal instruction from IS.

- **Remotely directed and facilitated single-actor terrorist:** individual attacker, receiving both remote direction and remotely orchestrated logistical support from the IS; the local logistics network remains somewhat detached from the attacker and therefore insulated in case of arrest.

This typology offers the means to continue distinguishing single-actor terrorists from networked cells, while equally recognising significant variations in the threat they pose. A key distinction between inspired lone-actor terrorists and other single-actors are that the former are undirected and uncontrolled by IS, while the latter are essentially a "*tactical variant of group terrorism*"[16] and may therefore be coordinated in the same manner as networked cells.

Discussion

If we are to understand the scale and nature of the threat posed by radicalised individual supporters of IS in Europe, it is crucial that we distinguish between those attacks that are neither directed nor logistically supported by the group – inspired lone-actor terrorists – and those where various degrees of personal direction and support exist, albeit in the shadows. The typology presented here is intended to facilitate such a distinction.

The classifications proposed here capture key elements of the overall threat situation in Europe now. Moreover, each category presents security officials with distinct challenges for detection and disruption. The threat posed by inspired lone-actor terrorists is in some ways dependent upon their choice of weapon. Across the fifteen years studied, the CLAT research found substantial disparities in the lethality of attacks by lone-actor terrorists: bladed weapons resulted in 0.36 fatalities per attack, explosives in 0.57 deaths, and, in stark contrast, firearms caused an average of 6.65 deaths. Overall, however, it was found that 76 per cent of plots failed to cause any fatalities, illustrating that although lone-actor terrorists can have a devastating impact, only a small proportion will do so.[17]

Out of the three types identified, the unconnected single perpetrators are, however, often the most difficult to detect, as without command and control from a wider network they may evade many of the 'tripwires' that would usually bring them to the attention of security officials. Although not distinguishing between typologies of single-actor terrorists, research by Petter Nesser and Anne Stenersen highlights the increased difficulty of detecting perpetrators who act alone: examining jihadist plots from 1994 to 2014 they found that only 30 per cent of single-actor cases were detected by the authorities, in contrast to 81 per cent of group plots.[18]

However, as the CLAT research highlighted, lone-actor terrorists are neither as isolated nor as secretive as we might presume: only 9 per cent of 'religiously-inspired' perpetrators appeared to be in some way 'socially isolated',[19] while 43 per cent gave some advance indication of their extreme views, or even intention to act to those around them.[20] This mirrored earlier findings by Paul Gill, John Horgan and Paige Deckert; examining lone-actor plots in the United States and Europe, they found that in 79 per cent of cases, friends and family were aware of the individual's commitment to a specific extremist ideology, and in 63.9 per cent of cases that they intended to engage in terrorism-related activities.[21] Therefore, while these indicators are rarely evident to security officials, those around the perpetrator such as friends, family and work colleagues are likely to encounter signs of their extremism or even intention to act; this creates opportunities for detection, provided they have both the means and the confidence to report their concerns.[22]

Remotely directly single-actor terrorists are in communication with members of the broader IS network. This has implications for the threat they present; however, it is not yet possible to draw specific conclusions, given the limited sample size. Remote instructions have the potential to either encourage simple attack methodology in order to increase the chance or success, or alternatively, offer guidance to facilitate more complex methods such as the use of explosive devices.

The possibility of the latter is of particular concern. Research for the CLAT project highlighted the extremely limited success rate of lone-actor terrorists in using such weapons, despite the various manuals and instructive literature available online.[23] In contrast, remotely directed single-actor terrorists can draw on the expertise of the broader network, increasing the potential impact of an individual attacker. Among the recent attacks, Daleel was able to produce an effective explosive device using components from a loudspeaker and a bicycle lamp, prompting speculation regarding the level of detail in the instructions received from IS.[24]

While their communications with a wider network creates possibilities for detection that do not exit with inspired lone-actor terrorists, such possibilities are somewhat constrained by the extensive use of encryption by IS through applications such as Telegram. Detailed discussion on this point is beyond the scope of this article, but their use of such technology, and the challenges this creates for intelligence and security officials, have both been well documented.[25]

Remotely directed and facilitated single-actor terrorists receive both direction and logistical support, increasing the likelihood that they will be able to access weapons, protective equipment, and false identity documents to facilitate evasion. This has significant implications for the threat posed. With regard to detection, they present a similar profile to the one in the previous category, using encrypted communication to correspond with IS in Syria. Although they receive material support from local logistics networks, there are indications that this is done with minimal direct communication; such networks remain detached and are therefore largely insulated in case of arrest. While members of the logistics network remain vulnerable to forensic analysis of the weapons or retrospective examination of security cameras near the delivery site, they can take precautions to mitigate such risks; the more unpredictable human element has been removed, with the attacking perpetrator unable to betray them.

It is worth noting, however, that that existence of such networks also creates a valuable investigative angle for security officials; if they can be uncovered and dismantled, there is an opportunity to have a disproportionate impact and disrupt multiple plots from this category of attacker.

Conclusion

In recent years there has been a growing focus on the threat from lone-actor terrorists across Europe. Commentators have been quick to label attacks by radicalised individuals as the manifestation of the feared 'lone wolf', while security officials have been rightly concerned about the unique challenges such attackers present in terms of detection and disruption. However, unless used with caution, the term 'lone-actor' can mask a more complex and nuanced situation. In the era of IS, it is now clear that a dichotomous classification of plots as either networked or 'lone-actor' is misleading, obscuring varied degrees of encouragement, direction and even logistical support. The categories of single-actor terrorism presented here are intended to offer a more differentiated view of the threat from radicalised individuals in Europe, offering greater scope to understand the nature of the threat posed and to devise effective strategies in response.

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Notes

[1] Translation from the website of Pieter van Ostaeyen: Al-Adnani 22.09.2014 "Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful"; URL: https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2014/09/25/abu-muhammad-al-adnani-ash-shami-indeed-your-lord-is-ever-watchful/

[2] The Failed Crusade', Dabiq, (No. 4, October 2014), p. 4.

[3] Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula's English-language Inspire magazine has consistently aimed to encourage and facilitate lone-actor terrorist attacks in the West through instructive articles; while the article 'How to Make a Bomb in Your Mom's Kitchen' is perhaps the best known, there have been numerous other examples.

[4] Co-funded by the Prevention and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union and by the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV). Further information about the CLAT project and copies of the research reports is available via URL: www.rusi.org/CLAT

[5] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, 'Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West', Perspectives on Terrorism (Vol. 9, No. 4, 2015); URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/440/html

[6] Idem.

[7] One of the key findings of the CLAT research was that a substantial proportion of lone-actor terrorist plots were inspired by extreme right-wing ideologies. The focus of this article on only plots linked to the Islamic State is intended neither to overlook nor to dismiss the significance of this finding; instead, the more limited focus is an acknowledgment of the changing dynamic of the threat posed by radicalised individuals linked to IS, and the importance of ensuring that its specific characteristics are understood.

[8] The approach therefore mirrors that of previous research in this journal; see Petter Nesser and Anne Stenersen, 'The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe', Perspectives on Terrorism (Vol. 8, No. 6, December 2014), pp. 2-24; URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/388

[9] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 'Global Terrorism Database', College Park: START, University of Maryland, 2015.

[10] The CLAT research used a wider definition of lone-actor terrorism that also incorporated plots by dyads and triads, provided there was no direction, command or control from a wider network. This was a reflection of the broader scope of the study, and its specific objective to understand how attackers without links to terrorist networks may present opportunities to practitioners seeking to detect and disrupt their activity. The distinct focus of this article means that a narrow definition has been adopted, examining only single attackers. For a further discussion on the definition used in the CLAT research, see Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Definitional Workshop', RUSI Occasional Paper (December 2015); URL: https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/lone-actor-terrorism-definitional-workshop

[11] Henry Samuel, 'Paris Shooting: Terrorist Wearing Fake Suicide Belt Shot Dead Outside Police Station on Charlie Hebdo Anniversary', The Telegraph, 7 January 2016; URL: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/12086901/Paris-police-shoot-dead-knife-wielding-man-live.html ; Angelique Chrisafis, 'Knife-Wielding an in Fake Suicide Vest Killed at Police Station', The Guardian, 8 January 2016; URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/07/paris-police-shoot-dead-man-near-police-station ; Inti Landauro and Noemie Bisserbe, 'French Police Treating Knife Attack at Paris Police Station as Act of Terrorism', The Wall Street Journal, 8 January 2016; URL: http://www.wsj.com/articles/french-police-shoot-man-who-tried-to-enter-paris-police-station-1452169931

12] Justin Huggler, 'Ansbach Bomber and Wurzburg Axemen 'were in Contact with Handlers in Middle East' before Attacks', The Telegraph, 29 July 2016; URL: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/29/ansbach-bomber-and-wurzburg-axemen-were-in-contact-with-handlers/ ; Samuel Osborne, 'Ansbach Suicide Bomber Mohammed Daleel 'Fought for Isis and al-Qaeda' before coming to Germany', The Independent, 27 July 2016; URL: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ansbach-explosion-germany-isis-suicide-bomber-mohammed-daleel-al-qaeda-a7157961.html ; BBC News, 'Ansbach Explosion: Syrian Asylum Seeker Blows Himself up in Germany', 25 July 2016; URL: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36880758 .

[13] Raffaello Pantucci, Clare Ellis and Lorien Chaplais, 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Literature Review', RUSI Occasional Papers (December 2015); URL: https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/lone-actor-terrorism-literature-review .

[14] BBC Panorama, 'Inside Europe's Terror Attacks', 23 March 2016; URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07598xc ; Kim Willsher, 'French Student Charged with Murder and Links to a Terrorist Organisation', The Guardian, 24 April 2015; URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/24/french-police-charge-student-links-terrorist-organisation ; Aurelien Breeden, 'Piecing Together a Deadly Encounter in Paris', The New York Times, 27 April 2015; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/28/world/europe/piecing-together-a-deadly-encounter-in-paris.html ; Jean-Charles Brisard and Kévin Jackson, 'The Islamic State's External Operations and the French-Belgian Nexus', The CTC Sentinel (Vol. 9, No, 11, 2016); https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CTC-Sentinel_Vol9Iss11.pdf .

[15] Rukmini Callimachi, 'How ISIS Build the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze', The New York Times, 29 March 2016; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html; Jean-Charles Brisard and Kevin Jackson, 'The Islamic State's External Operations and the French-Belgian Nexus', op. cit.

[16] Petter Nesser, 'Research Note: Single Actor Terrorism: Scope, Characteristics and Explanations', Perspectives on Terrorism (Vol. 6, No. 6, December 2012), p. 69; URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/231 .

[17] Clare Ellis, Raffaello Pantucci, Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Edwin Bakker, Benoît Gomis, Simon Palombi and Melanie Smith, 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Analysis Paper', RUSI Occasional Papers (February 2016), pages 7-9; URL: https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/lone-actor-terrorism-analysis-paper . Please note, these figures relate to all perpetrators, regardless of ideology.

[18] Petter Nesser and Anne Stenersen, 'The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe', op. cit.

[19] C. Ellis et al., 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Analysis Paper', p. 16. To record the ideology of lone-actor terrorists, the project adopted the categories used by Europol in its 'Situation and Trend' reports: 'religiously inspired'; 'ethno-nationalist and separatist'; 'left-wing and anarchist'; 'right-wing';'single issue'; 'other'; and 'unknown'; Europol, European Union Terrorism and Situation Trend Report 2016 (The Hague: Europol, 2016).

[20] Unpublished finding from the CLAT research. Overall, 46 per cent of all perpetrators in the dataset gave some prior indication of their extremist views or intention to act. See: C. Ellis et al., 'Lone Actor Terrorism: Analysis Paper', op. cit.

[21] Paul Gill, John Horgan and Paige Deckert, 'Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists', Journal of Forensic Sciences (Vol. 59, No. 2, March 2014), pp. 425–35.

[22] Clare Ellis and Raffaello Pantucci, 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Policy Paper 4: 'Leakage' and Interaction with Authorities', RUSI Occasional Papers (February 2016); URL: https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/lone-actor-terrorism-policy-paper-4-%E2%80%98leakage%E2%80%99-and-interaction . For further discussion on the role of family and friends in countering violent extremism, and in particular the challenges of reporting, see Michael J. Williams, John G Horgan and William P Evans, 'The Critical Role of Friends in Networks for Countering Violent Extremism: Toward a Theory of Vicarious Help-Seeking', Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression (Vol. 8, No. 1, October 2016), pp. 45–65.

[23] Clare Ellis et al., 'Lone-Actor Terrorism: Analysis Paper', op. cit., pp. 8-9 and 13.

[24] Spiegel Online International, 'Terror in Germany: How Close Were Attackers' Links to the Islamic State?', 2 August 2016; URL: http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/investigators-examine-possible-is-links-in-germany-attacks-a-1105636.html .

[25] See for example, Robert Graham, 'How Terrorists Use Encryption', CTC Sentinel (Vol. 9, No. 6, June 2016), p. 20; URL: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CTC-SENTINEL_Vol9Iss614.pdf . See also Nico Prucha's article in this Special Issue.

IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram

by Nico Prucha

Abstract

Groups such as al-Qaida (AQ) have pursued spectacular attacks to garner media attention and popularize their cause. What is often not noted, however, is that for those who submit themselves to the religious thinking of al-Qaida – and nowadays the self-designated "Islamic State" (IS) – the militant struggle is intertwined with the duty to call upon others to join the movement (da'wa). For jihadists da'wa is obligatory. While AQ's central organization pioneered the use of bulletin forums, blogs, YouTube and to some extent Facebook, for this and other purposes, it was its Syrian branch, Jabhat al-Nusra, that in 2012 pushed effectively into Twitter use. AQ lost its momentum as the social media pioneer of jihadism shortly thereafter to IS. Since 2013, IS has taken the use of social media da'wa and other activities to the next level. From that point onward IS has very effectively projected influence on Twitter on a massive scale, reaching a global audience. Since early 2016, however, IS's networks on Twitter have been degraded by various counter-measures, but the group has reconfigured and shifted to a new social media outlet: Telegram. This application has become the most important information outlet for IS and has been used to recruit and guide attackers in Europe. This article takes a closer look at what Telegram is, and how IS uses it for different purposes: not only operationally, but also for identity building.

Keywords: Al-Qaida; Islamic State; Jihadism; Internet; social media; Telegram; recruitment

> *"The battle for your reality begins in the fields of digital interaction"*
>
> - Douglas Rushkoff "Cyberia"[1]

Introduction

S unni extremist groups such as al-Qaida (AQ) and the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" (IS) use the Internet as a communication hub to broadcast their messages. Online jihad is a phenomenon that has spread on a massive scale and at fast pace over the past fifteen years. IS in particular puts much effort into its online operation, including maintaining and re-establishing accounts and networks on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *Telegram*. Massive amounts of jihadist audio, video and written content can be found on these networks, mostly in Arabic.

IS has moved from *Twitter* to *Telegram*, after a mass amount of account suspensions and more effective spam filters limited the group's appearance on *Twitter*. However, the move to *Telegram* allows IS to operate from the "dark web"[2] and orchestrate media raids and sting attacks into the "surface web", such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*. Several hundred IS channels on *Telegram* ensure that the content, the videos and writings, of IS are disseminated without much interruption. Among the many messages IS sends, the notion of being a "state" is one of the most appealing ones, as outlined in Jacob Sheikh's contribution in this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

This content conveys a coherent jihadist worldview, based on theological texts written by AQ ideologues and affiliates as far back as the 1980s. The jihadists' need for spreading theological writings has driven the development of audio-visual productions since the 1980s. A main purpose, back then as well as today, has been identity building: to explain who the "*mujahidin*" are, what they are fighting for, and whom they are fighting against. It is important to stress, that no single political narrative and enemy perception exists among the militants. Rather, groups such as AQ and IS enforce a coherent theology, that constitutes the foundation of what is often referred to as "ideology" in Western discourse, as outlined by Rüdiger Lohlker:

> *"Indeed, it is crystal clear—to virtually anyone who has the linguistic capacity to grasp and the opportunity to witness what jihadists are actually saying, writing and doing, both online and offline—that religion matters."[3]*

Following 9/11, the Internet became an important platform for AQ to spread its brand of Sunni extremist theology. The online media footprint today is built upon nearly two decades of committed media work by jihadist actors. This dedicated work has been, and is, the expression of a strategic discourse on how to conduct jihadist warfare online, and has been outlined in a highly coherent manner by leading jihadist theoreticians such as Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.[4] This theology, carved out by AQ in the 1980s, entered a new evolutionary phase in 2014 when ISIS declared a "Caliphate."[5] This AQ offshoot then became the central organization's primary rival, developing a massive foothold on social media sites, first Twitter[6], now Telegram, while AQ has been losing significant support, both online and offline,–especially among young extremists.[7] AQ has retained ideological seniority, projected by senior jihadist scholars (*shuyukh al-jihad*), such as Abu Qatada al-Filistini, or Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who criticized IS' declaration of an Islamic state and, for example, lambasted the group for the burning of the captured Jordanian combat pilot in 2015. [8] IS on the other hand has managed to translate territorial control and governance into a coherent, highly professional and structured online output. IS uses AQ's theology for two ends: (i) applied theology: what AQ theorized on paper, IS puts into practice and films it (this is documented by the vast amount of videos released throughout the past three years), and (ii) either re-publishing AQ theological writings (lengthy books, articles, religious guidelines, legal binding documents (*fatwas*), military handbooks etc.), or simply releasing a second, or third edition of an AQ book.

Jihadist videos are a powerful tool – even more so when originating from within territory that is defined as "Islamic". This definition is exemplified in IS videos which, for example, claim to document the application of sharia law, and the enforcement of a life-style in the society under its control that has been romanticized in salafi and salafi-jihadist writings. The massive production and release of videos on *Twitter* in the period 2013-2015 was truly a game changer, as acknowledged by one *Ahrar al-Sham* sympathizer on Twitter:

> *"#dangers on the path of jihad; my knowledge on jihad is based on professionally produced jihadist videos affecting the youth more than a thousand books or [religious] sermons."[9]*

This let Abu al-Jamajem (Sam Heller, @AbuJamajem) to comment: "Analog jihadists in *Ahrar al-Sham* and *Jabhat al-Nusra* lament ISIS's new, digital world."

Under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, IS[10] adopted al-Qaida's iconography and doctrine, without being subject to its formal leadership.[11] The Internet serves as a powerful tool that allows the jihadist network to morph and spread in many directions. IS dedicates time and resources to maintain a persistent output of videos and other items – with *Telegram* being the primary hub to strategically dispatch new content since early 2016.

Strategic Targeting of Selected Audiences Using Foreign Fighters

Cameras are the most effective gateways between real-life and the virtual world. AQ initiated – and theologically sanctioned – using the Internet as a basic tool to call people to come to Islam. This is inseparably tied to militant actions and terrorist operations. IS has learned valuable lessons in using and praising the media work and understands how to use its foreign fighters best: in front of cameras instead of just using them as mere cannon fodder in the front lines. Non-Arab foreign fighters do not, however, appear very often in videos on social media. When they do, they usually convey their individual and personal motivation as to why they have joined IS, explaining in their own words and language to potential recruits in their home countries what "real-Islam" is, while often addressing legitimate and real grievances and injustices endured by Sunni civilians in Syria or other places.

IS has taken the lead in producing mainly Arabic language videos to incite a global Arab audience. IS does so by glamourizing its fighters, ideologues and preachers as ultimate role models, modern-day Islamic warriors, or simply as defenders of Sunni communities in times of suffering. IS presents itself as an Arab movement fighting for independence, yet welcoming non-Arab Muslim foreign fighters into their ranks who are used strategically and on a tactical level for jihadist media, where they can be of value to the state-building efforts. Non-Arab media activists from within the "Caliphate" can call for attacks in their home countries in their respective language or slang and may become guides grooming potential attackers on applications such as *Telegram*.

It must be noted that non-Arab foreign fighters fulfil another role under the guidance of IS media strategists: talking about personal commitment and motivations for having undertaken the emigration (*hijra*) to the "Islamic State" gives such speakers the ability to inspire others to emigrate. Non-Arab foreign fighters tend to be keen to explain in their language aspects of jihadist theology, potentially drawing their audience into reading magazines such as Dabiq to further their education on religious concepts such as "*tawhid*" (monotheism) or "*shirk*" (polytheism).

Influence and Information Campaigns: from Twitter to Telegram

The theology of al-Qaida and subsequently IS, and their ability to propagate that theology as a monopoly of truth through professional promotion and marketing materials disseminated via modern communication technology–has proven to be jihadism's most resilient foundation, and greatest innovation. This jihadist media activism strengthens the movement's resilience on a daily basis with new audio-visual and written propaganda uploaded from a number of conflict zones, in numerous languages, to a wide range of online social platforms and multimedia channels.

In the West, policy makers are struggling to cope with the massive quantity and often times high quality productions issued by groups such IS who continue to draw in new recruits from Western societies, especially from Europe. Policy-makers have slowly recognized that the so-called "counter narratives" are failing, as highlighter by *New York Times* in 2015.[12] IS has proven its resilience on the battlefield and the West has so far employed half-hearted "counter-narratives", that usually neither touch upon the Arabic propaganda content, nor the messages conveyed by non-Arab foreign fighters, who explain their reasons for joining the cause in their own words. Due to the tactical focus of both "counter-narratives" and takedowns of IS messages from the Internet, the U.S. and its Western allies are being drawn into open online warfare, on a battlefield chosen by their jihadist adversaries. Those jihadists who will probably thrive in the resulting chaos. The ideology/theology of IS, offering a coherent worldview, while IS had been gaining and consolidating territory, has proven time and again to be resilient on all layers on the Internet.[13]

From 2011 onwards, the main platform for Sunni jihadists online was *Twitter*, in addition to *Facebook* and *YouTube*, especially since the outbreak of violence in Syria. This propagation effort by the so-called "*media mujahidin*" has been approved and sanctioned by the movement's leaders, and now feeds an interconnected jihadist Zeitgeist.[14] For example, jihadist groups had been using *Twitter* to disseminate links to video content shot on the battlefield in Syria and posted such video footage for mass consumption on *YouTube*. [15] Since 2011, members of jihadist forums have issued media strategy advice that encourages the development of *media mujahidin*. This has been accompanied by the release of guides on how to use social media platforms, which often included lists of recommended accounts to follow.[16] With relatively small efforts, IS was able to maintain massive networks on *Twitter*. This gave the media operations a whole new and unprecedented window of opportunity: the releasing of videos from within what is defined as "Islamic territory", liberated from their enemies, to a massive number of active or passive followers.[17]

Twitter did, after a while, an excellent job in preventing IS from keeping up its extensive networks on the service, despite the commitment and dedication of some of the media mujahidin to re-open hundreds of new accounts. This too changed when *Twitter* became more effective at banning IS content by adjusting its spam settings, severely weakening the jihadists' network on the platform. The degrading of IS *Twitter* networks led many Western observers on Twitter to believe IS in general was in decline. However, while the '*Twitter* ship' was sinking for IS, the jihadi online swarm simply turned to a new social media platform – *Telegram*.

In early 2016 a massive shift from *Twitter* to *Telegram* among IS militants and sympathizers could be observed. Until then IS had been able to maintain a persistent network on *Twitter*, despite a steadily growing rate of account suspensions. Because *media mujahidin* are highly dedicated – as much as *mujahidin* are on the battlefield – IS *Twitter* users usually reappeared on the platform, using a different account once their original account had been banned. From a user perspective, all you needed to be aware of was a good set of Arabic and non-Arabic key words to find IS content on *Twitter*, and then start following the accounts. At the same time, the IS network on *Twitter* was not taken down at once, and the remaining accounts keenly promoted the new Twitter handles of those who returned.

Substituting the Jihadist Twittersphere for Islamic State Telegrams

Telegram offers privacy and encryption, allowing users to interact, using their mobile devices (tablets and smartphones) as well as laptop and desktop computers. It offers a secure environment where sharing content is very easy. This includes the option to download large files directly via the *Telegram* application instead of having to open an external link in a browser to access the new videos and word documents. According to *Telegram*, the application is a cloud-based instant messaging service, providing optional end-to-end-encrypted messaging. It is free and open, having an "open API and protocol free for everyone," while having no limits on how much data individual users can share.[18]

Media savvy IS members and sympathizers then took to *Telegram* where in the meantime, via hundreds of channels, often more than 30,000 *Telegram* messages are being pushed out by them each week. *Telegram* is being used to share content produced by 'official' IS channels. As had been the case on *Twitter* – and as is the nature of online jihad on social media sites – such content is enriched and enhanced by media supporters from within ISIS held territory, as well as by sympathisers worldwide. The output is mainly in Arabic whereas dedicated linguist and translation departments ensure that a global audience is reached. *Telegram* is being used as a formal communication channel by a range of content aggregators within the movement, rolling out the official IS videos from the various provinces to Microsoft Word and PDF documents released by a rich blend of media agencies, such as *al-Battar*, *al-Wafa'*, *Ashhad*, *al-Hayyat* and many more.

A media group by the name *Horizon* (*Mu'assassat Afaaq*) established itself as a new IS media wing to provide sympathisers with advice and tutorials on online security and encryption. This is a current trend and highlights that user security on mobile devices, encryption and general awareness is rising. Arguably, this chatter on *Telegram* also led 'classic' IS media newspapers to pick up this trend and their messaging put more emphasis on the "electronic war", enemy capabilities and operational security, accompanied by relevant advice for IS members and sympathizers.[19]

Arabic transcribed keywords in Latin such as "*ghazwa*" play a major role, and help identify content quickly and sign up for new jihadist related channels on *Telegram*. As visualized above – taken from the IS channel *Ghazwa* on Telegram, the transliteration can vary especially after channels are being suspended, yet the words are easily identified by Arabic-speakers.

The "*Ghazwa*" channel on *Telegram* alludes to the classical understanding of conducting raids in the desert. It celebrates the early Muslims raiders, being *murabitin,* horsemen ready for war while spiritually tuned to defend territory and willing to enter Paradise.[20]

Jihadists perceive *Telegram* as a coordination point for raids (*ghazawat*), enabling the injection of content in an orchestrated manner onto social media platforms. *Telegram* is central to the supply of text for *Tweets*, disseminating new hashtags, the timing of such raids, and the flooding of comments on *Facebook* pages and so on. However, IS media operatives and sympathizers miss *Twitter*. IS official media outlets has called for a return to *Twitter* – fearing that da'wa on *Telegram* just reaching like-minded sympathizers will not work (more on this below).[21]
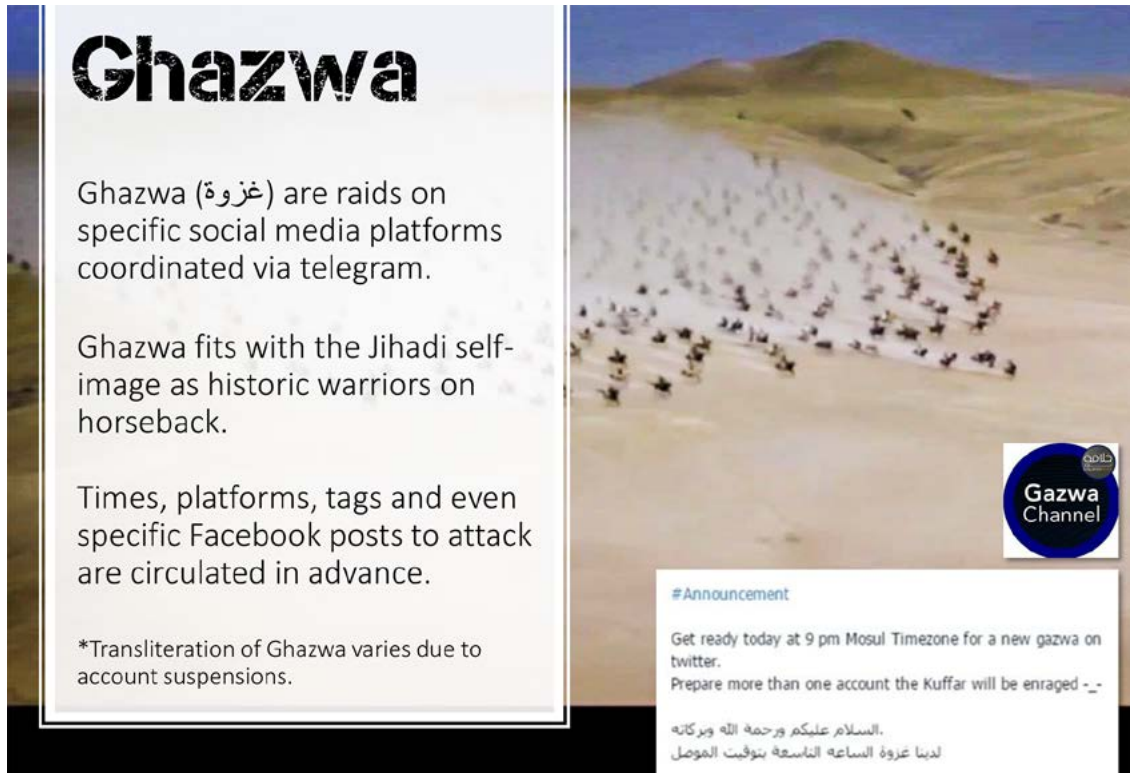

Figure 1: Sunni Jihadists, and in particular IS, have a passion for publishing and disseminating pictures, conveying coded notions and sentiments. The "Ghazwa" channel on Telegram sees itself in the tradition of the classical horseback charging 'hit-and-run' warriors, independent of a fixed base or camp.

During the attacks in March 2016 in Brussels, IS media operatives on *Telegram* prepared French language Tweets with hashtags used at the time of the attack to maximize the reach of pro-IS Tweets. Likewise, other social media platforms are affected by such "social media raids." By the time accounts were deleted on *Twitter* and elsewhere, IS had a new event-driven operation backed by social media raids. While the attacks in Paris and Brussels were major external events, most IS-driven and mediatized events are occurring in the Arab countries. A day before the November 2015 Paris attack, IS had dispatched suicide bombers to strike in Beirut, followed by social media raids. Since the beginning of the Iraqi Army operations to reclaim Mosul from IS on October 16, 2016, most event driven media raids are related thereto. As had been the case on *Twitter*, *Telegram* is now the main hub for IS to share content reposting from *Twitter*, other social media such as *YouTube*, *Vimeo*, *DailyMotion*, *SendVid* and *Facebook*, as well as websites containing IS propaganda, including those hosted on *WordPress.com*.

The multi-lingual strategic outreach and communication approach has a clear objective: targeting non-Arabic speaking potential recruits in the West. This remains a high priority for IS, while also maintaining and ensuring the steady and uninterrupted production and dissemination of Arabic content (targeting Arab native speakers worldwide).
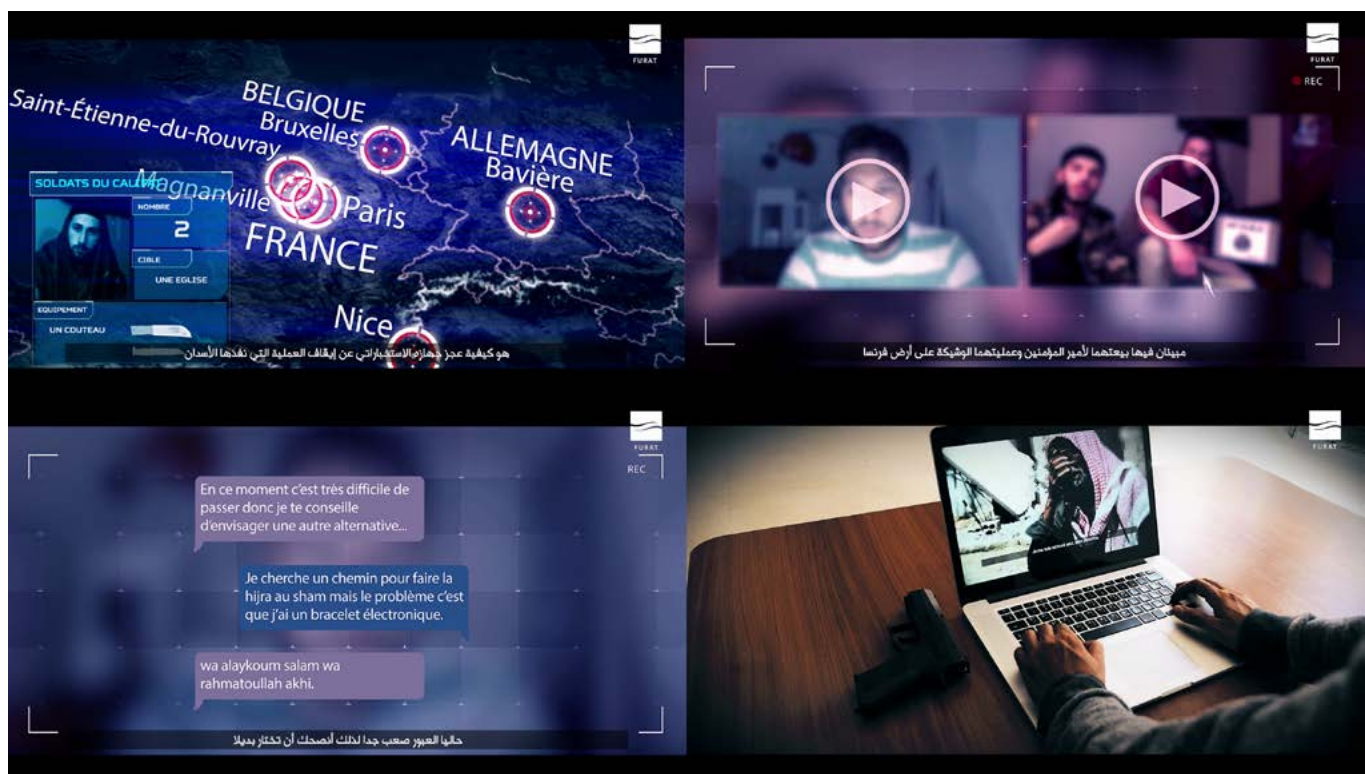
Figure 2: Multi-dimension outreach strategy: orchestrating an influence operation during the March 2016 Brussels attack, calling for a "Twitter Campaign". French-language pro-IS tweets to be copiedy-and-pasted onto Twitter accounts that will be abandoned shortly aftewardsr, using French mainstream hashtags to inject pro-IS messages into general networks. This method is also used to ensure content moves from Telegram where it is only visible to channel members onto open platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or blogs such as WordPress.

How Does IS Use the Platform to Recruit European Foreign Fighters and Terrorists?

Throughout the Summer of 2016, alleged "lone wolf" attackers struck in France, Germany, Russia[22] and the U.S. The attackers acted on behalf of IS and in most cases selfie-styled videos had been made and uploaded by them to IS media operatives of *Amaq Agency* (*wakalat al-'Amaq*). The short videos followed a classical Jihadist template, with the variation that these had not been foreign fighters, but rather local French, American, Chechen citizens, or as in the case of Germany, refugees from Syria or Afghanistan.

Omar Mateen, U.S. citizen born in America, attacked a night club in Orland, Florida in June 2016, leaving 49 people dead and 53 injured.[23] Jihadist users on *Telegram* were quick to disseminate pictures of Omar Mateen – after these had been released by the mainstream media – to praise the attacker as a martyr and "soldier of the Caliphate." A trend on *Telegram* quickly emerged to refer to such attacks under the hashtag "in your homes", a reference to the jihadist division of world into "*dar al-Islam*" (abode of Islam) and "*dar al-kuffar*" (abode of disbelievers).

As French, American and other anti-IS coalition combat aircraft continue to bomb the "*dar al-Islam*", IS seeks to inspire and theologically guide supporters such as Omar Mateen to conduct revenge operations in the "depth of your abodes" (*fi 'aqr diyarikum*), as the Arabic hashtag for "in your homes" advocates. Whatever the jihadists produce for publication, it always must be theologically coherent. The concept of *dar* (abode) is an identity marker for the Islamic State.

According to IS, "Islam" has been restored and is now embodied by its "state".[24] IS presents itself as the only legitimate zone where Sunni Muslims can exercise their duties towards God since

> "….the whole world, from east to west, became dar al-kufr, the "abode of the disbelievers". Therefore God set in motion the establishment of the Islamic State. This state consists of numerous elements that make it dar al-Islam."[25]

The Syrian refugee who failed undertaking a suicide bombing attack in Ansbach, Germany, as well as the Afghan refugee who at random stabbed passengers on train in the region of Würzburg had filmed their final statements beforehand. These statements are – just like the 9/11 "martyr's" videotaped farewell message or the 7/7/ bombing attackers last words – testimony (*wasiyya*) as much as legacy. Clearly IS pursues a strategy of seeking to recruit refugees, or dispatching sleeper cells posing as refugees coming to Europe, knowing this results in an increase of polarization within Western societies.

Allegedly, *Telegram* was used to communicate from within the 'Caliphate' with at least some of the attackers, who then in turn used the app to upload their self-filmed *wasiyya*. This video was then edited and branded with the *Amaq* logo and released to the IS *Telegram* community with the intention that the swarm would fan it out to other online sites and platforms for maximum visibility.

The value of continuing its successful influence operation has driven IS on *Telegram* to dedicate media channels and media operatives to translating and producing new content for specific French, German, Italian, English, Russian, and Bahasa Indonesian audiences.

Figure 3: Screenshots of the video highlighting attacks, assailants and encrypted communication on Telegram.

This has led to a two-tier production line: (i) official and (ii) user generated content. Together, these packages carry a range of messages which focus on the importance of the individual to initiate action. They echo the ethos captured in the 'Open Source Jihad' as set by AQ's English language magazine *Inspire*, where barriers

to entry are low and anyone can contribute. For example, they encourage individuals to realise that not all attacks have to be complex coordinated operations, nor use sophisticated weaponry, nor focus on a specific high profile target. Instead they articulate that anyone can strike a blow for IS.

On November 26, 2016, IS released a video in French with Arabic subtitles. The video was published *Furat Media*–a dedicated IS-media institution that produces content for non-Arab(ic) audience. As usual, the video is in 16:9 format, full high definition, and features praise for the spate of "lone wolf" attackers in 2016. The film, entitled "Sur leur pas" and على خطاهم in Arabic, demonstrates vividly how IS uses *Telegram* to instigate attacks.

Assailants are introduced and areas of attacks highlighted. Combined with mainstream media footage of completed attacks, IS portrays these as revenge operations and part of the Islamic State's 'foreign policy.' *Telegram* chat exchanges claim to 'document' that some aspiring IS fighters had expressed the wish to conduct the *hijra* (emigration) and join IS, but had been warned this was too dangerous. Instead, they may have been swayed to launch attacks in their home countries rather than risking arrest while seeking to emigrate. The video concludes with a young man watching an IS video on his laptop. His gun rests besides his laptop, suggesting he is ready to stage an attack as revenge for the many atrocities against Sunni Muslims, he has just been lectured about via the laptop.

IS's Criticism of Telegram Usage: "Supporters of the Caliphate - Do not Isolate Yourself on Telegram!"

A brief, 2-page document, published by *al-Wafa'* (devotion, faithfulness) Media, one of IS's media groups, in charge of releasing text documents of various kinds, warns the online community of IS supporters against the risk of becoming isolated on *Telegram*. This would be a strategic error, it argues, and in direct violation of the Sunni extremist' obligatory proselytization on the Internet, that has proven to be a vital factor for IS to project influence, incite terrorism, and recruit worldwide.

The document is entitled "supporters (*ansar*) of the Caliphate: do not isolate yourself on *Telegram*", released on July 3, 2016, and authored by Abu Usama Sinan al-Ghazzi, a regular contributor and representative of the media outlet's views. His chosen *nom de guerre* suggests a link to Gaza, Palestine. According to al-Ghazzi, IS maintains its grip on physical territory and holds power to project influence despite a global alliance to destroy the jihadists' project of building and up keeping an Islamic state. However, the "state-*da'wa*" must be upheld; and al-Ghazzi criticizes the shift to *Telegram*, maintaining that the outreach to new customers is absolutely degraded in comparison to open content sharing networks on *Twitter*.

Jihadist media strategies are coherently implemented while the online networks reconfigure all the time like a flock of bees or a swarm, and have proven to be resilient.[26] This is outlined by al-Ghazzi as:

> "The disbelievers (...) are confronted in their media war by an army of [IS] supporters who dedicate their time for the defense of the people of jihad."[27]

This "defense" or "protection" includes refuting the 'lies' of enemies and, in particular, to clarify what are genuine jihadist media materials and maintaining the dissemination of legitimate statements. The response of the enemies merely consists of

> "campaigns to delete and shut down thousands and thousands of accounts on social media platforms, in an attempt to dissuade the supporters of the IS in their mission and of what has been set in motion by them. However, the supporters of the Caliphate are resisting online, following the fashion and example of how their state resists on the front lines of the global war unleashed against them; and all praise is for God."[28]

The move to social media in the wake of the conflict in Syria and, in particular, the subsequent IS media operations on *Twitter* are one of the most remarkable developments of the online jihad in the past decade.

Against this background, al-Ghazzi defines the objective of the enemies as:

> "….causing problems for the supporters of the Caliphate on social media platforms is one of the most important desires for the Crusaders to achieve. This is the filet [sic] for [the enemy] media [strategies] and the analysts when they stress to counter and address this issue. This is their objective for which they wish to achieve sufficient account take down and removal operations, without an end in sight."[29]

This statement reflects the current reality of IS media supporters and dedicated media operatives, in particular on *Twitter*, where accounts are often removed. This has, however, not significantly diminished or interrupted the broadcasting of IS videos and writings. On *Twitter*, however, IS sympathizers and supporters have to be somewhat more proactive these days to look up current IS-related and trending hash tags, or check out 'surviving' accounts to find and follow the new ones. Often IS content is now to be found in a pool of anti-IS materials and the consumer has to search to find what he or she is looking for. *Telegram*, on the other hand, gives IS the ability to organize 'media stings' and push messages and external links to websites and file-hosting sites of online platforms. This is part of the IS response to al-Ghazzi's criticism against remaining comfortable, but secluded on *Telegram*, rather than returning to seek the momentum to reach out, incite and inspire new potential recruits.

Hence the war for the hearts and minds, as outlined by al-Ghazzi, is not just militarily between in the physical space in Syria and Iraq, but also online:

> "In this electronic war between the supporters and the Crusaders, lots of our brothers prefer Telegram over anything else. With the desertion of the remaining social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to Telegram, obviously due to … account removal operations…, Telegram is furthermore set to resist deletions as channels get forwarded easily to private channels. Therefore I wish to send a message to the brothers of the ansar to the effect that you do not isolate yourself on Telegram! The Telegram application despite all its positivity has also a number of downsides. It is a closed group and reserved to the administrator of the channel; the app does not allow users to actively search for channels; you can only access a channel via a link provided by the channel admin."[30]

The secrecy and encryption of *Telegram* is harmful for IS' swarming operations as the networks which are sustained on *Telegram* lack the outreach as well as the opportunities for projecting influence, which *Twitter* in particular allowed. To avoid marginalization and simple in-house-recruitment or indoctrination, al-Ghazzi demands a return to the 'classical' social media platforms.

> "Return to Twitter and Facebook, for our missionary operations (da'wa) have greater reach on these platforms. Those we intend to reach [and influence] are not on Telegram, rather we find them on Twitter and Facebook."

This can be seen as a direct order and perhaps as a reconfiguration of IS media networks: use Telegram as a safe haven or fall back position from where new *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts are published and bring the content you get on *Telegram* back in full to *Twitter* and *Facebook*. The mission is to incite and recruit new members–not those who are already initiated and thus active within the *Telegram* networks.

Conclusion

Unlike AQ, IS controls swathes of territory in the Sunni Arab heartlands, primarily in Iraq and Syria. The theology which was largely theoretical in the case of AQ is now applied in full by IS – making the "state" a real and, to IS-sympathizers, attractive alternative where the imaginary "real-Islam" promoted by AQ has now become a reality with IS. Sunni extremism is driven by an absolute belief in God for which the application of absolute formalized religious rule is the desired final objective (and the only solution to minimize the risk

of living in a state of sin, which would mean ending up in hellfire). For more than three decades, jihadists, in their own words, both in their writings and in their video productions, have been yearning for the creation of an Islamic State and, ultimately, the return of the Caliphate. The self-designated "Islamic State" claims to answer to this desire for the restoration of Islam to a position of power.

The existence of a coherent set of powerful jihadist narratives, combined with the unprecedented achievement of the Islamic State to ensure a persistent presence on social media and the Internet in general, make the task of effectively countering IS a big challenge. Any approach taken needs to combine hard and soft measures (counter-terrorism and counter-narratives). Improving nascent efforts at producing counter-narratives can be one step in the right direction in the soft-power domain. These efforts need to engage in religious discourses, as religion is one of the central elements in IS' efforts to recruit and radicalize its potential followers. Unless the religious dimension is properly acknowledged and addressed, the legacy of IS will not die with the fall of the territorial Caliphate that is now under attack from coalition forces. As also highlighted in Jakob Sheikh's contribution to this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, the idea of an Islamic State, is rooted in a broad Sunni jihadist tradition that has been gaining strength for more than 35 years and has become a major pull-factor for militant recruitment.

Neglecting the fact that jihadist online networks are forming a whole as they are basing themselves on a coherent theological framework will allow IS to survive a recover even after territorial extinction. In the words of Rüdiger Lohlker: "Without deconstructing the theology of violence inherent in jihadi communications and practice, these religious ideas will continue to inspire others to act, long after any given organized force, such as the Islamic State, may be destroyed on the ground."[31]

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Notes

[1] Douglas Rushkoff, *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace*. New York: Harpercollins Publishers, 1995 (reprint).

[2] The name "dark web" is often used to refer to the part of the Internet which is neither indexed nor visible by search engines such as Google and not accessible by using standard browsers such as Microsoft Edge or Apple's Safari. Most dark websites are part of the onion network, can only be accessed using the Tor Browser which provides a high degree of anonymity to users to access websites in general. Andy Greenberg, "Hacker Lexicon: What is the Dark Web?" *Wired*, September 19, 2014; URL: https://www.wired.com/2014/11/hacker-lexicon-whats-dark-web/

[3] Rüdiger Lohlker, "Why Theology Matters – The Case of ISIS," *Strategic Review,* July –September 2016; URL: http://sr-indonesia.com/in-the-journal/view/europe-s-misunderstanding-of-islam-and-isis

[4] Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

[5] "Statement regarding the Relationship of the Qa'idat al-Jihad group to ISIS," (in Arabic) *Markaz al-Fajr li-l I'lam*; URL*:* https://alfidaa.info/vb/showthread.php?t=92927 (accessed February 2, 2014). Al-Qaida Central issued this statement distancing themselves from *the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham* after the refusal of ISIS' leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to pledge allegiance (*bay'a*) to AQ-*amir* Ayman al-Zawahiri. As a consequence, the Syrian revolution against al-Assad was further divided with various 'rebel' factions turning on each other – including *Jabhat al-Nusra*, the official branch of AQ turning on ISIS and vice versa. The clash – or *fitna* (tribulation) – between ISIS and *Jabhat al-Nusra* as well as other factions is the manifestation of two torrents: the claim of seniority posed by AQ and its Syrian franchise *Jabhat al-Nusra* versus the practicality of the "Islamic State" which advanced what AQ pledged to fight for: the establishment of a Caliphate. Joas Wagemakers refers to ISIS as the *Zarqawiyyun*, practical military orientated individuals who seek to implement their principles of faith by brute force versus the *Maqdisiyyun*, adherents of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi who criticized the "Islamic State" for its apparent rapid move in declaring a Caliphate. For further reading: Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi – The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.–Cole Bunzel referred to this rift in these terms: "….two tendencies predominate among jihadists insofar as the Syrian war is concerned: one favoring the al-Qaida-affiliated *Jabhat al-Nusra* and cooperation with all rebel groups, and another favoring ISIS and its exclusionary political designs as the reborn Islamic state, or proto-caliphate." Cole Bunzel. "The Islamic State of Disunity: Jihadism Divided." *Jihadica*, January 30, 2014; URL: http://www.jihadica.com/the-islamic-state-of-disunity-jihadism-divided/. See also: Khalil Ezzeldeen and Nico Prucha. "Relationship between ISIL and local Syrian rebels break down," *IHS Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, Islamic World Web Watch, April 2014.URL: http://magazines.ihs.com/IHSJanesIslamicAffairsAnalystProducts/

[6] Ali Fisher. "How Jihadist Networks Maintain a Persistent Presence Online," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 3, July 2015 ; URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/426.

[7] *Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)*, the Syrian AQ affiliate was first to use *Twitter* on a noticeable scale and facilitated the social media platform to disseminate propaganda videos and writings. The JN-IS divide caused JN to lose members, fighters, and media activists to the "Islamic State"; see Nico Prucha and Ali Fisher. "Tweeting for the Caliphate – Twitter as the New Frontier for Jihadist Propaganda," *CTC Sentinel,* June 2013; URL: http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/tweeting-for-the-caliphate-twitter-as-the-new-frontier-for-jihadist-propaganda.

[8] Abu Qatada al-Filistini, "radd khilafa daesh (thiyyab al-khilafa), isaba al-ijram fi al-Iraq wa-l Sham, Juli 11, 2014; URL: https://da3ich.wordpress.com/2014/07/11/%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4/; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "risala al-Maqdisi li-l Baghdadi hawl al-Kasasiba, al-Ghad al-Urduni, February 7, 2015; URL: http://www.alghad.com/articles/852017-%D9%86%D8%B5-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A9

[9] Khalid Abu Anas (@khaled852111), October 10, 2015. All Arabic translations by author (N. Prucha).

[10] At that time the "Islamic State" referred to itself as *dawlat al-Islamiyya fi l-ʿIraq wa-l Sham* (ISIS), then shortened its name after the declaration of the Caliphate to IS or *dawlat al-khilafa*.

[11] See Cole Bunzel, "The Islamic State of Disobedience: al-Baghdadi Triumphant," *Jihadica*, October 5, 2013; URL: http://www.jihadica.com/the-islamic-state-of-disobedience-al-baghdadis-defiance/.

[12] Mark Mazzetti and Michael R. Gordon, "ISIS is Winning the Social Media War, U.S. Concludes," *New York Times*, June 13, 2015 ; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/13/world/middleeast/isis-is-winning-message-war-us-concludes.html?_r=0

[13] Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, "ISIS is Winning the Online Jihad Against the West," *The Daily Beast*, October 1, 2014; URL: http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/01/isis-is-winning-the-online-jihad-against-the-west.html

[14] *Al-Manhajiyya fi tahsil al-khibra al-iʾlamiyya,* Muʾassasat al-Furqan & Markaz al-Yaqin, part 1," Markaz al-Yaqin and al-Furqan, May 2011. Two jihadist media departments from Iraq published this Arabic language handbook, part of a greater series. Jihadist activity is sanctioned through the existing core *fatwa* (authoritative religious ruling or decrees) based on historical scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), the famous Hanbali scholar, and enriched by the senior leadership of al-Qaida and now ISIS. Thus, any local jihadist, al-Qaida- or ISIS-affiliated action can fall under this umbrella approbation, thereby increasing its appeal. See Prem Mahadevan, "The Glocalisation of al-Qaedaism," *Center for Security Studies*, 22 March 2013; URL: http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Strategic-Trends-2013-AlKaida.pdf

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[24] Please consult the contribution by Jakob Sheikh "I just said it. The State": Examining the motivations for Danish foreign fighting in Syria," in this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

[25] Suhayl al-Najdi, "*Luju' al-Muslimin ila ard al-salibiyyin wa-l iqama fiha*," Mu'assassat al-Wafa', September 2015; URL: www.telegram.org . The "dar al-Islam" embodied by the "Islamic State" is further related by the following factors outlined by al-Najdi:

"The rule of shari'a law returned as well as the implementation of physical punishment (al-hudud), cutting off the hands of thieves, punishing adultery by stoning to death and beheading wizards. The establishment of the Islamic State as a reaction to those who commit injustice, governed by "commanding right and forbidding wrong" while driving a jihad against the disbelievers – thus the might of the Islamic community has been restored. Muslims living in the state openly manifest the rituals of their religion, not fearing anything apart from God – therefore the state of Islam is the abode of Islam in this era. It is obligatory for every Muslim to support and protect it, to openly display dissociation and enmity to the enemies of the Islamic State."

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"I Just Said It. The State": Examining the Motivations for Danish Foreign Fighting in Syria

by Jakob Sheikh

Abstract

While several studies of radicalization processes and recruitment to jihadi organizations have been undertaken in European countries, very few are based on interviews with foreign fighters that have been fighting in Syria and/or Iraq. Hence, actual knowledge about the foreign fighters' inner narratives and motivations remain scarce. This article aims to shed light on how foreign fighters from jihadi organizations in Syria and/or Iraq understand their own actions and behaviour, and what we might overlook when designing counter radicalization measures. Drawing upon 16 in-depth interviews with returned and current foreign fighters from Denmark, the study suggests that while many previous studies emphasize the role of structural socio-economic factors in pushing foreign fighters to travel, several pull factors–some rather counter-intuitive–are also at play. Thus, the very idea of an Islamic State seems to have a significant pull effect on Danish jihadi-travellers, being a driving force in the radicalization process, in the recruitment to jihadist organizations, and on the battlefield.

Keywords: Denmark; foreign fighters; motivation; counter-measures

Introduction

What drives Danish Muslims to leave their country behind and travel to conflicts in the Middle East, potentially ending up as international militant jihadis?

The outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011 proved to be a new arena for foreign fighters, sparking an intense focus in European media on radicalization and jihadism. While structural and socio-economic factors have been discussed in numerous media and academic articles,[1] we still know too little about the motivations of foreign fighters, much less what really "triggers" those involved. As primary data is often very hard to obtain, most studies that seek to address this question draw on open source material such as court documents, media articles, online autobiographies, or official government statistics.[2]

This article examines the motivations as seen through the lens of the foreign fighters themselves. Based on interviews with militant Islamists who left Denmark to take up arms in Syria and Iraq, it argues that some of the motives are quite counter-intuitive and may differ from common assumptions regarding push- and pull-factors in relation to foreign fighter participation.

In recent years, Denmark, along with the rest of Europe, has experienced an increasing threat from terrorism. Assessments made by Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) and the Agency's Centre for Terror Analysis (CTA) suggest that Denmark "continues to face a serious threat of terrorism from networks, groups and individuals who adhere to a militant Islamist ideology."[3]

Throughout the last decade, Denmark has been the scene of several notable terror plots such as the Glostrup Case (2007), the Glasvej Case (2008), the Jyllands-Posten Case (2012), and the Copenhagen Shootings (2015). Although the reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet in February 2008 made Denmark and Danish interests a high-priority target among militant Islamists, the terrorist threat against Denmark is now primarily linked to the efflux and influx of militant Islamist foreign fighters. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, individuals travelling to Syria and Northern Iraq have therefore been of key concern in Denmark. Even though Danish citizens/residents have previously fought as foreign fighters in various conflicts–most notably in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s and the Finish uprising against the Soviet

invasion in the Winter War from 1939–1940–the recent flow of foreign fighters from Denmark to Syria and Iraq is unprecedented.

By April 2016, at least 135 individuals–primarily young Sunni-Muslim men–had travelled from Denmark to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, according to the PET. Around half of the individuals had returned to Denmark, while around 35 had been killed.[4]

Though the agency assesses that an attack in Denmark is most likely to be carried out by "small groups or individuals who have not been abroad", groups that attract foreign fighters–such as the Islamic State group (IS)–remain a major concern. CTA writes in its latest assessment that:[5]

> "There are individuals with intent and capacity to commit terrorist attacks in Denmark […] The terror threat is primarily posed by militant Islamism. The key factors affecting the threat picture are the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the group that refers to itself as the Islamic State (IS). IS propaganda has an influential effect on persons in Denmark to commit terrorism or to travel to Syria/Iraq to join IS. Moreover, IS can direct attacks against Denmark…"

Thus, radicalization and counter extremist ideological programmes remain core components in policy-making on state, regional, and local levels in Denmark. The country is among those in Europe with the most extensive counter-radicalization initiatives, many of them specifically aiming at reducing the potential threat, both foreign and domestic, posed by the militant Islamist milieu in Denmark.

However, even though the focus on these issues is without doubt intense, knowledge on why individuals are radicalized, motivated and recruited to jihadist organizations remains scarce and inadequate at best.[6] Interviews with radicalized individuals or foreign fighters are rare as the environment surrounding them is generally hostile towards authorities and media outlets alike.

This paper draws on 16 interviews with individuals that have fought or are currently fighting for militant Islamist groups in Syria and/or Iraq between 2011 and 2016. These qualitative interviews seek to identify individual narratives and motivations in order to improve our understanding as to why and how do some young European Muslims become attracted to and recruited by jihadi organizations. What drives and motivates them? Why are they drawn to a group as murderous and extreme as IS?

The interviews are supplemented with a quantitative dataset covering background information on gender, age, and other socio-economic measures related to Danish foreign fighters. The sample of qualitative interviews is not to be considered fully representative or unbiased (e.g. the sample does not include female interviewees). The author did, however, manage to include interviewees with various group affiliations, of different age levels, different hometowns, and different socio-economic backgrounds in order to reduce the bias.

The Rise and Impact of IS in Denmark

Denmark has seen the presence of militant Islamist networks within its borders since the early 1990s, mainly due to a small influx of North African and Middle Eastern (especially Egyptian) militants who received asylum. By the late 1990s, a limited number of Danish-born or Danish-raised Muslims began to embrace a jihadist ideology. In May 2014, PET estimated that "some hundred individuals actively support a militant Islamist ideology in Denmark."[7] Several individuals from this militant Islamist milieu have been linked to Danish terrorism cases, while others have fought, or are currently fighting for jihadist organizations in Syria or Northern Iraq.

PET now considers returned foreign fighters as one of the most potent threats to national security in Denmark. As is the case with most European countries, the vast majority of the Danish foreign fighter

contingent have joined IS. The Islamic State has already inspired individuals who sympathize with the group, to carry out attacks on its behalf in Denmark. In February 2015, Denmark was struck by the first ever attack defined as terrorism in which victims were killed. The perpetrator, a young Dane of Palestinian descent, who had a violent criminal past and had recently been released from prison, shot and killed two civilians—one at a debate event focusing on freedom of speech, and another in front of the Jewish synagogue in Copenhagen.

During his imprisonment, Omar el-Hussein had expressed sympathy for IS, which led prison staff to warn the Prison and Probation Service, and to the latter warning PET.[8] Just a few minutes before his first attack, el-Hussein posted a statement on his *Facebook* wall, pledging *bay'ah* (oath of loyalty) to the self-declared caliph of IS known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In June 2016, a 24-year old returned foreign fighter from Denmark was sentenced to seven years in prison for joining IS in Syria.[9] At the time of this writing, this was the first Danish court case against a returned foreign fighter.

Although the war in Syria and the rise of IS has encouraged militant Islamism in Denmark, this development has also been exacerbated by other political and social factors such as the rise of far right extremism (since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and the refugee streams that followed, Denmark has seen a number of attacks on refugee camps and mosques, some of them carried out by far right extremists).[10]

According to PET, "there are political extremist circles in Denmark that are prepared to use violence to promote their political agenda," and "the violence may be directed at political opponents, minority groups, including refugees and migrants, and organisations and companies considered to have a symbolic value."[11] PET also assesses that "increasing focus on refugees and migrants among persons affiliated with political extremist circles or extremist sympathisers may increase the threat to asylum centres, refugees and migrants as well as relevant authorities," and that "such a threat may be in nature of violence, arson, or other types of attacks. Attacks or threats against refugees and migrants by right-wing extremists may lead to reactions from Islamists or left-wing extremists."

However, while both the historical evolution of Danish jihadism and the consequences of the Syrian war have surely influenced those Danish Muslims who decided to become foreign fighters, the question is what IS fighters' themselves say about their own motivations. Are there other, less intuitive, factors at play that push or pull them? To explore this question, I have spent months and years tracking the activities of current and returned foreign fighters and militant Islamists in Denmark. This provided me with a rather unique chance to study their intentions, narratives, motivations, and thoughts.

Methodology

This article is based mainly on qualitative interviews, supplemented by a quantitative dataset consisting of background data on 82 foreign fighters from Denmark, with variables such as gender, age, socio-economic status, education level, residence in Denmark and group affiliation. The interviews took place between March 2013 and October 2015. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, while nine were conducted by phone or through encrypted messaging programs, such as Telegram, Surespot, Kik, or Signal.

A number of individuals have left Denmark to join jihadist organizations in Syria and/or Northern Iraq, narrowing the pool of possible interviewees considerably. Hence, as access to respondents was hard to obtain, the aim was to recruit as many interviewees as possible, using snowball sampling, acknowledging the risk for bias.[12][13]

The 16 respondents had been, or were currently fighting for militant Islamist groups at the time of the interview. 8 of them had fought for IS, while another 8 had not. Thus, the respondents should not be regarded

as one homogenous group. They offer very different approaches to fundamental issues of inquiry, e.g. how a future (Islamic) state should look like. Some respondents even fought for jihadist groups on opposing sides. This was the case with two individuals who fought for Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fath al-Sham) during the first years of the conflict and later ended up fighting for IS. Hence one should be cautious with drawing firm conclusions based on individual statements.

The interviews focused on the respondents' motivations, their network of contacts, and in broader terms their creed and grievances. Because speaking openly about jihadist activity can lead to legal prosecution in Denmark, respondents were guaranteed full anonymity in the face-to-face interviews, and approached through encrypted channels. This enabled the respondents to speak more freely about issues that are often considered sensitive, even within jihadi milieus.

The 16 respondents were all male, and the vast majority were under 30 years of age. They were all from the cities of Aarhus and Copenhagen, or suburbs of the two cities.

While some respondents were approached through a snowball-sampling method–one respondent vouching for the interviewer toward another possible respondent–others had for years been sources to the author, providing information of journalistic relevance. The long term-relationship with some of the respondents may have led to a discrepancy in the respondents' level of trust.

Several respondents were in Syria or Iraq at the time of the interview, and the sometimes chaotic and unpredictable situation in a conflict zone limited their time and availability. These conditions made it challenging to conduct in-depth interviews with a pre-planned interview questionnaire. However, the interviews were semi-structured in the sense that the respondents were asked similar questions about fixed topics such as ideological sympathies, group affiliation, inspirations, grievances, and personal backgrounds. Other questions were improvised according to how the conversations developed, allowing time and space to discuss points and narratives that came up spontaneously.

Analysis: The Attraction of 'The State'

The interviews made for this study revealed that many of the things the interviewees portrayed as motives ran counter to common assumptions. Activist foreign policy seemed to be a significant driver, as highlighted in several other studies.[14] This aligns with the official assessment of the terror threat to Denmark by PET that considers the participation of Danish military troops in the invasions and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq to have been an important factor.[15]

When respondents were asked by whom and from where they got their religious inspiration (apart from religious texts, audio sources, and visual sources), none pointed to the mosques. In fact, the interviews conducted imply that militant Islamists are quite sceptical towards the mosques, especially mosque that are considered to be "moderate" by mainstream society. Several respondents even accused these mosques of being right-hand men for PET. Most respondents claimed they entered the militant Islamist milieu along with a group of friends. It was not clear from the interviews whether a friend introduced the respondents to the milieu, whether the respondents themselves introduced their friends, or whether they and their friends entered extremist circles at the same time as a group. Instead of trusting what was preached in the mosques, the respondents seemed to rely almost exclusively on their close friends. Discussions among friends were mentioned as an influential inspiration. Most respondents stated that they travelled to Syria with a group of friends, adding that the mosque had no say or influence on their decision to leave Denmark.[16]

What intrigued me the most, however, was the impact resulting from the very idea of an Islamic State, and how this notion seemed to shape a specific jihadi narrative and serve as a direct and very present motivation for Danish foreign fighters. When the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-

Baghdadi, officially declared the caliphate in the summer of 2014, he also gave his sympathizers and 'soldiers' an extra reason to come. Now, foot soldiers and fanboys alike were no longer just joining an insurgency; they were joining a Muslim state. While a battlefield primarily attracts fighters, a state also attracts immigrants, who want to settle down and build a future for themselves. The notion of "the state" occurred very often in the interviews conducted after the announcement of the caliphate in late June 2014. When the interviewees used the term "dawla" ["state" or "nation"] they were sometimes not referring to the jihadist group, but rather to the caliphate itself (although most often referred to as the "khilafah" by its supporters). They spoke of a place that no longer just represented a battlefield to its fighters but a home to its citizens. As one 28-year-old returned former IS fighter from Denmark said in a face-to-face interview:

Interviewer: You mentioned that you want to go back to Syria…

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: Why shouldn't I? It's like… It's more perfect there than here.

Interviewer: How?

Interviewee: What do you mean by "how"?

Interviewer: How is it more perfect in Syria compared to Denmark?

Interviewee: The state is better at taking care of its citizens.

Interviewer: Which state? The Islamic State?

Interviewee: Yes. But I am not speaking about the group now. I am speaking about the state.

Interviewer: Ok, I understand. Don't you… I mean… Don't you find it dangerous down there?

Interviewee: As a Muslim, I love death more than I love life. And trust me, it is not like how we hear it in Western media all the time. You also know that.

Interviewer: Yes, I know that Western media are influenced by Western politics. In your opinion, what is it that Western media overlook?

Interviewee: I just said it. The state. Western media don't understand our love to the state. To the land we have. They don't understand that this piece of earth means the whole world to us. We are ready to give up our lives to defend this piece of land, you know. It is like a fortress to us; we have conquered it with our hands and weapons, and we will defend it with our hands and weapons. I tell you this. We are a state. All Muslims wish to emigrate to the state, because it is their home, and they can live in this state without fearing that the enemy with make problems for them or disturb them from worshipping Allah, may piece be upon him.

To a certain extent, being able to join a perceived state and (at times) also being able to participate in governing the state seem to be pull-factors for the Danish jihadists in Syria. The respondents kept mentioning "the state" as a driving force.

Several times during the rest of the interview the respondent referred to propaganda videos released by IS about daily life in IS held areas. These videos seemed to appeal strongly to him. At times during the interview it seemed like the state was a particular reason to fight in itself. The respondent wanted to defend the state because it seemed to provide legitimacy to his cause.

The aspiration for state building is by no means a new tendency. Long before IS's self-declared caliphate, jihadists in Denmark were talking about the establishment of a state as a goal that would allow Muslims to emigrate and implement Islamic law. One of the most prominent advocates for the cause in Denmark has been Shiraz Tariq, a Danish born Salafi with Pakistani roots. A leading figure among militant Islamists in Denmark for almost a decade, Tariq was seen as an "emir" by his followers. During an interview in late 2012, he made it clear to this author that a state was a goal in itself:

> *"Implementing an Islamic State takes sacrifices. It is our duty to fight the infidels and take back what it was they took away from us. It is our duty to implement the caliphate."*[17]

Tariq was a good friend of the well-known British-Born Pakistani Salafi preacher Anjem Choudary. The latter had ties to several convicted terrorists, and was actively recruiting foreign fighters to the war in Syria from the outset. A few months after the above-mentioned interview, Tariq left himself, ending up joining the extremist group that would later be known as IS.

From his hideout near Aleppo in Syria, Tariq wrote in an email to this author:

> *"My goal is to fight the infidels until the state is implemented."*[18]

Indeed, this seems to be a motivation that is commonly shared in the jihadist milieu in Denmark. After Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's caliphate announcement, the rhetoric shifted remarkably among IS fanboys in Denmark and among Danish IS fighters in Syria and Iraq. They consistently started referring to the group as "Dawla." The state project seems to have an appeal at least in some parts of Danish jihadist milieu. Institutional aspects such as economical systems, schools, and legal systems were brought up several times during the interviews. Running the state seemed to be a major inspiration and motive for joining IS.

Other respondents talked about "protecting the state" rather than protecting Islam, or protecting the Muslims living in the caliphate. One respondent even went as far as calling the state "crucial", claiming that the notion of defending an actual state was the determining driver in his decision to leave Denmark and take up arms in Syria. The interviews implied that most IS-affiliated respondents saw IS partly as a state-building project, aimed at restoring Islamic pride rather than waging war against the West.

The strong focus on state-building among my interviewees also implies IS no longer appeals merely to young men. Hundreds of women from European countries have travelled to the caliphate, where several are now working as school teachers near Hasakah, as day-care helpers in Mosul, and – as is the case for two female fighters from Denmark – sick children's nurses at the hospital in Raqqa; important functions in IS's endeavours to maintain a complete and valid state.[19]

Predictably, several respondents that did not fight for IS, or fought for groups that consider IS an enemy, were opposed to the idea of an IS-governed state.

Another recurrent, yet related, argument was that of the state being a sign of Islamic revanchism as well as a means to restore Islamic pride. In other words, cultivating the state-project was considered a means and an end at the same time. A remarkable number of the interviewees highlighted revenge as a driving force. As such, they echoed the message and reasoning of Abu Bakr al-Bahgdadi when the self-declared IS-caliph announced the caliphate in the summer of 2014. Under his direction and leadership, the Islamic world would be returned to "dignity, might, rights and leadership", as al-Baghdadi had said.[20]

This narrative of revanchism has been prevalent among Danish jihadists for years. When the self-declared "emir" of a brigade of Danish foreign fighters in Syria, Tariq, wrote to this author in the summer of 2013, he said he was taking part in the revival of Islamic pride: "The goal of the Muslims is also to restore the power we had in the past (we are very close)," Tariq wrote from the battlefield near the city of Aleppo, Syria. He added: "Islam is superior and will never be beaten."[21]

Shiraz Tariq and his fellow fighters appeared to be allured by the past; they felt they were as close as they had ever gotten to the vision of restoring the most holy and pure caliphate in history: the one that existed in the time of the prophet and has ever since been a guiding star for Salafist communities.

In public *YouTube* videos as well as in private messages it was highlighted that they were driven by the need to make good for the defeats of the past in the Muslim world. They wanted to see justice being done. One interviewee, a 28 year-old IS fighter, mentioned this exact phrase during the interview:

Interviewer: Do you remember the first time you went out to fight?

Interviewee: Haha. You mean fighting with weapons?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: You can't put it like that.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Interviewee: Fighting is not just a question of actual fighting with guns. It is more like… Like Islam is a fight in itself. You are fighting every day to be a good Muslim and to follow the words of Allah, may peace be upon him. This is why the khilafah [caliphate] is important. It is like a proof to the kuffar [unbelievers] that we took back what belongs to us.

Interviewer: Belong to you?

Interviewee: Yes. Kuffar [unbelievers] have always tried to take our faith away from us. They want to tell us that we should not be proud of being Muslims. This [having established a caliphate] is like telling them: "We are proud of who we are. No matter what you do, you cannot take away our pride." I am telling you the khilafah [caliphate] makes us proud.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Look… Listen… This happened by the grace of Allah, may peace be upon him. He said to the Muslims: "You have to suffer, but in the end I will let justice be done." I tell you, now we have reached a phase where Allah has given us this opportunity to restore our pride.

Interviewer: What opportunity?

Interviewee: I just told you.

Interviewer: What do you mean by "opportunity to restore our pride"?

Interviewee: If you look back in history, the Muslims have been defeated militarily lots of times, but no one has ever defeated our deen [religion]. Nobody has defeated the faith of the Muslims. And the khilafah [caliphate] is the proof that at the end of the day we will always win.

A majority of the interviewees also mentioned pride as a primary motivation for joining a jihadist organization. The respondents saw these organizations as actors that could restore the pride of the Muslims through military success and by seizing territory that is believed to be "Muslim land" and have been "taken away from the Muslims."

Several respondents spoke of the jihadist organizations' fight against (often Western) military powers as a fight to regain pride after crusades, colonialism, and other historical defeats. Numerous times, it was mentioned by both IS members and Nusra members that the respective jihadist groups sought to get even for what happened in the past.

Conclusion: What Danish Counter-Measures Are Missing

This study has sought to make sense of what motivates Danish foreign fighters in the processes of radicalization, recruitment, mobilization and fighting for militant Islamist organizations in the Middle East.

The denouncing of the mosques by Danish militant Islamists might also suggest that even well-known Salafi mosques may only have limited contact with, and sway over, young militants, minimizing their possible influence on militant Islamist groups that are joining or fighting with groups such as IS. Instead, as indicated in this study, the attraction of the state-building narrative remains the most powerful driver in foreign fighter recruitment.

In the Danish discourse on foreign fighting, it is commonly assumed that the decision to leave Denmark and take up arms in conflict zone such as Syria can be explained largely by push factors. And while this assumption has found some support in previous studies on foreign fighting motivations, Danish authorities base their counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization measures almost entirely on this theory.

However, when talking to the foreign fighters, one finds that some of the things that motivate them are counter-intuitive; they pursue different aims than we think they do.

What, then, is the implication? The findings in this study raise a fundamental question: Are Danish authorities using too much resources on counter-measures that will probably have little or no effect on these guys, who seem driven to a large extent by a utopian ideological project far beyond Denmark?

This study suggests that the mobilization of foreign fighters may often have been fuelled not primarily by push factors such as political stigmatization, social marginalization, or other factors usually suffered by disadvantaged individuals–factors that are the main focus of counter-measures in Denmark.

This should not be understood as a denial of the correlation between individual socio-economic deprivation and risk of radicalization, as proved by many scholars. Rather, it appears that many counter-radicalization measures may be missing an important point: The prevalent pull factors (such as the narrative of state building) are apparently attracting foreign fighters for other–and perhaps more constructive–reasons than we might think. Hence, based on the interviews, it appears that the concepts of statehood, pride, and revanchism can be significant motivations for foreign fighters. These narratives are often overlooked in counter radicalization initiatives, issued by the authorities, perhaps limiting the chances of success.

About the author: **Jakob Sheikh** *is a multi-award-winning investigative reporter with the Danish daily Politiken, one of Scandinavia's leading newspapers. Since 2012, he has focused on radicalization and foreign fighters. In 2015, he released his book on Danish Islamic State fighters based on numerous interviews with returned and current jihadists as well as key figures in the militant Islamist environment in Scandinavia.*

Notes

[1] See for instance: Edwin Bakker and Roel de Bont, "Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, Motivations, and Roles in the War in Syria and Iraq," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 27, 2016; Daan Weggemans, Edwin Bakker, and Peter Grol, "Who are They and Why do They Go? The Radicalisation and Preparatory Processes of Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters," *Perspectives on Terrorism,* Vol. 8, 2014; Rik Coolsaet, "Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighter Wave: What Drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic State? Insights from the Belgian Case," The Royal Institute for International Relations, 2006; Edwin Bakker and Peter Grol, "Motives and Considerations of Potential Foreign Fighters from the Netherlands," International Centre for Counter Terrorism, ICCT, 2015; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, 2010.

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[5] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Danske islamistiske miljøer med betydning for terrortruslen mod Danmark"; URL: http://www.pet.dk, May 28, 2014.

[6] A few Danish studies, however, have dealt with identity related issues in extremist Islamist communities from a qualitative approach. See for instance: Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "Salafi Jihadism: Relying on fieldwork to study unorganized and clandestine phenomena," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2011; Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "Whose courtroom? Observations from terrorism trials," Lived Space. Reconsidering Transnationalism among Muslim Minorities, 2011; Jon Olsen, "Roads to Militant Radicalization–interviews with five former perpetrators of politically motivated organized violence," Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009; Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "The attractions of Jihadism. An identity approach to three Danish terrorism cases and the gallery of characters around them," University of Copenhagen, 2010; Tina Gudrun Jensen & Kate Østergaard, " Ekstremistiske miljøer med Salafigrupperinger i fokus," University of Copenhagen, 2011; Lene Kühle & Lasse Lindekilde, "Radicalisation and the Limits of Tolerance: A Danish Case-Study," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2012.

[7] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Danske islamistiske miljøer med betydning for terrortruslen mod Danmark"; URL: www.pet.dk, May 28, 2014.

[8] "The Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation," Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2015.

[9] "Første syrienskriger er dømt for terror," *Politiken,*; URL: http://politiken.dk/indland/ECE3263014/foerste-danske-syrienskriger-er-doemt-for-terror/, June 22, 2016.

[10] See for instance: "26-årig varetægtsfængslet for brandstiftelse ved asylcenter kendt fra højreradikalt miljø," Danmarks Radio. URL: https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/26-aarig-varetaegtsfaengslet-brandstiftelse-ved-asylcenter-kendt-fra-hoejreradikalt, August 28, 2105

[11] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark," English version,; URL: http://www.pet.dk, April 28, 2016.

[12] See for instance: Patrick Biernacki and Dan Waldorf, "Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling," *Sociological Methods & Research,* Vol. 10, No. 2, 1981.

[13] The aim in this study was to get in touch with as many foreign fighters from Denmark as possible, regardless of their gender, age, jihadist group affiliation, time spent in Syria and/or Iraq.

[14] See for instance: Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History*. London: Hurst Publishers, 2015.

[15] Chief of PET, Mr. Finn Borch Andersen, testified before the Danish Parliament's Legal Committee at a public hearing on October 5, 2016.

[16] The role of mosques in the radicalization process will be discussed further in a later study.

[17] Jakob Sheikh, "Meeting the foreign fighters: how does Islamic State recruit thousands of Westerners?," *New Statesman*, December 1, 2015.

[18] Jakob Sheikh and Morten Skjoldager, "Shiraz Tariq: Islam vil aldrig blive overgået :D," *Politiken,* August 30, 2013.

[19] Angela Sharda, "Islamic State is a one-way ticket for jihadi brides," *International Business Times;* URL: http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/islamic-state-one-way-ticket-jihadi-brides-1503746, May 31, 2015.

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Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq and the Socio-Economic Environment They Faced at Home: A Comparison of European Countries

by Philip Verwimp

Abstract

This article looks at the gap in labour market and school outcomes between non-EU immigrants and natives in European countries. It then correlates the related socio-economic data with the number of foreign fighters per million inhabitants as well as per million non-EU immigrants. It emerges that larger gaps correlate with higher numbers of foreign fighters, with Belgium emerging as the worst performer in the sample. While not offering a full, causal and micro-level model to understand the link completely, the present analysis nevertheless finds a clear and robust pattern across much of Europe.

Keywords: foreign fighters; exclusion; labour markets; PISA; Belgium; Europe; terrorism

Introduction

There is a vibrant debate in the literature on the educational background and the employment status of militants who leave European countries to join the Islamic State (IS). The question to be answered is whether and to what degree we are dealing with educated, employed individuals, or with rather uneducated and often unemployed ones. The background to this question has far-reaching consequences: in case we are dealing with a group of individuals that can be situated at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, the policy conclusion would be that something can be done about it, to wit, offer them a descent education and a job. That will allow them to get a positive self-image, cater for their families and increase the opportunity cost to leave the country. If the opposite turns out to be the case, then policies aimed at improving the socio-economic situation of potential militants will not help much. When we are dealing with above-average educated and well-employed people, it is clear that they have much to lose by joining IS, hence the reason(s) for joining should be situated primarily in the ideological, religious or political domain.

While it is not necessary to look for one profile, or for the average profile of a foreign fighter, indeed, such average profile may miss the point completely when, for instance, a group of highly educated, radical Islamists are leading a second group of poorly educated, rank-and-file. In that situation, the average outcome 'somewhat educated' is next to meaningless. However, it is by detailing the individual profiles of foreign fighters that one can arrive at a better understanding of the role of (lack of) education and employment. There is not one road that leads to IS. Hence, the study of individual profiles is very important. However, this requires access to information currently only available to the intelligent services, and not to this author. Regretfully, this article will therefore have to do without such micro-level data.

In order to address the question of joining IS at the aggregate, cross-country level, two domains – the labour market and the school system – will be discussed. In essence these represent two of the most important institutions that young adults face in their encounters with "society". The outcomes in these two domains will be linked to the number and percent of young adults who join IS from European countries. The use of aggregates does not mean that a portrait of the average foreign fighter is sketched. Rather, an attempt is made to compare labour market and educational outcomes of non-EU immigrants with those of natives (non-migrants). Since non-EU immigrants are considered as one group, however diverse it may be, this does not present a profile of foreign fighters. For this comparison, natives are also treated as one group. There will be highly educated individuals in both groups, as well as poorly educated ones. Here the focus is on the

gap between both groups. Because of the lack of micro-level data it is not possible to analyze the profile of immigrants joining IS with that of those not joining IS.

For the estimates of per capita numbers of fighters joining IS, only those European countries will be considered for which comparable data on labour market and schooling outcomes between natives and non-EU immigrants could be found. For many countries in the Middle East or in Asia that have also sent fighters to Syria/Iraq, such group-level data are not available. Due to the small sample size, the interpretation of data is limited to (Western) Europe. The focus is on the potential variation between European countries. For an account of the high absolute number of foreign fighters going to Syria, the work of Hegghammer should be consulted[1] while for a history of Jihadi transnational networks, the work of Nesser is most relevant.[2]

The analysis leads to the conclusion that a larger gap between non-EU immigrant and native populations groups in the labour market and the school system in a European country is correlated with a higher per capita number of foreign fighters sent from that country. Again, this does not mean that all foreign fighters have experienced this gap themselves. It could be that those young adults who join IS are not the most disadvantaged within their group.

Review of Related Literature

As Lee has argued,[3] among the politically informed (which requires some degree of education), it is the volunteers with lower social status (drop-outs from high school for example) who may be most inclined to participate in violent activities, as compared to the high status militants who are politically active in non-violent groups, mainly because they have more to lose. Or, as Krueger and Laitin suggested,[4] a well-educated migrant may find it all the more frustrating when (s)he realizes that his group is disadvantaged and may therefore wish to act as a type of "Robin Hood". Hence, such arguments are compatible with the gap shown below. It suffices here to document the existence of a gap and the potential for recruiters to exploit such a gap. In that sense this represents a qualified version of the grievance hypothesis–'qualified' in the sense that, in a cross-country approach, more marginalization and exclusion vis-à-vis the native group are correlated with a higher level of participation in IS–without implying that the poor among the immigrants constitute the bulk of the participants.

Long before the major terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) and before the ascent of IS, social scientists and representatives from civic society in Europe pointed out the dangers arising from the backward position of immigrants in the labour market and in the school system.[5] In fact, the disadvantaged position of immigrants in these two key areas has been part of common knowledge in European policy circles for some time as well.[6] While this position has improved in some countries in recent years, a new report by the Belgium Ministry of Labour [7], still paints a dark picture. Immigrants and their offspring continue to face daunting challenges, in some countries more than in others.

Apart from the publications of the authors already mentioned, two other publications bear some similarity to the approach taken here. Since both come to different results and interpretations, a discussion of them is warranted here. The first publication is authored by McCants and Meserole [8] who apply machine learning to find out which one of a series of 40 variables correlates most with a foreign fighters score. They computed the latter by multiplying the radicalization rate (the number of foreign fighters per Muslim population) with the foreign fighters share (the share of each countries' contingent in the total number of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria). They argue that a policy maker should be interested in this score rather than in the two indicators that make up the score. That maybe the case for the global policy making community who want to stop IS, a national policy maker, however, will be interested first of all by the radicalization rate, as this gives him/her a measure of the extend of the problem in his/her own country. Two more comments on their very interesting study are in place here. The first one is this: among the 40 variables there is none that allows

us to identify disparities or inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims in the countries under study. In other studies, such inter-group inequality has been found to correlate with within-country violent conflict.[9] The country-level Gini coefficient, the literacy rate, or the youth unemployment rate do not inform us about that. Second comment: McCants and Meserole have 50 countries in their sample. On the one hand, this is an advantage (larger samples have more statistical power), but these countries also have very idiosyncratic histories (including, for example, Russia, Australia, Saudi-Arabia, Israel, China). Here, we run the risk that the Gini coefficient, youth unemployment or any other variable may mean very different things in these countries. Can we really assume that youth unemployment captures the same condition in each of these countries?

The second study, authored by Benmelech and Klor [10], argues that the flow of fighters to IS is not determined by poor economic conditions, but rather by ideology and by the difficulty of assimilation into homogenous Western countries. As in the case of McCants and Meserole [11], these authors use data aggregated at the national level (e.g. GDP per capita and Gini Coefficient) to conclude that poverty and inequality are unlikely to be root causes for young Muslims to join IS as Belgium, Austria, Sweden and Norway are highly developed welfare states. In the present contribution it is argued that we should not focus on national aggregates but on the differences of outcomes between Muslims and non-Muslims, or, as done here, between non-EU immigrants and natives.

What both publications have in common with the approach used in this article is the difficulty to attribute causality to one or more variables to explain the size of the foreign fighter phenomenon. All three studies also point out that they do not use/have micro-level data. Hence, it is prudent to talk about correlations, rather than causality. In that sense there is not really a contradiction in findings. All three have an element in common: the difficulties of non-EU immigrants to integrate into rich, secularized societies. Setback in the labour market and the school system, as well as the mainstream political discourse around Islam, or the homogeneity of the country may all be manifestations in different domains (economic, political, cultural) of the same underlying problem.

The sample size (N=14 countries) informing this article is too small to make causal inferences. It limits itself therefore in its interpretation to correlations between variables, realizing fully well that other, omitted variables, such as the presence of Salafist networks, preachers or recruiters, ought to be taken into account to arrive at a fuller understanding of the phenomenon. The purpose here is to observe variation across European countries, but refraining from causal and micro-level interpretations. The take here on the 'structural' factors can only serve as an incomplete analysis of recruitment.

Data and Methods

In search for comparative data on European countries, Eurostat, the European Union Labour Force Surveys (EU-LFS) and OECD are the first sources to turn to. The groups of persons that are of particular interest for this analysis are first and second generation non-EU immigrants, in other words, those immigrants born outside the EU as well as native-born offspring of foreign-born parents. As IS recruits from both groups, the present analysis utilizes two definitions of 'immigrant'. Some immigrants of the second generation have obtained the nationality of the host country before leaving to Syria or Iraq, or acquired the nationality of another European country. As most recruits are in their 20s or early 30s, the focus here is on the labour market situation and educational achievements of this age group. A comparison between the situation of this group in the educational system and in the labour market with that of the native-born offspring of native-born parents is made.

The data found in the sources just cited need to be teased out. Eurostat, to start with, distinguishes between persons with and without the nationality of the country of residence, and between countries of birth. Based

on that source alone, one cannot distinguish second generation immigrants from native-born offspring of native-born parents since both were born in the country of residence and (most) possess the nationality of one or another European country. Fortunately, the recent OECD report on immigrants and their integration presents data on the second generation (native-born offspring of foreign-born parents).[12] For some countries however, key variables are missing in the OECD data, thereby reducing the sample's size from 14 to 12 countries.

Due to this, two definitions of migration will be utilized to compare data between natives and immigrants. The first is from Eurostat and EU-LFS; it defines an immigrant as someone having the nationality of a country other than a EU member state. This definition allows one to present comparative data across 14 European countries on the employment rate of nationals and non-EU nationals. This should provide an indication about the (variation in) challenges faced by immigrants on the labour markets of European countries. These challenges certainly do not disappear when an immigrant acquires the nationality of the country of residence, as discrimination is often linked to a non-European name, especially on the labour market.[13] The second definition of immigrants used is: native-born offspring of foreign-born parents. Here, data for 12 countries are available which allow a comparison of the unemployment rate for 25 to 34 year-old immigrants with native-born offspring of native-born parents. This is as close a definition one can get to locate comparable data on the target groups. It should be pointed out that these are not samples of convenience. In each case the largest group of European countries for which data were available for comparison was taken, utilizing definitions by either Eurostat or OECD.

Given the focus on the educational achievements of immigrants and their offspring, PISA test score data were also consulted. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the largest, comparative school testing program in the world. It tests the mathematical and reading skills of a cross-section of 15-year old students in OECD countries every few years. With the help of data assembled by PISA one can compare indicators for second generation students with those of native-born students from native born parents.
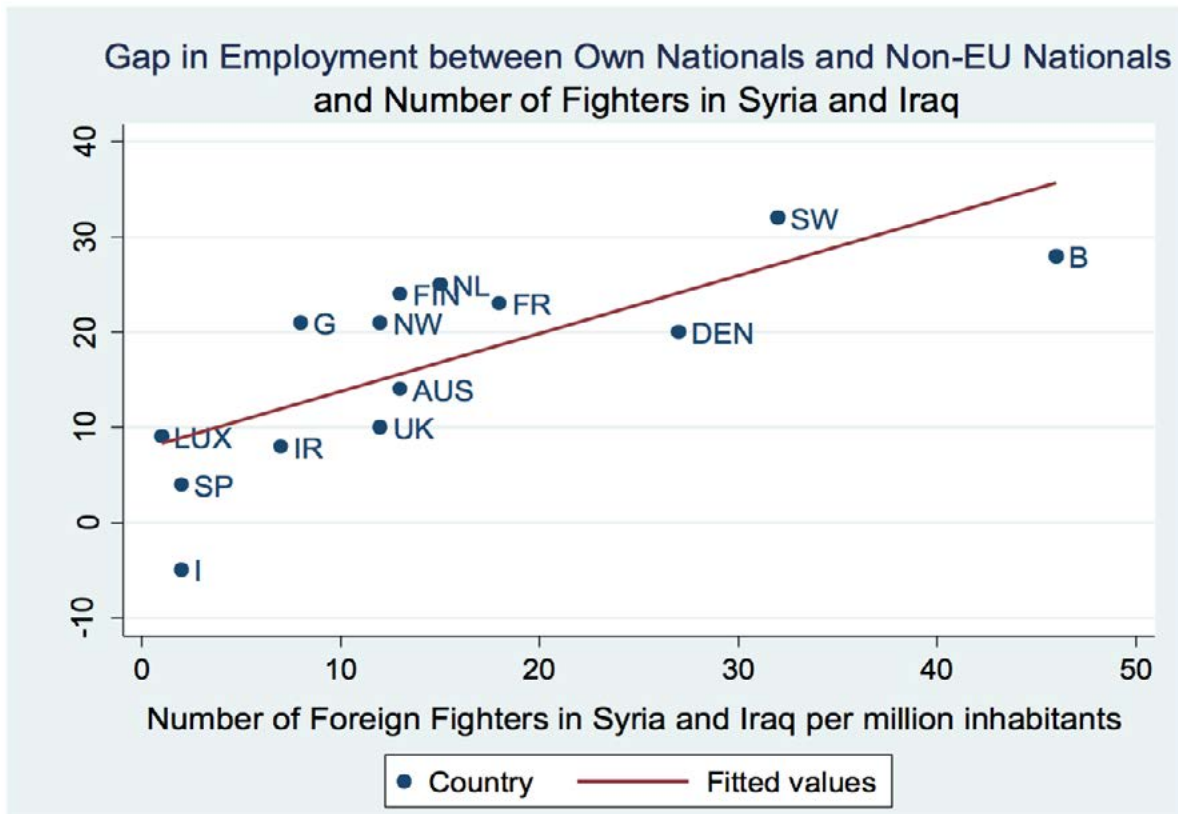
To sum up: four data sources are utilized: (i) from Eurostat and from the European Union Labour Force Surveys (EU-LFS) employment data for the year 2010 are used.[14] These data sketch an approximate picture of the situation potential fighters faced on the labour market before their departure. During 2005-2008, the situation of immigrants on the labour market in Europe had improved somewhat, compared to the 2001-2004 period [15]; however, it worsened again with the 2009-2010 economic crisis; (ii) data on the employment situation of second generation immigrants, as defined by OECD, were consulted.[16] These data are available for the year 2013, which is later than one would wish, but the assumption is warranted that the gap between second generation immigrants and native-born young men and women from native-born parents did not change much between 2010 and 2013; (iii) pooled PISA test scores in mathematics for the PISA waves of 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012 were utilized. The reasons to use these educational achievement data are the same as for the labour market: they are readily available and reflect the situation of immigrants in the school system at the moment that most Syria fighters were in school, being around 15 years old at the time. As students take the PISA test at age 15, the pooled sample should capture the situation of Syria fighters when they were school-going; and (iv) finally the number of fighters that left for Syria and Iraq *per million inhabitants* was calculated. A robustness test will be done by looking at the number of foreign fighters *per million non-EU immigrants*. It is not clear from the outset which of the two is the better denominator; arguments can be found for each of the two. The data on foreign fighters are retrieved from those collected by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence in London.[17]
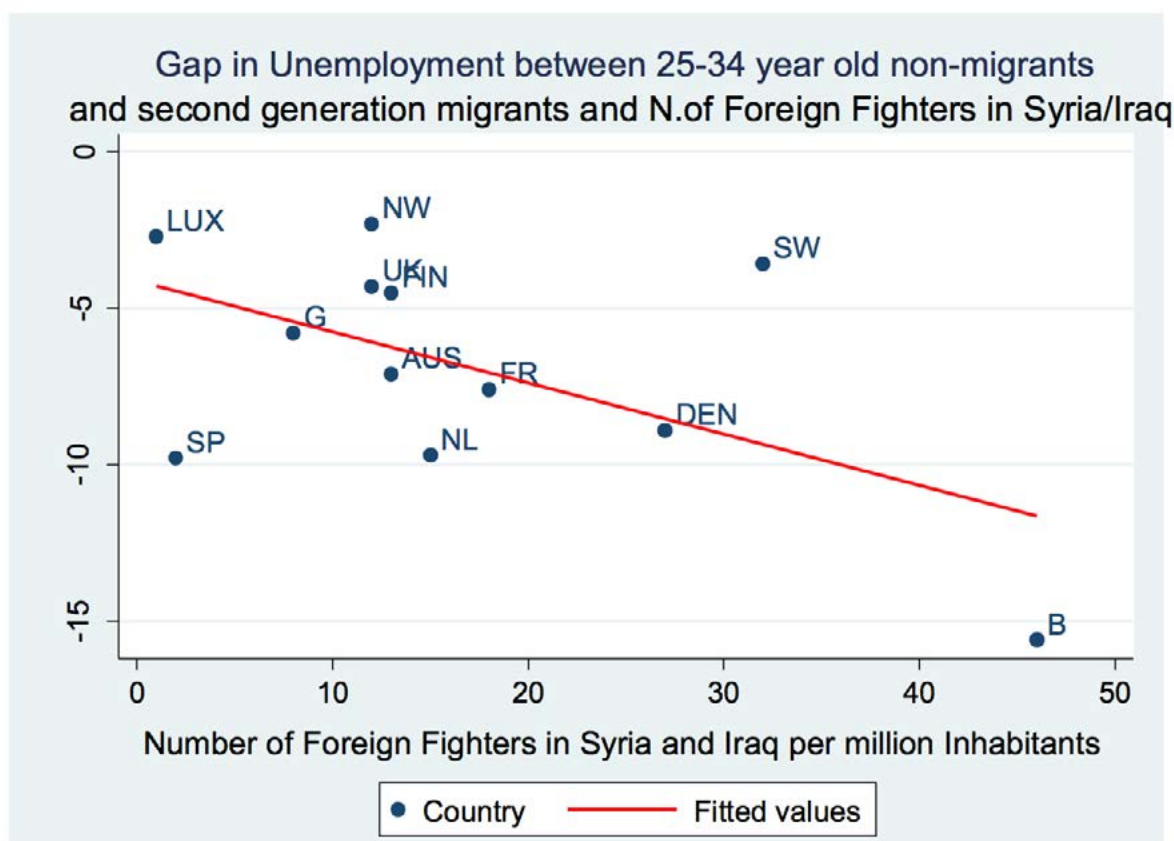
Main Results

Graphs 1(a) and 1(b) show a positive correlation between the gap in employment of immigrants and natives on the one hand and the number of Syria-going fighters per million inhabitants on the other hand in a

sample of European countries. Belgium is performing worst on both indicators. The Pearson correlation coefficient between both variables is 0.74*** in Graph 1(a) and -0.55* in Graph 1(b) - which is high. The first is statistically significant at the 1% level, the second at the 7% level. Since correlation is not the same as causation one should refrain from attributing the high number of Syria fighters in Belgium and elsewhere solely to their situation on the labour market. To search for one single causal factor would be imprudent for the complex foreign fighter phenomenon. Having said that, the graphs show a clear pattern across Europe.

Graph (1a): First definition of migrant (N=14)

(1b) Alternative definition (N=12)

Gap in Unemployment between 25-34 year old non-migrants and second generation migrants and N.of Foreign Fighters in Syria/Iraq

Number of Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq per million Inhabitants

● Country   —— Fitted values

On average, across the 14 European Countries, the youth unemployment rate among native-born offspring of foreign born parents is 15% of the labour force whereas it is 10% for the native-born offspring of native-born parents. This let the authors of the 2015 OECD report to conclude: "*In the European Union, the youth unemployment rate among native-born offspring of immigrant parents is almost 50% higher than among the young with native-born parents.*" [18] Graph (1b), based on the OECD data, shows remarkable variations between European countries: from 6.3% versus 21.9% for Belgium making a difference of -15.6 and from 4.9% to 14.6% for the Netherlands, making a difference of -9.7% to Germany, with the UK and Norway showing smaller differences.

Is There a Selection Effect?

It could be that the profile of immigrants in Belgium and other under-performing countries differs from that of other countries. Immigrants in badly performing countries could, for instance, be more violent compared to immigrants in other countries, and/or, they could be less well-educated and therefore more vulnerable to experience unemployment. Social scientists and economists refer to a situation as 'selection effect', meaning that the bad performers would be home to a group of immigrants with particular characteristics that ill-prepare them for school and for the labour market.

(i) Selection on Violence?

The scarce literature on the attitudes towards violence mostly deals with differences between migrant communities within one country, for example those of Moroccan vs. those of Turkish descent. However, it seems very unlikely that immigrants in badly performing countries have other innate attitudes than their colleagues in other European countries, at the time of migration or at the outset. However, it could be that

several other factors influence attitudes towards violence among immigrants after migration. These factors could indeed differ across Europe. One of those factors might be the recruitment of young adults by Salafist preachers. Another might be the presence of mosques spreading an ultra-conservative interpretation of the Koran and of Islam (Wahhabism). While these factors exist they are not considered here. In any event, these factor would constitute an external intervention and as such cannot be attributed to any innate characteristics of migrant populations. It also begs the question why Salafist preachers are more present in certain countries/ cites than others.

(ii) Selection on the Level of Education?

The second part of a potential 'selection effect' lies in the level of education and its corollary, the resulting greater vulnerability to unemployment of disadvantaged immigrants. Here, there is more evidence. The OECD classifies Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Germany as longstanding destinations of lower-educated immigrants.[19] That might therefore play a role. It should, however, be noted that four of these five group members appear to belong to a 'middle-performing' cluster of countries in Graph 1a–not the best, but not the worst either.

As any school director knows, it is much easier to achieve superior test scores if your students were high-performers already before they entered their school. Here some evidence from PISA studies is illustrative. Graph 2 shows the correlation between the difference in test scores between immigrants and natives on the mathematics test on the one hand and the gap between the percentage of natives in employment compared to immigrants on the other hand (as also used in Graph 1). Graph 2a shows a positive correlation, larger differences in test scores correlate with larger gaps in employment. The Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.87*** with test scores of 2003 (this is when the average recruit for IS was 15 years old). The correlation coeff. is 0.67*** when we pool all math scores for the years 2003 to 2012 as they are reported in PISA in FOCUS.[20] (It should be noted that these coefficients are not reproduced in Table 1).

The result using the alternative definition of immigration is shown in Graph 2b. The Pearson corr. coeff. of -0.72**, stat. significant at the 4% level. The sample size, however, is further reduced from 12 to 9 countries in Europe as PISA 2003 data for three countries are not available. As before, Belgium performs the worst of the entire class, having the largest difference in immigrant test scores compared to natives of any PISA country. Backed by several research reports by Glorieux et al (2006, 2009), a 2012 report of the regional labour bureau of Flanders (VDAB) on the situation of immigrants on the labour market already noted: "the dire situation on the labour market is a consequence of the equally dire situation in the school system".[21]

When one performs a similar analysis at the school level, comparing PISA test scores for mathematics in schools with a high concentration of immigrants and without immigrants, the difference in Belgium is +70 points–the second highest of all PISA countries.[22] Importantly, the OECD also reports a difference after accounting for type of school and student socio-economic status. This captures the above mentioned selection effect to a great extent. In this case, the difference in test scores for Belgian schools with a high concentration of immigrants and without immigrants is reduced to +30 points. Belgium remains, however, in terms of difference the third largest in all of the PISA countries. Two countries from the group with former "longstanding migration of lower-educated" (see above), The Netherlands and Germany, manage to eliminate the difference completely after accounting for the socio-economic situation of the students and the schools.

Hence, the level of education at entry point can only partly explain the dismal performance of immigrants in Belgian schools. The other part is to be found in the school system itself, in particular for second and third generation students, who were born in Belgium and went to school there. There is much evidence that the school system in itself is a major contributor to the dismal performance of (the children of) immigrants. It

caters very well to the children from the middle-class, but its curriculum, teacher training, way of testing and school culture fail to connect with the lives and aspirations of migrant children.

Graph 2a First Definition of Migrant
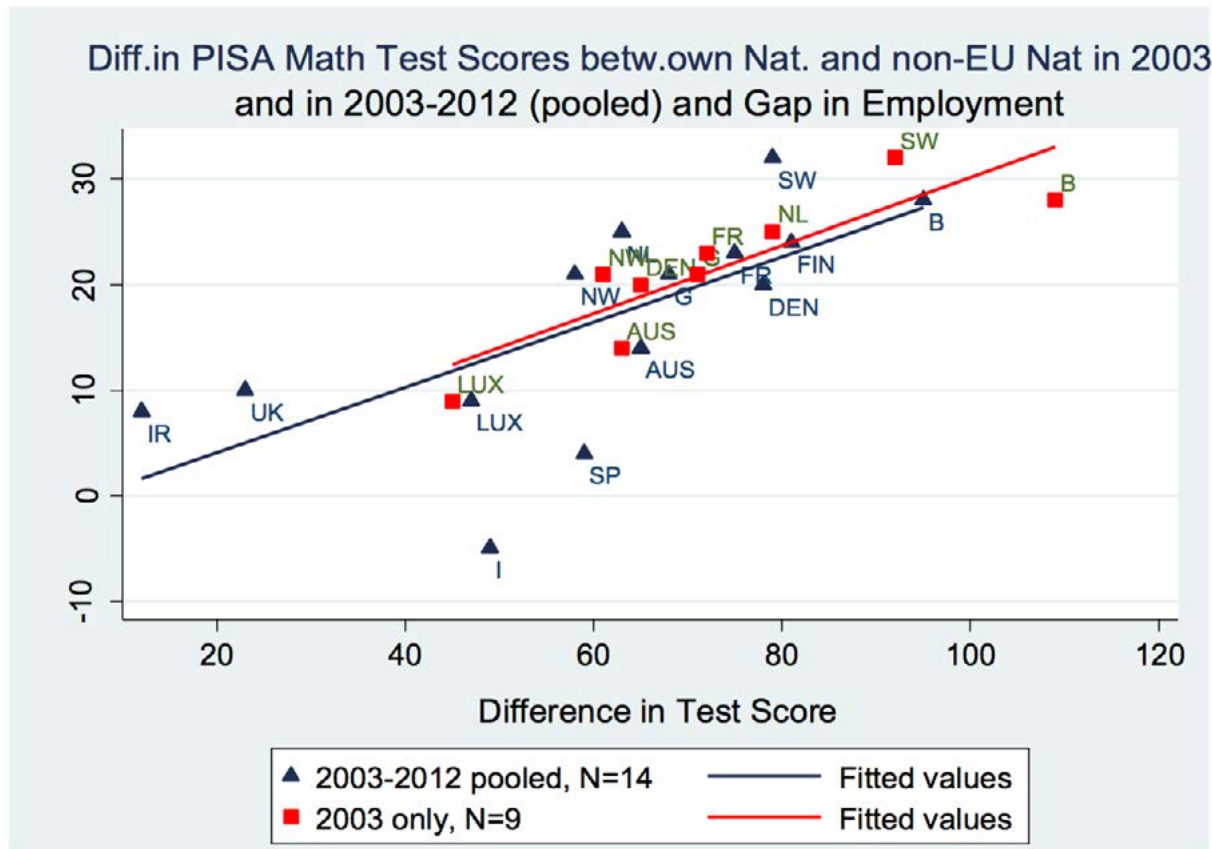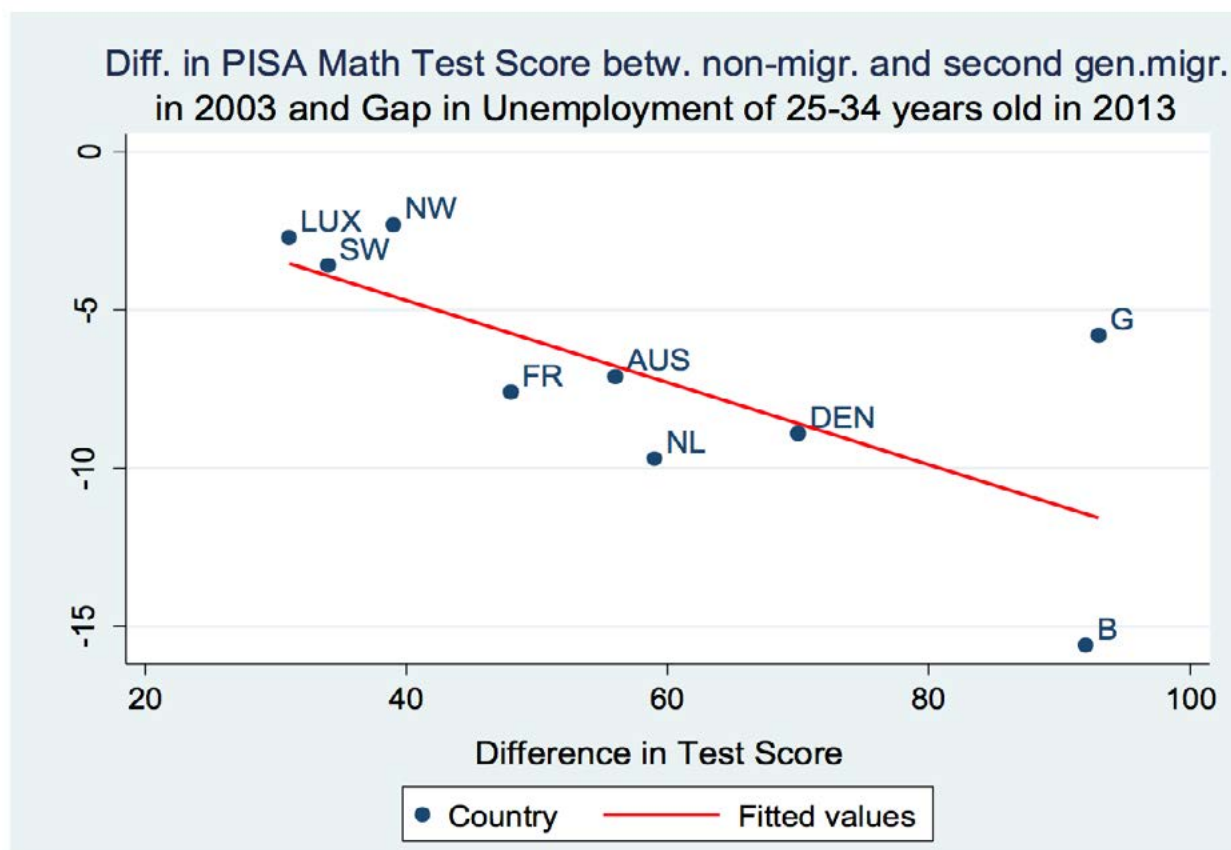
(2b) Second Definition of Migrant

Table 1: Pearson Corr. Coeff. between a Set of Socio-economic Indicators and the per capita Number of Foreign Fighters who left 14 European Countries for Syria/Iraq

Correlation Coefficient	Gap in (Un-) Employment Rate (x)	Gap in Residence in Urban Areas (b)	Gap in Rel. Poverty rate (c)	Gap in (Un-) Employment Rate (y)
Definition 1 of migrant, N=14	0.74***(a)	0.60**	0.32	0.69*** (a)
Definition 2 of migrant, N=12	- 0.55* (a')	0.53*	0.30	- 0.67** (a')

*Notes: The difference between immigrants and non-migrants is used, as the non-differentiated value of the indicator risks to capture the state of the economy in general, which is to be avoided. Here the focus is on the difference between the two groups within each economy. [*** stat.sign at 1% level, ** at 5% level, * at 10%/].*

(a) The employment rate refers to the percentage of Non-EU immigrants in employment. Source is the difference in the employment rate of individuals bearing the nationality of each of the countries and Non-EU immigrants. Source: European Union Labour Force Surveys (EU-LFS) 2010; retrieved from Kansengroepen in Kaart, VDAB, 2012, p.11. This definition as well as an alternative definition "comparing native-born children from foreign-born parents with native-born children from native-born parents (arguably better for the present purpose, as this is the group of second generation immigrants) is utilized. For this alternative data for 12 of the 14 countries (excluding Ireland and Italy) could be found [data retrieved for 2013 from OECD, 2015, p.263], which reduces an already small sample. Nevertheless, when calculation of the Pearson Corr.Coeff.[see (a') in Table 1 for these 12 countries with the alternative definition applied to the unemployment rate of the group of 25-34 years old,] a corr. coefficient of -0.55, stat. sign. at the 6% level can be found. See the row for N=12. This is measured as difference in the two percentages.

(b) Refers to the difference in the percentage of non-migrant and migrant populations residing in cities.

(c) Refers to the difference between the relative poverty rate for natives and immigrants. Source: OECD, 2015, p.31.

(x) Here the denominator for the percentage of foreign fighters is the total population.
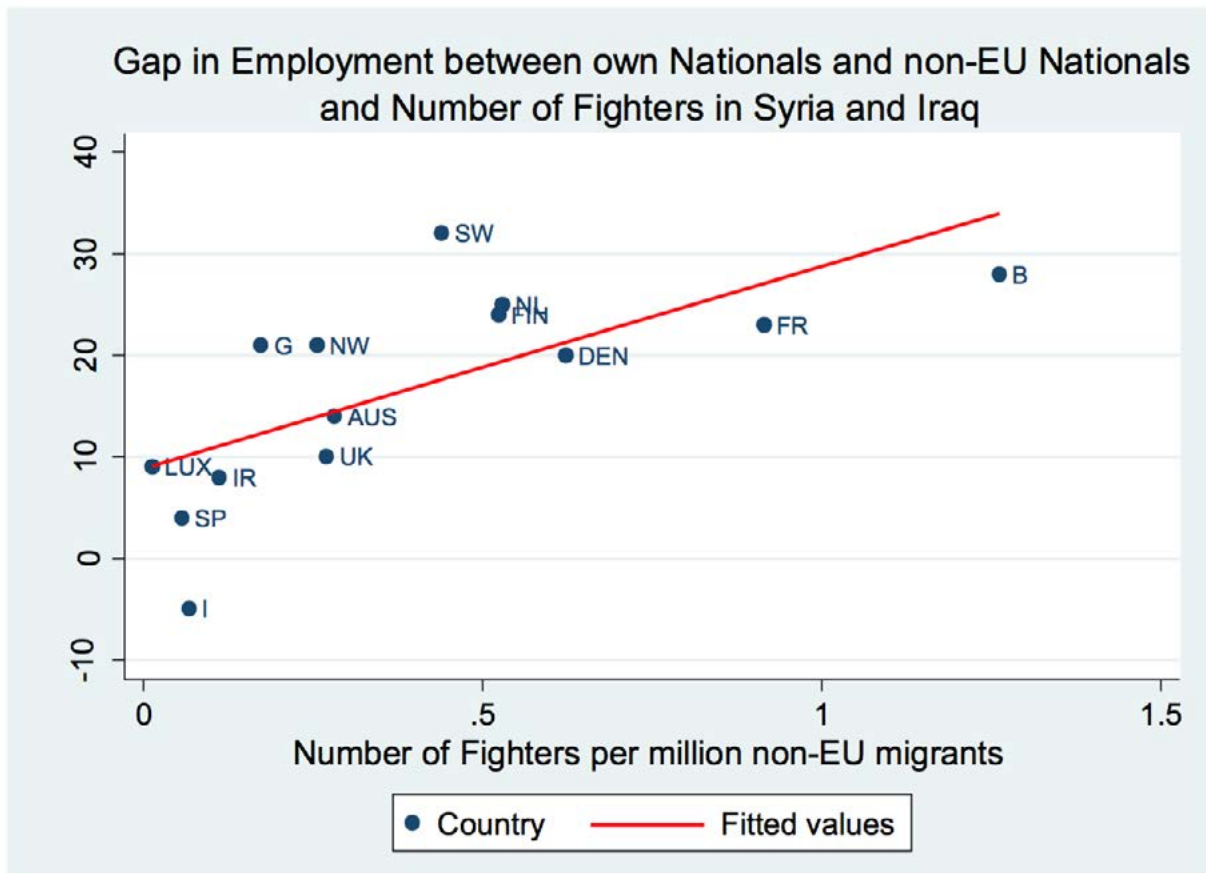
(y) Here the denominator for the percentage of foreign fighters is the Non-EU immigrant population.

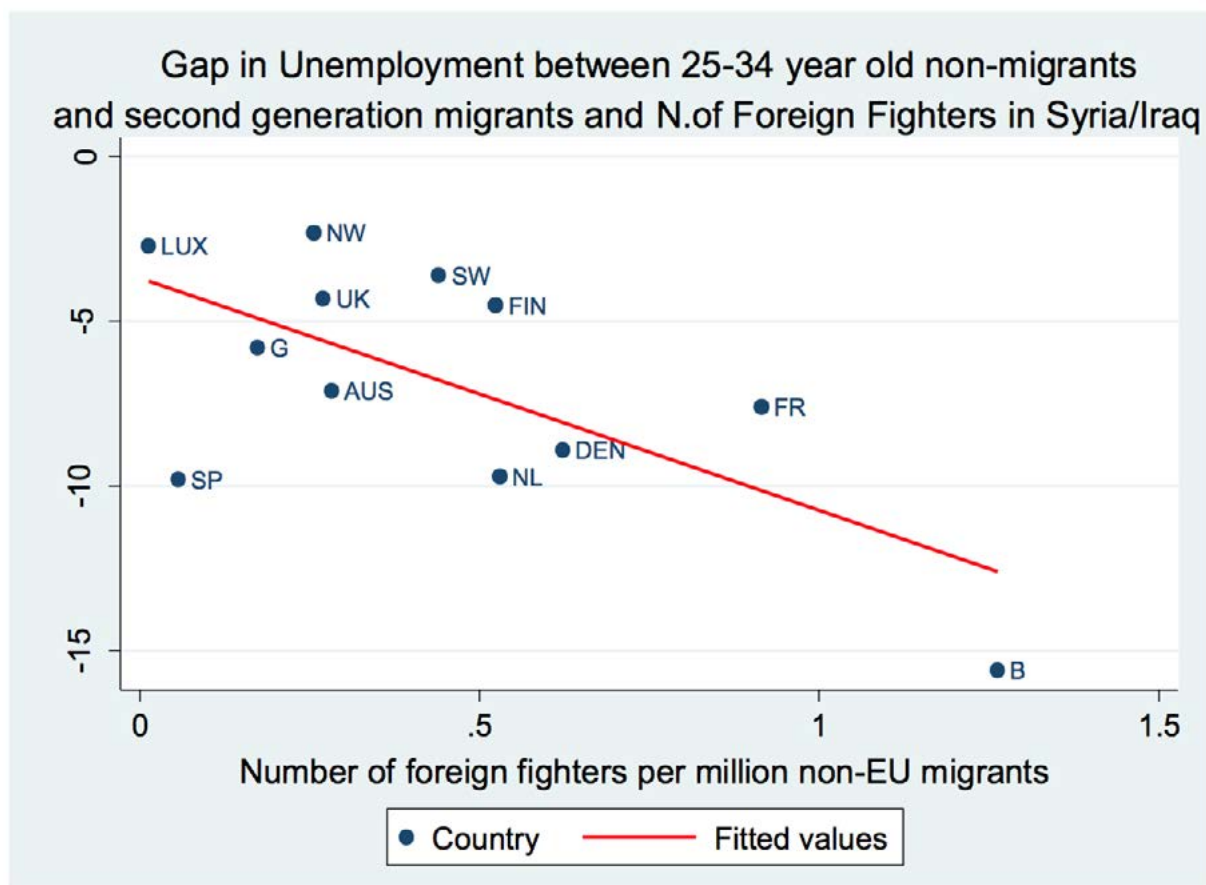### Robustness Analysis: Using Another Denominator

One can argue that one should not use the total population as the denominator in the calculation of the number of foreign fighters per capita, but rather the number of Muslims in a country, or the number of immigrants. I do not use the number of Muslims as I have not found an OECD or Eurostat definition (meaning the same one used for each country) to identify the number of Muslims. In addition, such a denominator would also miss non-Muslims or recent converts, estimated to be around 20% of all foreign fighters. Hence, for sake of comparison, I use the total number of non-EU immigrants residing in the countries in my sample. This denominator is used to perform a robustness check for graphs (1a and b). It has also been used and I also use it in the last column of Table 1. In case one would use yet another denominator ("the number of immigrants born outside of the EU") the correlations are confirmed with Pearson Corr.Coeff of 0.72*** for (a) in table 1 and -0.52* for (a'). Another type of robustness check is the removal of extreme values from the sample–in this case Italy and Belgium for Graph 1(a) and Spain and Belgium for Graph 1(b). This procedure, which reduces further an already small sample and is thus not a preferred procedure, results in the confirmation of the finding in Graph 1(a), with a statistically significant and positive correlation, but in doing so one loses the statistical significance for Graph 1(b). The latter is thus driven by the extremes. When, however, when performing the same check with the new denominator (the total number of non-EU immigrants) as in Graphs 3(a) and 3(b), both correlations are statistically significant.

Graphs 3a-b: Labour Market Gap and Number of Foreign Fighters, with #Non-EU Immigrants as Denominator

(3a) Robustness for Graph 1(a)

(3b): Robustness for Graph (1b)

Gap in Unemployment between 25-34 year old non-migrants and second generation migrants and N.of Foreign Fighters in Syria/Iraq

Concluding Remarks

In its edition of November 28, 2015, *The Economist* argued for stopping the bashing of Belgium because we are dealing with a European-wide phenomenon.[23] That plea must have pleased the Belgian government. The *Economist* is correct to state that other European countries also have to deal with young adults joining IS in Syria and Iraq. As in the case of Belgium they are also drawn from immigrant populations. But Belgium is at the extreme end based on the indicators used in present analysis, namely number of fighters per capita, gap between the employment status of natives and immigrants as well as in the PISA test scores. Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate to single out Belgium: the magnitude of the problems in all but two or three other countries appears to be significantly smaller.

Like other West-European countries, Belgium has a very elaborate state-financed welfare system. All citizens have health insurance coverage, schools and universities charge no or low fees while child- and unemployment benefits as well as pension schemes are all in place. While there does not appear to be a strong correlation with the gap in relative poverty in the sample of 14 countries examined here (see Table 1), there is one strong correlation with the gap in residence in cities with concentrations of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in some European countries. Almost all foreign fighters from Belgium originate from Brussels, Vilvoorde or Antwerp. As stressed in the introduction, this does not mean that each individual recruit who headed for Syria was or needs to be unemployed for the correlation to hold. Here is what Blattman and Ralston [24] said about this is a recent extensive overview of employment and violence:

> *"If terrorist groups want a small cadre of highly motivated, high-performing recruits, it may make sense to recruit from the better educated and even employed. Indeed, giving up gainful employment could be a signal of ideological commitment or other non-material incentives for committed participation".[25]*

> *There is some evidence, however, that poor economic conditions help terror organizations recruit more able, better-educated people to participate in more complex, higher-impact terror missions. For instance, high levels of unemployment seem to have enabled Palestinian terror organizations to recruit better educated, more mature, and more experienced suicide terrorists, who in turn attacked more important Israeli targets".[26]*

The correlations do suggest that the larger the gap of immigrants with the native population (the larger the disadvantage experienced at the group level) is in a given country, the more jihadi recruits are likely to emerge from that country.

The welfare state system comes at a cost of a closed labour market, meaning a labour system that heavily protects those who are in, but makes entry for newcomers very difficult – contrary to the situation in many Anglo-Saxon countries. In Belgium, just as in the Scandinavian Countries, inequality between citizens–measured for example by the Gini coefficient–is very low. What the Gini does not show, however, is the inter-group inequality between 'natives' on the one hand and 'immigrants' or 'non-EU nationals' on the other hand. From the present analysis, a pattern emerges across much of Europe that links the number of Syria fighters to low labour market participation and lack of educational achievements among immigrant populations.

Notes

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Terrorism and Beyond: Exploring the Fallout of the European Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in Syria and Iraq

by Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn

Abstract

The foreign fighter phenomenon in Syria and Iraq has led to many worries about the potential negative consequences that might occur in the near future. The scenario of returned foreign fighters launching attacks in the West is by far the most prominent one. This article aims to broaden the discussion on the potential fallout of the phenomenon by examining three particular dimensions: the physical threat (including the terrorist threat), ideological consequences, and societal consequences. After presenting these dimensions, three historical cases of jihadi foreign fighting (Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia) are examined to see to what extent different types of fallout materialized. The final part of the article attempts to gauge which indicators or signs of potential fallout are already observable in the case of the on-going conflict in Syria and Iraq. If we seek to prepare ourselves for the future fallout of today's foreign fighter phenomenon, we must look beyond the terrorist threat.

Keywords: Foreign fighters; Syria,; Afghanistan;Bosnia; Islamic State; jihadi terrorism

Introduction

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has attracted tens of thousands of foreign fighters [1] of which five to six thousand have come from Europe.[2] This has created serious concerns in European countries about the possible negative consequences, or fallout, of the foreign fighter phenomenon, particularly in the form of the potential terrorist threat posed by returning fighters. It is this scenario of returned foreign fighters staging attacks in Western countries that has featured most prominently in the majority of studies into the potential fallout of foreign fighting.[3] This specific angle that is mainly emphasized by counterterrorism professionals dominates the debate and overshadows other types of fallouts that we might have to face.

This article aims to contribute to a more comprehensive overview of the potential fallout of the foreign fighter phenomenon. It will do so by first exploring the often-mentioned physical threat in the form of terrorism and other types of violence that might be traced to foreign fighters. The focus will not be limited to short-term terrorist threats and violence in Western countries as longer-term consequences and those for the countries where these fighters go to will also be discussed. The second dimension that will be studied is ideology. Foreign fighting may lead to a growing appeal of, in this case, transnational jihadi ideology and bring with it an increased potential for recruitment by movements linked to that ideology. The third and final dimension that will be explored concerns the societal consequences of the foreign fighter phenomenon, such as polarization and securitization within the countries that the fighters depart from, reintegration in home countries as well as in post-conflict countries, and problems on a more personal level such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and broken families.[4]

The aim is not to present a complete list of all forms of fallout but rather to broaden the current discussion by highlighting three particular aspects. The focus will be on jihadi foreign fighters, the dominant foreign fighter phenomenon of today, and the potential fallout of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. The first part of the article provides an overview of the three types of fallout (physical, ideological and societal). In the second part, these aspects of fallout are examined in three cases of jihadi foreign fighting: Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Somalia. It can be shown that certain types of fallout are prominent in some cases, but less so in others. The final part examines what fallout is to be expected from today's presence of European foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Types of Fallout

The Physical Threat

The first type of fallout is the violence and physical threat linked to foreign fighters. This includes the potential terrorist threat posed by returning foreign fighters who could come back further radicalized, battle-hardened, and subsequently use their experience and extremist links to launch new attacks.[5] This could happen during or after the conflict. Conversely, "wannabe" or failed foreign fighters who are unable to reach jihadi battlefields–regardless of whether they are stopped by the authorities or denied access by foreign fighter groups–might choose to engage in terrorism at home instead. Another scenario is that of sleeper cells that are instructed to stay under the radar for years before being reactivated to launch attacks. A final example linked to a terrorist threat in the home country originates from the presence of networks that are involved in recruitment and logistical support for groups in conflict zones. These networks might also broaden their activities and start focusing on home countries, effectively bridging the divide between foreign and domestic activities, such as has been studied extensively by Petter Nesser.[6] He has shown how jihadi plots in Europe "usually involve interaction between a cell and extremist networks in the attack country, as well as international networks".[7]

Similarly, as there might be a nexus between domestic and foreign activities, there might also be a so-called "terrorism-crime"-nexus. This debated topic within terrorism studies has gained more attention in recent years.[8] Some scholars suggest that we should refrain from seeing terrorist organizations and "classical" criminal organizations as two contrasting types of either fully politically or non-politically motivated organizations.[9] Terrorist organizations often engage in criminal activities, such as robberies, drug trafficking or money-laundering to finance their operations. Besides the possible involvement of networks that support foreign fighters via criminal activities, foreign fighters might also use their experience to participate in other types of criminal activities upon return.

Another example of a physical threat is the impact foreign fighters could have on local conflicts.[10] An often suggested implication is that foreign fighters could broaden such conflicts by getting other parties that either support or fight them involved, or use their presence as an excuse to escalate a pre-existing conflict with local or regional adversaries. These fighters could also form new or strengthen existing terrorist organizations. Following insights from the field of negotiation studies, this could mean that conflict resolution could become more complicated, or that different negotiation strategies are required.[11] Many foreign fighters join the struggle of an insurgency against a state, vying for – in most cases – independence, change of government, or restoration of order. If foreign fighters join groups pursuing such causes and use terrorist tactics to that end, they might be called "conditional absolute terrorists who have something to negotiate about – territory, independence, conditions – even if their suicidal tactics are absolute".[12] Another possible way in which foreign fighters could be linked to violence is by introducing more brutal tactics or different norms about what is allowed during combat, such as suicide attacks.

Another often-mentioned consequence for local conflicts is the impact foreign fighters might have on the strength and reputation of the side they are fighting for. It is often assumed that they strengthen the side they join in the battle. Kristin Bakke, however, has shown that it could also have the exact opposite effect.[13] This has been reconfirmed by more recent studies of Ben Rich and Dara Conduit, who have demonstrated that the presence of jihadi foreign fighters in Chechnya and Syria "have had a catastrophic impact on international and domestic perceptions of the opposition" and that "(i)n some cases, this has led observers to transfer support back to the antagonistic government, preferring the known government over the potentially destabilizing effects of a revolutionary jihadist regime".[14]

In addition to the impact on the local conflict, foreign fighters could also be involved in violence outside the country itself. For instance, foreign fighters could continue to stay together after the conflict has terminated,

and look for other places where they could continue their jihad. This idea of foreign fighters "hijacking local conflicts" has been mentioned in many studies.[15] The fighters could also leave the country to set up training camps somewhere else. The formation of al-Qaida and its activities in multiple countries around the world are a case in point. According to David Malet, the fact that foreign fighters do not return to their home countries does not mean the fighters did not desire to do so. He claims that this often resulted from "the policies of their home and host states that prevented reintegration and created cohorts of stateless, and now professionalized, actors who perpetuate in weakly-governed conflict zones."[16]

The Impact on Ideological Currents and Recruitment

A second type of fallout relates to the influence the foreign fighter phenomenon could have on the reinforcement and spread of their ideology. In this case, this applies to the transnational jihadi ideology that emerged from the 1980s conflict in Afghanistan. Foreign fighters usually claim to fight in defense of a certain community that is facing an existential threat. A "transnational identity" links these fighters to the community they are fighting for.[17] This transnational identity is derived from adhering to a certain ideology and being part of movements linked to that ideology. This partly explains why Communists from close to fifty countries joined the International Brigades in Spain in the 1930s fighting alongside the Republican side against the Fascists under General Franco. Similarly, it explains why jihadis in the 1980s came to Afghanistan to support the local fighters against the "infidel" Communists. The experience of foreign fighting can profoundly influence the course of development of a particular ideology, the heroic stories that are being told about the accomplishments of those who adhere to the ideology, and the ideas of what it means to be part of such movements.

One specific example is the formation of a "foreign fighter legacy". Regardless of their military accomplishments, foreign fighters tend to build a positive narrative, portraying themselves as a brave fighting force. This narrative or "political myth" connects the ideology to the idea of the fighters defending a certain transnational community. This type of narrative can have a long-lasting impact if future generations in these movements continue to see themselves as defenders of certain communities, and act accordingly. Mohammed Hafez, for instance, has shown how a specific "subculture of volunteerism and martyrdom" that was born in Afghanistan remained to be highly influential in many subsequent conflicts.[18] Another example of how foreign fighters' experiences could have a long-lasting influence on ideology is the formation of an enemy image. Fighting in a battle and, equally important, being attacked by others determines who is perceived as the enemy.[19] As a consequence, even those who are not directly involved in fighting against these foreign fighters but who condemn it or try to stop them from joining – such as authorities blocking fighters to leave – might also be seen as hostile actors. This determines the position vis-à-vis other actors and also contributes to narratives of the groups.

Another important aspect of ideological fallout is the splitting of local insurgent groups and the radicalization, or further "extremization" of certain groups, or an ideological current. This aspect has been studied by Rich and Conduit who conclude – with regard to the cases of Chechnya and Syria – that this has led to "a jihadization of the opposition".[20] The jihadi foreign fighters managed to normalize the portrayal of the struggle in Chechnya as a civilizational clash between Islam and the rest of the world. It also led to a split in the opposition between those who saw the struggle more as a secular and nationalist one and those who stressed the jihadi and religious nature of it.[21] Similarly, splits in movements could also occur around methods that are permitted in combat, and ideas about where the next battle should be waged. It could also revolve around the question whether it is mainly a local fight or that a global agenda should be pursued.

In addition to these possible consequences relating to ideology formation, it could also strengthen the reach of an ideology. For instance, the presence of foreign fighters often manages to draw international attention to the conflict and the proclaimed cause they are fighting for. Thus, it might be used as a successful tool to

draw (renewed) attention to a cause, and can be part of propaganda efforts to frame the conflict in a certain way. It could also provide renewed legitimacy to a cause or ideology that appears to have lost importance. The presence of foreign fighters could prove that certain transnational identities are relevant and need to be defended, such as happened when Abdullah Azzam stressed the individual obligations linked to transnational jihadism (to be discussed below). Another example of how the reach or appeal of an ideology could be strengthened is related to the earlier-mentioned foreign fighter legacy. Returned foreign fighters could enjoy a kind of street credibility and status as experienced fighters. Their role model and presence in certain communities could motivate a next generation to become foreign fighters.[22]

The Impact on Societies

A third and final type of fallout encompasses the consequences for societies. The foreign fighter phenomenon could, for instance, affect national policies and perceptions on (counter-) terrorism and related issues, such as immigration. Polarization could arise when foreign fighters are part of a particular ethnic, religious, or ideological group in the home country. The general population could become anxious about alleged support for militancy – or lack of public condemnation of it – among affected diaspora communities. Additionally, returning fighters will commonly be seen as a potential threat, resulting in public calls for fierce and immediate actions to counter this threat. Conversely, anxiety can stem from measures taken by authorities targeting these specific ethnic, religious or ideological groups. Furthermore, securitization could occur, which means that the issue of foreign fighters is increasingly perceived to be an important security threat, and that specific measures or resources need be mobilized to address it.[23] It could lead to higher levels of fear among the general population, or result in other (security) issues moving down the ladder of policy priorities, as resources and attention are devoted to this particular issue.[24]

Another example of societal consequences for the home countries is the reintegration process of returned fighters. Depending on the actions that have been linked to foreign fighters in the conflict zone (e.g. war crimes, beheadings, torture and rape), and the general stance of the authorities towards the foreign fighter phenomenon, returning fighters might be closely monitored, prosecuted, detained, or become part of intensive rehabilitation programs. This could result in a serious strain on the resources of various agencies, ranging from the public prosecution service, the prison system, the intelligence services to social workers or probation services involved in accompanying their return into society. The same applies to efforts to try to prohibit young Muslims from becoming foreign fighters.

Some of the societal consequences for the (post-)conflict country might be related to physical threats. For instance, disturbed relations between sectors of society could lead to violent clashes. In discussions about the (social) peace in a post-conflict country, these issues are often subsumed under the acronym "DDR" – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. These are generally regarded to be key components of post-conflict peace consolidation, with re-integration being more society-oriented and disarmament and demobilization being more security-oriented.[25] Problems might arise when, for instance, foreign fighters choose to stay in the post-conflict country and refuse to disarm. They might ignore requests by the post-conflict authorities to leave the country. In other cases, they are invited to stay and receive citizenship as a reward for their fighting efforts. The presence of these armed individuals and groups could lead to tensions, and become an obstacle towards a more peaceful future. When they disarm, there might still be barriers to full integration in the country, as they often adhere to different norms and habits. This could result in a strenuous and potentially volatile relationship with the local population. Pressure could also be put on the post-conflict authorities to prosecute or extradite these fighters if they are suspected of having been involved in war crimes or acts of terrorism. Unwillingness or inability to do so could damage the international reputation of the post-conflict country, and might result in these countries being labelled as "state sponsors of terrorism" and thereby become subject to sanctions.[26]

At the individual, personal level, there are multiple forms of fallout. Most of these are predominantly relevant for the fighter himself, but some also have a clear impact on society. Two important examples are the consequences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and the issue of broken families. Several studies have established a link between combat experience and a lack of training to cope with traumatic events on the one hand, and the risk of PTSD on the other.[27] It is also known that PTSD has serious ramifications for the quality of life of those affected, and might result in behavior that could endanger those suffering from PTSD as well as those in their immediate social surroundings. Combat exposure is linked to increased risks of abuse of a spouse, depression, and substance abuse.[28] Foreign fighters could thus introduce these kinds of problems into society upon their return. Then there is the impact on families. Foreign fighters frequently leave behind broken families in the home country who are in most cases confronted with the loss of a husband or son. This could affect the life of the family members, most obviously on the emotional level but also economically. These challenges might be further exacerbated when families are stigmatized or feel deeply hurt or ashamed because a family member has left to become a foreign fighter.[29]

Fallout from Historical Cases of Foreign Fighting

An examination of historical cases of foreign fighting illustrates how certain types of fallout might be present in some cases while being less relevant in others. Each case of foreign fighting has its own characteristics and dynamics that will determine whether or not certain forms of fallout can be identified. The following takes a brief look at the consequences of jihadi foreign fighting in three particular cases Afghanistan (1980s), Bosnia (1990s), and Somalia (2000s). These cases have been discussed in more detail elsewhere and are here used to concretize and illustrate the types of fallout that were discussed in more general terms earlier.[30] Admittedly, an examination of other cases of jihadi foreign fighting could lead to other results. The selection of these three cases is motivated by a desire to study the fallout of foreign fighting in different regions (South Asia, Europe, Africa) and different contexts (pre- and post-9/11).

The Physical Threat

Examples of physical fallout can be seen in all three cases. It has been widely reported that foreign fighters who joined al-Shabaab in Somalia during the war against Ethiopia (2006-2009) introduced new methods of fighting such as suicide attacks.[31] One such attack was perpetrated by Abdulrahman Ahmed Haji, a Dane of Somali descent. Haji blew himself up during a college graduation ceremony and killed more than 20 people, including three government ministers.[32]

In terms of exacerbating the conflict and rising tensions between the local population and foreign fighters, we have seen clear examples in Bosnia and Afghanistan. For instance, the Bosnian army tried to put an end to the ruthless behavior of foreign fighters who were involved in horrendous atrocities and who regarded the local Bosnians to be impious Muslims. A deputy of the Bosnian army told the Western press that "[i]t was a mistake to let [the foreign fighters] in here (…). They commit most of the atrocities and work against the interests of the Muslim people".[33] In Afghanistan, the foreign fighters were regarded with much suspicion as well. Not only did many lack fighting experience and dedication, there were also "ideological and cultural frictions" between the foreign fighters and the local fighters.[34] Al-Shabaab offers another interesting example as it appears that some foreign fighters turned into targets for some local fighters. Since 2010, many who were deemed too critical of the leadership or too outspoken about internal affairs have been killed or prohibited from leaving the group.[35]

The scenario of experienced foreign fighters travelling to other conflict zones was most visible in Bosnia, where several Afghan veterans had joined the fight. After the Soviet Union had withdrawn its troops from Afghanistan in 1989, in-fighting intensified between the different groups. The fall of the Najibullah regime

in 1992 and the outbreak of the civil war made the idea of a defensive jihad, as had been propagated by Abdullah Azzam, redundant. The war in Bosnia proved to be an opportunity for a number of Afghan veterans – unwilling or unable to return home – to fight there. Furthermore, groups like al-Qaida recognized that Bosnia might offer an opportunity to set up training camps or eventually stage attacks against other enemies.[36] However, despite the hopes of some jihadi groups to use Bosnia as a "springboard" for terrorist activity elsewhere, this never materialized. The impact of such conflicts on the mobilization and radicalization processes of many jihadis in Europe was large, but rather reflects the ideological impact as will be discussed in the next section. The three cases provide examples of how the focal point of militancy can move from one jihadi theatre to another. The aftermath of the war in Afghanistan demonstrates how foreign fighters could continue their activities in other countries. This could be by way of direct engagement in other conflicts as well as take the form of a consolidation of a transnational terrorist network such as the one of al-Qaida, that subsequently planned terrorist attacks in multiple countries.

Concerning the terrorist threat, we see some examples of returned foreign fighters who became involved in terrorism in their home country. One example is the so-called "Roubaix Gang", of which two members, Christophe Caze and Lionel Dumont, had fought in Bosnia. They planned to detonate a car bomb during a G7-meeting in Lille, but the police disarmed the bomb and arrested the members.[37] Another foiled plot was linked to British-Jamaican fighter Andrew Rowe, who had not only fought in Bosnia, but allegedly also met with Islamists in other parts of the world. Rowe was arrested in 2003 on the French side of the Channel tunnel with traces of high explosives in his socks.[38] None of those European Bosnia returnees actually managed to stage a successful attack.

Another important insight is provided by studying the link between foreign fighting and radical activity – such as fundraising, propaganda, and recruitment for terrorism–in the home country. The clearest example is perhaps London where many foreign fighters found an environment in which they could focus on a variety of activities: giving radical sermons but also making connections between cells abroad and at home to help potential foreign fighters reaching conflict zones.[39] A study by Petter Nesser found similar scenarios emerging in several other European countries in the 1990s.[40]

The most well-known example of a threat posed by a foreign fighter, although not a returning one but someone who remained abroad, is Osama bin Laden, who plotted attacks in a foreign country against multiple other countries. Two of the 9/11 hijackers presumably also fought in Bosnia.[41] Other important examples are the attacks perpetrated by al-Shabaab in neighboring countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, although the direct involvement of foreign fighters remains unclear. Another case is offered by Michael Adelobajo. This British citizen apparently tried to join al-Shabaab in 2010 but was arrested by the Ethiopian authorities at the Somali border and was sent back to the UK. Three years later he killed the British soldier Lee Rigby on the streets of Woolwich, London.[42] This example shows how failed foreign fighters could equally pose a security threat.

Impact on Ideological Currents and Mobilization

The importance of the three episodes of foreign fighter experiences in terms of ideological fallout cannot be overestimated, particularly in the case of Afghanistan. Although the foreign fighters mostly played a marginal role during combat, their presence in the conflict zone contributed to the idea of a foreign fighter legacy that still resonates today. According to Petter Nesser, "it was the Arab volunteers in the anti-Soviet struggle who created the ideologies and movements that would become referred to as "jihadism".[43] A key figure in the mobilization for the fight in Afghanistan was the Palestinian sheikh Abdullah Azzam. Thomas Hegghammer has described how Azzam "is still an icon of the Islamist movement, and among radicals his stature is only matched by Osama bin Laden's".[44] He managed to draw tens of thousands of fighters to the area. Perhaps more importantly, he took "the first step toward a more global vision of jihad", although he himself never

focused on targeting the far enemy by way of terrorist attacks on foreign soil.[45] The case of Afghanistan also shows how internal disagreements arose. Stéphane Lacroix showed that the foreign fighter movement in Afghanistan became increasingly split into several camps. Fierce competition arose between, for instance, al-Zawahiri and Abdullah Azzam about the young Bin Laden.[46] Another point of contention between the two was which enemy should be targeted: the external enemy (according to Azzam) or the apostate Muslim regimes (according to al-Zawahiri).[47] Fawaz A. Gerges even goes so far as saying that "it is doubtful that transnational jihad would have materialized without the prolonged Afghan war and its socializing and mobilizational effects".[48]

The conflicts in Bosnia and Somalia provided pretexts for the invocation of a defensive jihad. This was particularly relevant in the case of Bosnia. The conflict started shortly after Afghanistan had seemed to have lost much of its original appeal. Similarly, the Ethiopian invasion in Somalia in 2006 was framed as another instance of the "crusaders" attacking the Islamic world. Al-Qaida deputy leader Al-Zawahiri stated it as follows: "My Muslim brothers everywhere (...) While I am addressing you today, the crusader invading Ethiopian forces are violating the Islamic land of dear Somalia. (…) Here, I am urging the Islamic nation in Somalia to be steadfast in this new crusader battlefield, which America, its allies, and the United Nations are waging against Islam and Muslims".[49] A few years later, Bin Laden issued a video titled "Fight On, Champions of Somalia".[50] Conflicts like those in Somalia and Bosnia demonstrated to potential supporters what it would mean to be a jihadi and who should be seen as enemies of Islam.

The presence of foreign fighters in these conflicts also managed to draw international attention to the cause. The foreign fighters were often aware of the opportunity to frame the conflict in a favorable way. During the Bosnian conflict, videotapes were distributed in numerous, mainly Arab, countries, showing mutilated corpses and wounded civilians. They added "footage from World War II concentration camps to draw parallels between the past slaughter of Jews and the current slaughter of Muslims by European Christians".[51] In Bosnia, the frame was that the West was doing nothing to stop innocent civilians from being slaughtered. The jihadis were the only ones coming to help. As reported by Raffaello Pantucci, Lorenzo Vidino and Evan Kohlmann in their study of al-Shabaab, these kinds of conflicts ensured that "the global jihadist movement also benefits, as it can expand its influence and add credibility to its narrative that Islam is under attack from non-Muslims".[52] Still, some critical remarks about the "ideological success" of these conflicts need to be made. Thomas Hegghammer, for instance, has shown how the Bosnian jihad was an "anti-climax" for the Saudi jihadi movement "because it never took the proportions of the Afghan jihad and because the Arabs were not welcome in Bosnia".[53]

Another form of ideological fallout was the role played by returned foreign fighters in recruiting others to become foreign fighters. In particular, the Arab veterans from Afghanistan gained such a reputation. For instance, Abu Hamza al-Masri, became one of the key figures of the Finsbury Mosque in London in the late 1990s. He had also been in Bosnia, and this experience made him a persuasive recruiter. Another example is Anwar Shaaban, a senior leader of Al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya who had fought in Afghanistan and had contacts with Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman and Al-Zawahiri. After obtaining asylum in Italy, he was the central node in recruiting Europeans to fight in Bosnia.[54]

The Impact on Societies

The three cases show mixed societal consequences. For instance, there is a difference in the levels of polarization that seemed to occur in the home countries. Generally speaking, the relatively low numbers of foreign fighters meant that the discussion in the home countries never became quite intense, and that reintegration problems of returning foreign fighters seemed to have remained manageable. It was not only numbers, but also the public and official stance towards the foreign fighter phenomenon that mattered. For instance, during the war in Afghanistan, the fighters could sometimes count on the sympathy of the

population in the home country. The American jihadis in Afghanistan were fighting the Cold War enemy of the US. As reported by J.M. Berger, this meant that those who went there could still be seen as "good Americans".[55] It is important to stress that these three conflicts took place in very different international contexts. During the war in Bosnia, al-Qaida had not yet launched terrorist attacks against the West. The attacks on 9/11 drastically changed the attitude of Western countries towards foreign conflicts with jihadi elements. Similarly, it also resulted in a different attitude towards the people who aimed to take part in these fights. Thus, the post-9/11 context of Somalia and the prominence of the jihadi threat on many security agendas in Western countries make this case very different from Afghanistan and Bosnia.

The situation with regard to Bosnia shows similarities with the case of Afghanistan. The numbers of foreign fighters were too low to lead to much upheaval in the (at least Western) countries where the fighters departed from. Also, it has been said that the presence of foreign fighters was "tacitly consented to both by Bosnians and by the international community", similar to what happened in Afghanistan.[56] Here again, the sympathetic media reporting regarding the conflict "opened up the pool of recruits to a much wider range". [57] However, the departure of foreign fighters from Western countries did at times lead to suspicion and investigations. This was particularly relevant in a number of key recruitment centers, such as in Milan. In 1995, during operation "Sphinx" of the Italian intelligence agency, seventeen militants were arrested at the Intercultural Institute (ICI) while many more were subject to investigation.[58] Interestingly, wider pressure on the authorities to close the institute did not materialize when its links to the Bosnian jihad became apparent. This only happened after the attacks on 9/11 when it became clear that the ICI seemed to be "one of Al Qaeda's main recruiting stations" in Europe.[59]

Instead of polarization or securitization within the countries where the foreign fighters left from, the Bosnian case shows how this could occur within the post-conflict country itself. This is linked to the issue of reintegration of fighters. After the 1995 Dayton Agreement, foreign forces were officially ordered to leave the country within thirty days. The foreign fighters, however, were in many cases granted citizenship as a reward for their fighting efforts. This allowed them to stay, and it has been estimated that at least 700 to 1000–but some sources report up to 3,000 militants [60]–of them have stayed. They mostly formed their own enclaves in former Serb towns surrounding Maglaj, reportedly with sharia law in place.[61] However, it was also said that many of the fighters married widowed Bosnians and lived "undisturbed with their new families in other people's [former Serb] houses".[62] After 2000, when some Serbs reclaimed their original houses, the Bosnian government evicted the former fighters from these villages. Whereas there was perhaps only limited integration of these fighters into the new Bosnian state, real violent incidents seemed to have been rare. However, tensions between the Bosnian Muslim population and the often much more conservative foreign fighters incidentally rose. Some report that there was a "cultural and religious uneasiness" between the two.[63] That uneasiness slowly transformed into something more pressing, namely a general fear that the "potentially threatening forms of Islam that the Mujahideen had brought with them to Bosnia were spreading, and that any potential ties the former Mujahideen may have to al-Qaida were threatening to turn the country into a sanctuary for terrorists and terrorist training".[64]

This shows how the presence of foreign fighters was initially accepted as a simple fact of post-conflict Bosnia, but was later securitized by the Bosnian government and international actors, especially after the attacks on 9/11. These attacks formed a major turning point in the Bosnian authorities' stance towards the former fighters, as they decided to withdraw the citizenship of many of them. A proven link to 9/11 or terrorist activity is still disputed.[65] As reported by Jennifer Mustapha, their mere past as former jihadi fighters was enough to invoke this idea of a threat.[66] According to Stephanie Zosak, '[t]his scrutiny of the mujahideen is a direct response to pressure the international community has put on the Bosnian government to take action against these individuals due to concerns that they may use Bosnia and Herzegovina as a base for promoting and perpetrating acts of terrorism".[67] However, other sources suggest that it might be oversimplified to claim that the perception of the former foreign fighters as a threat was only motivated by some kind of

political agenda. It has been said that the Bosnian State Intelligence Agency (OSA) had been genuinely worried about the lack of integration of some of these former fighters and the consolidation of Islamist networks in parts of the country.[68]

In the case of Somalia, the situation is different. Most foreign fighters joined al-Shabaab that is on the lists of designated terrorist organizations of, amongst others, the US and UK.[69] Michael Taarnby and Lars Hallundbaek point to the UK and the Scandinavian countries as places where recruitment for al-Shabaab has been particularly problematic.[70] In their attempts to interview members of the Somali Diaspora community in Denmark about their views on the terrorist organization, the authors were confronted with a lot of hesitation to cooperate. Many in the Somali Diaspora find this topic extremely sensitive to talk about, and are sometimes threatened by those with sympathies for al-Shabaab if they speak out.[71] Many European countries regard foreign fighters who have joined the conflict in Somalia to be a potential threat, as can for instance be seen in a 2010 statement by the British head of MI5, who said that Somalia had become one of the most serious bases for potential attacks against the UK.[72] This means the Somali diaspora communities are experiencing pressure from several sides: from within – where talking about al-Shabaab to outsiders is not allowed – but also from outside, as the debate about Somali youth leaving to fight is sometimes tied to debates about immigration and integration of minorities. There is, however, another side to polarization that seems to have been more prominent in these cases: stigmatization within Somali diaspora communities. In a US Congressional Hearing, a Somali community leader and uncle of a foreign fighter called Osman Ahmed voiced his frustration and difficulties with sharing information with the authorities. Ahmed stated that:

> "… we have been painted as bad people within the Somali community by the mosque management. We have been threatened for just speaking out. Some members of Abu-Bakr Al-Saddique mosque told us that if we talk about the issue, the Muslim center will be destroyed and Islamic communities will be wiped out. They tell parents that if they report their missing kid to the FBI that FBI will send the parents to Guantanamo Jail. And this message has been very effective tool to silence parents and the community".[73]

This statement illustrates how members are stigmatized within their own community and how they are afraid to speak out. Ahmed also testified how entire families are affected by the decision of a child to travel to Somalia. Not only do these families have to cope with their own anger and sadness, the stigmatization makes them unwanted elements within their own environment.

Reports about the impact foreign fighting could have on the former fighter himself are usually anecdotal in nature. The cases or stories that managed to attract attention are often tied to some broader political discussion. One such case is Imad al-Husein, a Syrian national who fought along the foreign fighters in Bosnia, received citizenship, married a Bosnian widow and continued to live in the country.[74] Following the attacks on 9/11, however, al-Husein lost his citizenship, and in 2008, he was planned to be deported to Syria.[75] Al-Husein won an EHCR court case that prevented his deportation. The result was some kind of "legal limbo" that forced him to live in a deportation center for years.[76] His case attracted a lot of attention and rallies were organized to block his deportation, which – according to a leaked cable of the US Embassy in Sarajevo – was the result of a "skillful public relations campaign (…) [to] highlight (…) his role in the war in order to appeal to Bosniak public opinion." At the same time the case also "has the potential to be appropriated by Bosnian Serbs for nationalist purposes as demonstrated by the sensationalist coverage of the Zenica rally in the RS press".[77] This shows how such cases could be exploited by multiple actors.

The issue of PTSD rarely surfaces in reports about foreign fighters. There is little reason to assume this means it has not been an issue for some of these fighters. Several studies have linked combat experience as a risk factor to PTSD.[78] For instance, it has been estimated that between 13 and 20% of the American soldiers who have fought in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom might be suffering from PTSD.[79] There is reason to believe this number might be equal, if not much higher among former foreign

fighters as some of the "mitigating factors" that are often present in official armies – good training and proper aftercare – seem to be absent.

Potential Fallout of Jihadi Foreign Fighting in Syria and Iraq

Before summarizing the extent to which the three types of fallout have been observed in these three cases, one final question will be addressed. Against the backdrop of today's large presence of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, the question arises if we can expect similar types of fallout as shown in the case studies. This is a difficult question as the conflict is still on-going and the eventual fallout will be influenced by many factors that cannot be foreseen at this moment. Despite these obvious limitations, this section will examine what we already see and discuss what to expect.

One difference between the foreign fighter phenomenon in Syria and Iraq today and the historical cases relates to the magnitude. Around 5-6,000 European foreign fighters have joined the conflict on the side of jihadi groups.[80] Against this backdrop, the magnitude of the fallout can be expected to increase as well. The reality of foreign fighters joining a terrorist organization with a transnational agenda is not a new phenomenon. As shown in the historical cases, terrorist organizations were present in two of these conflicts – Bosnia and Somalia – and were the product of the third one – Afghanistan. In all of the foreign fighter movements, there have been elements with a more global than a local agenda, and most of these groups did not shy away from using terrorist tactics.

The most visible fallout of the conflict in Iraq and Syria today is the physical threat. For instance, we have seen multiple examples of plots and attacks by returnees or sympathizers in European countries (Brussels: 2014, 2016; Paris: 2015).[81] Foreign fighters who are still in Syria or Iraq have also been involved in planning some of these attacks. Most analysts predict that organizations such as Islamic State will continue to try to launch attacks abroad, with Europe as one of its main targets.[82] This strong terrorist element makes the current conflict fundamentally different from the historical cases of foreign fighters that were discussed, and it is therefore not just an example of a particularly large foreign fighter mobilization. This analysis seems plausible as IS has been very vocal about its desire to launch terrorist attacks outside the conflict zone. In addition to that, IS' spokesman al-Adnani – again – urged followers of IS in a speech in May 2016 to launch attacks independently if they are unable to reach areas of IS control.[83] His call appeared to be related to the military losses the organization has been facing lately and the fact that the numbers of new fighters joining IS has been declining, forcing IS to "stimulate" attacks in addition to organizing these themselves.[84]

Another crucial difference with the three historical cases is that IS has announced the establishment of a "Caliphate" in parts of Syria and Iraq, and could be called a quasi- or proto-state, although it is currently facing increasing pressure and losing territory. The Caliphate narrative has strongly affected and even partially changed the ideological appeal of joining the conflict.[85] It does not only attract those who wish to fight to liberate Muslim lands from foreign "occupation", but also those whose main aim is to live in what is said to be a true Islamic state. The organization tries to convince fighters that they can join something "new" in the Caliphate, and that this is the "simplicity and unity that they imagine existed in the earliest days of Islam".[86]

Great uncertainty surrounds what will happen in the "post-conflict country" straddling Syria and Iraq. Analyzing the battle near Mosul that started in October 2016, the Soufan Group noted that "deep internal sectarian and ethnic divisions will play a significant role in the long-term outcome in Mosul".[87] The position of foreign fighters will be just one of the myriad challenges that Syria and Iraq will have to face. If the Islamic State were to be militarily overrun, the question is what will happen to the foreign fighters who are still alive. Much will depend on whether foreign fighters will be able to stay in these countries as well as the policies that are implemented in their home countries. They might remain in Syria and Iraq when the

face prosecution in their home countries. Some might choose to move to countries where they think they can escape prosecution.

Foreign fighters might also move to another conflict zone, either in response to policies in the "post-conflict countries", or motivated by a desire to continue fighting a jihad elsewhere. This will have regional implications. For instance, it has already been observed that foreign fighters are increasingly moving to the "next" battle zones, including Libya.[88] This movement of battle-hardened jihadis from one conflict zone to the next one would very much align with the insights from historical cases, where those who most strongly believed in the transnational duty of conducting a jihad did not choose to return home but continued to fight elsewhere. Given the current developments and changes on the ground, it is too early to conclude on what might happen.

Another question relates to the potential ideological fallout. The historical cases have shown that the actual numbers of fighters or their military accomplishments are not the most important factors when it comes to ideological impact. All three cases demonstrated how the experience of foreign fighting contributes to a foreign fighter legacy that can affect the strength and expansion of an ideology. The case of Afghanistan is the clearest example, which is partially a result of the duration of the conflict and the number of fighters involved, but also because of the importance of individuals like Azzam, al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden. Both Afghanistan and Somalia showed signs of the extremization of an ideology, while the case of Somalia showed how foreign fighters themselves could become victims of power struggles and ideological debates, something which might have occurred in all three cases. The case of Syria and Iraq already reveals similar signs of the extremization of movements, and partially as a result of that, splits within movements. The current battle between IS and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra – JaN) is an example. Aaron Zelin analyzed the struggle between the two groups in 2014, and noted that whereas al-Qaida's leadership was worried about excessive violence and losing support of local communities, the use of extreme methods and their potential blowbacks appear to be less of an issue for those who joined IS.[89] Several foreign fighters left JaN to join IS when the latter rose to power in parts of Syria. As with the historical cases, we can expect that the conflict in Syria and Iraq will remain influential on jihadi ideology in the decades to come. Despite the fact that IS might be militarily defeated and that other groups might take over, the experience of having managed to establish a self-proclaimed Caliphate with the help of foreign fighters, can be expected to feature prominently in future jihadi propaganda and might again attract future fighters.

Where the current case seems to deviate most strongly from the historical cases presented earlier is the societal fallout. The "foreign fighter phenomenon" has become the number one security issue in many countries. Many resources and much attention are now devoted to this issue. This was clearly not the case in most of the historical cases of foreign fighters, where it was often condoned in their countries of origin and not regarded to be an important security issue. Today the foreign fighter issue has become strongly securitized and criminalized, and has increased levels of fear of terrorism in European countries.[90] Other indicators of the potential societal fallout are polarization and distrust. Reciprocal radicalization between jihadis and other Islamists on the one hand and anti-Islam movements on the other hand is one aspect of this. Polarization and tensions between communities are for instance visible in the actions of right-wing popular movements such as Pegida – the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West. One well-known Pegida-sympathizer, Felix Menzel, for instance stated in one of the first interviews after the organization was founded in late 2014 that he believed "that what is unfolding in Iraq and Syria at the moment is a clear harbinger of the first global civil war".[91] Organizations like Pegida show how the issue of foreign fighters and broader discussions about (Islamic) radicalization are often tied to other societal issues such as immigration.

Another example of this increasing distrust and polarization is the pressure put on Muslim communities to speak out against IS and terrorism. In a study of the German Institute for International and Security

Affairs, it is stated that "these demands reinforce negative associations of Islam with terrorism and violence, and nourish threat perceptions and anti-Islamic prejudices, which in turn contribute to Muslims feeling increasingly excluded in Europe. Extremists can take advantage of this alienation for recruiting purposes". [92] While this statement is not limited to the foreign fighter phenomenon but holds for jihadism in general, the issue of large numbers of Muslim citizens leaving to fight for jihadi causes has brought the issue much closer to home in many parts of the world.

Conclusion

This article approached the potential fallout of today's jihadi foreign fighter phenomenon by not only looking at the potential terrorist threat posed to Western countries but by also discussing its ideological and societal dimensions. After examples of these types of fallout were provided, three historical cases of jihadi foreign fighting were examined. These three cases showed a somewhat mixed picture. With regard to the physical threat, all three cases indicated that this was clearly present. The scenario of returning foreign fighters launching attacks does not appear to have featured very prominently in these three historical cases. However, examples were found of foreign fighters who remained abroad and launched attacks, or who moved to a next conflict zone, especially in the case of Afghanistan. In addition, the three cases demonstrated that the presence of foreign fighters often led to conflictual relations with local militants, and that they were not always welcome. The case of Somalia provided an example of how a foreign fighter who was prevented from travelling to the conflict zone eventually became implicated in terrorist activity in the home country.

Regarding the ideological fallout, all three cases contributed to the strengthening of a foreign fighter legacy, although more so in the case of Afghanistan, than Bosnia and Somalia. The idea of fighting a "defensive jihad" to protect a transnational Muslim community still resonates today. In addition, spokesmen of foreign fighters managed to frame the conflict and their enemies in ways that boosted ideological impact. Returning fighters also played key roles in recruitment and managed to transform their real or alleged battlefield accomplishments into heroic stories about their jihadi experiences. Their street-credibility and status as returned foreign fighters should not be underestimated.

When it comes to societal fallout, polarization and securitization in European home countries appeared to have been a relatively minor issue historically, although the case of Somalia deviated from this. Whereas foreign fighters in Bosnia and Afghanistan could mostly count on support or passive tolerance within their home countries, this was not the case with regard to Somalia. In this post-9/11 context, foreign fighters joined an organization that was listed by many countries as a terrorist organization. The Somali case also showed how families of foreign fighters might become affected in the home country. Societal fallout in the post-conflict country was most visible in the case of Bosnia, where foreign fighters were initially welcomed but later became unwanted elements. This was partially the result of securitization processes following the attacks on 9/11 when new views on jihadism and international pressure resulted in changed attitudes towards former foreign fighters, who were increasingly viewed as a potential threat. However, it was also partially the result of reintegration problems and tensions between the former foreign fighters and the local population in Bosnia itself.

These three cases illustrate how the fallout of the foreign fighter phenomenon encompasses more than the possible terrorist threat posed to Western countries by returning foreign fighters. In the case of Syria and Iraq, we have already seen that this latter threat is real. However, the threat for the region itself, as well as the potential fallout related to the ideology and especially the societal dimensions need to be acknowledged. There are indications of a potentially substantial ideological and societal fallout from the wars currently raging in the Middle East. Whereas authorities are already devoting much of their attention to curbing the (potential) terrorist threat, it is as important to pay closer attention to the challenges that are linked to the other two dimensions.

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Notes

[1] The article will follow Malet's definition of foreign fighting–"non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict", see David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.9.

[2] The latest estimates are that more than 30,000 foreign fighters have joined jihadi groups, see for instance The Soufan Group, "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq," 2015, p.4.

[3] This observation has also been made by Ben Rich and Dara Conduit. In an earlier article in *Perspectives on Terrorism,* the author of this article has applied the same focus. See Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, "The Foreign Fighters' Threat: What History Can(not) Tell Us" 8, no. 5 (2014): pp. 59–73. Thomas Hegghammer studied why jihadis choose to go abroad or stay at home, and the terrorist threat posed by returnees in: Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", *American Political Science Review* 107.01 (2013): pp.1-15. Daniel Byman studied the terrorist threat to Western countries as well as to the Arab world; see Daniel Byman, "The Homecomings: What Happens When Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria Return?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 0731, no. May 2015 (2015): pp.1–22. Other examples are: Brian Michael Jenkins, "When Jihadis Come Marching Home," *Rand Corporation*, 2014; Jytte Klausen, "They're Coming: Measuring the Threat from Returning Jihadists," *Foreign Affairs*, 2014; Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): pp.14–30; Andrea Barzon and Orsola Greco, "Fighting Abroad: The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the Scope of International Law, the 'Blowback Effect' and National Counter-Terrorism Measures,", 2015, available at Available at SSRN, URL: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2690168, 2015.

[4] These three dimensions do not encompass all forms of spin-off effects. A different categorization of fallout – such as short-term vs. long-term consequences, or consequences for the conflict country vs. the home country – would have been possible as well.

[5] See for instance the Dutch threat assessment, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security, "DTN 32,", March 13, 2013. URL: https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/summary-dtn32-uk_tcm32-84137.pdf.

[6] Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015, p.8.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See, for instance, Steven Hutchinson and Pat O'Malley, "A Crime–Terror Nexus? Thinking on Some of the Links between Terrorism and Criminality," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 12 (2007): pp.1095–1107. See also Basra & Neumann's contribution in this Special Issue.

[9] Tamara Makarenko, "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism," *Global Crime* 6, no. 1 (2004), pp.129–45.

[10] In a 2014 *International Security* article, Kristin Bakke has outlined the various ways in which this is possible; see Kristin Bakke, "Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): pp.150–87.

[11] Scholars like William Zartman have analyzed how the type of organization influences the chances of success at the negotiation table. Certain types of organizations, the "revolutionary absolute", will never compromise, because violence is an end in itself; see I. William Zartman, "Negotiating with Terrorists," *International Negotiation* 8, no. 3 (2003), p.446.

[12] Ibid.

[13] K. Bakke, "Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies,", p.185.

[14] Ben Rich and Dara Conduit, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters on Indigenous Secular-Nationalist Causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 2 (2014), p.125.

[15] See for instance, Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci, and Evan Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict," *African Security* 3, no. 4 (2010), pp.216–238; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 58; Babak Rezvani, "Reflections on the Chechen Conflict: Geopolitics, Timing and Transformations," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. May 2015 (2014), p.8.

[16] David Malet, "Foreign Fighter Mobilization and Persistence in a Global Context," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2, no. 3 (2015), p.1.

[17] D. Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*, p.4.

[18] Mohammed H. Hafez, "Martyrs Without Borders: The Puzzle of Transnational Suicide Bombers," in Marie Breen-Smyth (Ed.)*The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence*, New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2012, p.186.

[19] For a theoretical view on how enemy images are being formed, see for instance Louis Oppenheimer, "The Development of Enemy Images: A Theoretical Contribution," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2006), pp.269–92; William Eckhardt, "Making and Breaking Enemy Images," *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 22, no. 1 (1991), pp.87–95."

[20] B. Rich and D. Conduit, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters on Indigenous Secular-Nationalist Causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria,", op. cit., p.125.

[21] Idem, p.116.

[22] See for instance Petter Nesser's discussion about "Londonistan", in his volume Islamist Terrorism in Europe, London: Hurst, 2015, p.37.

[23] See Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Covent Garden: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

[24] Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, "Jihadist Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in Western Europe : A Low-Probability, High-Impact Threat," The Hague, ICCT, 2015.URL: https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ICCT-Bakker-DeRoyvanZuijdewijn-Jihadist-Foreign-Fighter-Phenomenon-in-Western-Europe-October2015.pdf.

[25] For a discussion about successful "DDR" – Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration – and the role played by factors on a micro level, see M. Humphreys and J. M. Weinstein, "Demobilization and Reintegration," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 51, no.4 2007, pp. 531-567.

[26] Daniel Byman has noted that "the process by which the United States and other governments designate a terrorist sponsor is highly politicized, leading to poor conceptualization of the overall problem"; see Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.4.

[27] It has been estimated that between 7 to 20% of the American soldiers fighting in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom can be diagnosed with PTSD, see IOM (Institute of Medicine), *Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Military and Veteran Populations: Initial Assessment.* Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2012. There is reason to believe this number might be even higher for returned foreign fighters, who lack good training or proper aftercare (two of the alleged mitigating factors).

[28] Holly G Prigerson, Paul K Maciejewski, and Roberta Rosenheck, "Population Attributable Fractions of Psychiatric Disorders and Behavioral Outcomes Associated with Combat Exposures among US Men," *Research and Practice* 92, no. 1 (2002): pp.59–63.

[29] A new ICSR report is focusing specifically on the families of those who left to fight with IS. Shiraz Maher and Peter R Neumann, "Pain, Confusion, Anger, and Shame: The Stories of Islamic State Families," London: ICSR, 2016.

[30] Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn and Edwin Bakker, "Returning Western Foreign Fighters: The Case of Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia," The Hague: ICCT, 2014. URL: https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-De-Roy-van-Zuijdewijn-Bakker-Returning-Western-Foreign-Fighters-June-2014.pdf.

[31] David Shinn, "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (2011), p.208.

[32] Ibrahim Mohamed, "Somali Speaker Says Suicide Bomber Was Danish," *Reuters*, December 11, 2009.

[33] Evan Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network*. Oxford: Berg, 2004, p.90.

[34] Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, op. cit., p. 26.

[35] See for instance AFP, "Somali Shebab Extremists Kill Two of Their Own Chiefs: Spokesman," *Fox News*, June 30, 2013.

[36] "United States of America V. Enaam M. Arnaout, Government's Evidentiary Proffer Supporting the Admissibility of Coconspirator Statements, No. 02 CR 892," 2003, 24. It must be noted, however, that it was not al-Qaida that was most strongly connected to the conflict. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, led by Omar Abdel Rahman, and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) – at that time led by Ayman al-Zawahiri – were more prominently present; see J.M. Berger, *Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam*. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2011, p.55.

[37] Petter Nesser, "Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994–2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 10 (2008): p. 929.

[38] Frazer Egerton, *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.121.

[39] Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, op. cit. p. 37.

[40] Ibid.

[41] J.M. Berger, *Jihad Joe,* p.55.

[42] "Woolwich Murder Suspect: Michael Adebolajo Held in Kenya in 2010," *BBC News*, May 26, 2013.

[43] Petter Nesser, Jihad in Europe: Patterns in Islamist terrorist cell formation and behaviour, 1995-2010. Oslo: University of Oslo, 2011, p.76.

[44] Thomas Hegghammer, "Abdullah Azzam, the Imam of Jihad" in: Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, p.81.

[45] Idem, p.101.

[46] Stéphane Lacroix, "Ayman al-Zawahiri, Veteran of Jihad" in: Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, p.154.

[47] S. Lacroix, "Ayman al-Zawahiri, Veteran of Jihad", p.155.

[48] Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*: *Why Jihad Went Global*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.87.

[49] "Excerpts: 'Al-Qaeda' Call to Somalis," *BBC News*, January 5, 2007.

[50] L. Vidino, R. Pantucci, and E. Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict", op. cit., p. 222.

[51] Chris Hedges, "Muslims From Afar Joining 'Holy War' in Bosnia," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1992.

[52] L. Vidino, R. Pantucci, and E. Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict", op. cit., p.224.

[53] Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.208.

[54] Damir Kaletovic and Anes Alic, "Al-Qaida's Bosnian War Move," *International Relations and Security Network (ISN)*, March 28, 2008. URL: http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail//?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=52023.

[55] Idem, p.203.

[56] Jennifer Mustapha, "The Mujahideen in Bosnia: The Foreign Fighter as Cosmopolitan Citizen and/or Terrorist," *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 6-7 (2013), p.747.

[57] J.M. Berger, *Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam*, op. cit., p.90.

[58] Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* . Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006, p.218.

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The French "Iraqi Networks" of the 2000s: Matrix of the 2015 Terrorist Attacks?

by Jean-Pierre Filiu

Abstract

The networks that were active in sending "volunteers" for the anti-US jihad in Iraq from 2003 to 2007 might have played a key role in organizing the major terrorist attacks that struck France in January and November 2015. This jihadi genealogy underlines a complex generational transmission between pre-Islamic State (IS) and IS-inspired activists and cells.

Keywords: Jihadism; France; IS; Iraq

Introduction

France had faced repeated waves of Middle East-bound terrorism since the 1980s. But the devastating shock of the successive 2015 attacks is unprecedented. One of the factors to explain such blows could lie in the development, one decade earlier, of networks focused on the anti-US jihad in Iraq, where these blended with what would eventually become the Islamic State. To sustain this hypothesis, one will first follow the four waves of anti-French terrorism, then the constitution of the French "Iraqi" networks, before focusing on one of their central figure, the French-Tunisian Boubaker al-Hakim.

From Middle East State-inspired to Algeria-linked Terrorism in France

France has been the target of four successive terrorist waves over the past three decades:

The first wave, from 1982 to 1986, was a clear case of State-inspired terrorism, with the direct implication of the Islamic Republic of Iran and/or the Assad regime in Syria (the French judicial authorities has accused the Syrian intelligence as recently as March 2015 [1] of ordering through the Abu Nidal group, aka Fatah-Revolutionary Council, the August 1982 terrorist attack that killed six people in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Paris). France was targeted mainly for its military support to the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq (that had attacked Iranian territory in September 1980), but also for resisting the Syrian campaign against the sovereignty of Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) independence of decision from Damascus.

The second wave, in 1995-96, was intimately linked to the escalating Algerian civil war between the GIA [2] jihadi group not only with the security forces, but also with the rival Islamist FIS.[3] It was in fact triggered by the GIA killing of the imam Abdelbaki Sahraoui, one of the FIS founding members, in Northern Paris, in July 1995, soon followed by a terrorist attack in the Paris subway that killed eight people at the Saint-Michel metro/RER station.[4] The GIA campaign eventually ended after eighteen months as a result of French security actions (which led to the capture or the killing of most jihadi activists), but also because of the GIA internal crisis and decline.

The third wave, closely connected in 2000-2001 with Al-Qaida's global campaign (including the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington), was eventually thwarted by preventive action from the French security, that benefitted from the defiant attitude of the GIA towards Al-Qaida, and the induced vulnerability of the rival "Abu Doha" networks (Abu Doha was the war moniker of Rashid Boukhalfa, an Algerian jihadi that run Al-Qaida inspired training facilities in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan). One would have to wait until 2006 for a

GIA splinter group, the GSPC,[5] to eventually pledge allegiance to Al-Qaida and become its branch for the "Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM).[6]

The fourth wave was far more devastating than the two first ones (since the third one was thwarted) and killed 17 people (and three terrorists) in three separate attacks over three days in January 2015 (Charlie Hebdo, Hypercacher and the shooting of a police woman), then 130 people (and 7 terrorists) on the night of 13 November 2015, in six coordinated attacks in Paris and its Saint-Denis suburb (massacres at Bataclan and restaurants and suicide bombings near Stade de France). The Islamic State (IS) officially claimed responsibility for the November massacre the following day in an audio message disseminated through IS-linked Telegram accounts.[7] Prior to the Paris/Saint-Denis November attacks, Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser had proposed a typology of IS-linked attacks that put in the type 2 category (training and mid-level directives) the Verviers plot (thwarted in Belgium, shortly after the Paris January attacks).[8] One major figure in this Verviers plot was the Belgian-Moroccan Abdelhamid Abbaoud, who was killed in Saint-Denis with two accomplices on 18 November 2015. He was accused by the French authorities of masterminding the 13 November attacks and of having planned a deadly sequel in the Defense, the financial district in Western Paris.

This article will not discuss Hegghammer and Nesser's typology, but focus instead on the networks that developed in France between the third and fourth waves, and how their complex integration in the IS global outfit led to the devastating attacks of 2015. One would just be reminded that Hegghammer and Nesser include in their "type 2" both the Abu Doha networks (because of their loose connection with Al-Qaida that was described above as a major "vulnerability") and Mohammed Merah's three separate attacks in Toulouse and Montauban in March 2012 (which killed first three French military, then a teacher and three children at a Jewish school). The French judicial authorities accused Moez Garsalloui, a Belgian-Tunisian activist, of organizing the transfer of jihadi volunteers from Europe to the Pakistani tribal areas and of having supervised the terrorist training in those areas of at least six French nationals, including Merah.[9] Garsallaoui had been condemned in 2010 by the Belgian ministry of justice to an eight-year sentence in absentia for his jihadi activism. The US military claimed to have killed him in October 2012 in the North-Waziristan tribal area.

The Nineteenth District Network

Yet the main jihad-oriented networks that developed in France between the third and the fourth waves were not connected to the Af-Pak nexus, but to Iraq, where they channeled foreign fighters to the insurgency after the 2003 US-led invasion.[10] In retrospect, the matrix of the "fourth wave" dynamics appear to have laid in the "Nineteenth district network", thus labeled since most of its members originated from the Buttes-Chaumont neighborhood in the Nineteenth district of Paris. The key figure in this network is the French-Tunisian Boubaker al-Hakim, who repeatedly threatened France on behalf of the Islamic State (including in an interview in the Dabiq online magazine dedicated to Africa in April 2015), under the war moniker of Abu Muqatel.

Boubaker al-Hakim was born in August 1983 in a five-children family in Paris. He grew up in the Nineteenth district where he developed a close relationship with Farid Benyettou, a self-proclaimed Salafi preacher of his own age, along with other "buddies" like Peter Cherif, Mohammed al-Ayouni and the Kouachi brothers, Cherif and Said. Boubaker al-Hakim first travelled to Syria in July 2002, officially to study Arabic. The rising threat of a US campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime had already compelled the Syrian intelligence, known under the generic terms of *mukhabarat*, to work closely with its Iraqi counterparts, after years of divorce, and even "shadow war" between the evil twins of Baath party. The Assad regime indeed feared that an American invasion of Iraq under the motto of "democratization" would soon lead to an aggressive campaign against the Syrian dictatorship itself.

From Arab Legion to Al-Qaida

Boubaker al-Hakim was certainly monitored in Damascus by the Syrian security, like all foreigners, especially students of Arab descent. It is not sure whether he was actually recruited by the Syrian intelligence, but their support was crucial in the semi-clandestine trip he made into Iraq before returning to France from Damascus in January 2003. Two months later, he was back in Damascus where he volunteered at the Iraqi embassy to join the so-called "Arab legion" that Saddam's regime was hoping to mobilize against the impending US-led onslaught. Boubaker al-Hakim was soon interviewed by French media in Baghdad where he called upon his "buddies from the Nineteenth district" to join the anti-US resistance.[11] The collapse of the Iraqi regime in April 2003 forced Boubaker al-Hakim to go underground. This strengthened most certainly his collaboration with the now banned Iraqi security and the Syrian *mukhabarat*.[12] Without such collaboration, he would never have been able to sneak back into Syria and travel from there to France.

This is when Boubaker al-Hakim started to recruit as a jihadi role model for what would be described in the subsequent prosecution as the "Nineteenth district network". The "spiritual" guidance of the group remained in the hands of Benyettou, who never left France. But Boubaker al-Hakim returned back to Damascus and from there onward to Falluja in Western Iraq along with his brother Redouane and his "buddies" Peter Cherif and Mohammed al-Ayouni. Falluja had become the stronghold of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group Tawhid wal Jihad, which many "former regime loyalists" (FRL), according to the US denomination, had joined less out of jihadi commitment than because it was the most dedicated group fighting the Western/"Crusader" occupation. I have often described what would evolve later into the "Islamic State in Iraq" as the blending of two totalitarian projects [13]: the Al-Qaida vision (with Tawhid wal Jihad becoming officially in the fall of 2004 the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaida) and the Baathist "FRL" project, both keen at the "management of savagery", as the jihadi ideologue Abu Bakr al-Naji would entitle his seminal book.[14]

Iraqi-Focused Networks

From March to August 2004, Boubaker al-Hakim remained in the embattled city of Falluja. His brother Redouane was killed in a US air raid and Mohammed al-Ayouni lost an eye and an arm in an explosion. Boubaker al-Hakim managed to escape before the fall of the jihadi stronghold in November 2014 and took refuge back in Syria, but Peter Cherif was captured and transferred to a US-run detention facility in Iraq. In January 2015, French security services dismantled the "Nineteenth district network" and the French ministry of justice eventually obtained Boubaker al-Hakim's extradition from Damascus. He received a seven-year sentence, compared to a six-year sentence against Benyettou and a three-year against Cherif Kouachi (his brother Said was considered innocent). Mohammed al-Ayouni also received a three-year sentence and, while jailed, his jihadi aura (and the physical proof of it) led a petty criminal, Salim Benghalem, to fall under his militant spell.

While those jihadi activists were jailed, French security services dismantled another network associated with the hamlet of Artigat (60 kilometres South of Toulouse) which was also dedicated to sending volunteers to Iraq. The "spiritual" guidance of this group remained in the hand of a Syrian Islamist, Abdelilah Dandachi, who had chosen the name of Olivier Corel when receiving the French nationality. Two figures of this "Artigat Network" personify the intertwining of those "between-waves" dynamics: Sabri Essid, while in detention, was visited by the very same Mohammed Merah whose mother had married Essid's father; Essid would join in March 2014 the then "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) and be identified in a jihadi execution video celebrating one of the Paris January 2015 attacks [15]; and Fabien Clain would also join the "Islamic State" in Syria and eventually praise the Paris November 2015 attacks online.

Meanwhile, Boubaker al-Hakim was released in January 2011 and soon went to Tunisia where a popular revolution had toppled dictator Ben Ali who had been more than 23 years in power. The general amnesty benefitted Seifallah Benhassine, aka Abu Iyad, the former leader of the Al-Qaida-linked GICT.[16] "Abu Iyad"

started to organize the militant salafi group Ansar al-Sharia (AS/Supporters of the Sharia) and commissioned Boubaker al-Hakim to develop its clandestine military branch. AS was in the vanguard of the deadly assault on the US embassy in Tunis in September 2012, that led to the outlawing of the Salafi group. But Boubaker al-Hakim, indirectly in February 2013, directly in July of the same year, participated in the targeted killings of two prominent leftist figures. Those twin killings nearly derailed the Tunisian democratic transition that was eventually saved by a "Quartet" from the civil society (who became the award-winners of the Peace Nobel Prize in 2015 for this accomplishment).

The IS-French-Tunisian Triangle

After that his subversion plan had been thwarted in Tunisia, Boubaker al-Hakim rallied the Islamic State in Syria, where his position in the operational chain of command remains unknown (one should point out that very little is known for certain about the operational structure of the Islamic State and the way it commissions terrorist attacks worldwide. The fact that IS-directed attacks in Turkey are never claimed officially is only an indication of the extent to which Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's self-proclaimed "caliphate" has managed to protect its inner circle while projecting its terrorist campaign globally). What is certain is that two of his former "Nineteenth district buddies", the Kouachi brothers, were the ones who killed twelve people at the Charlie Hebdo magazine siege in January 2015, opening the cycle of violence of the fourth terror wave on French soil.

It would appear that terrorist attacks in France are often connected to attacks of the same inspiration in Tunisia:

- two months after the Paris January attacks, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the killing spree at the Tunis Bardo museum, where 21 foreign tourists and one Tunisian security died (next to the two terrorists);

- on the very same day, 26 June 2015, when a French jihadi killed his employer at a chemical facility in the Alpes region (but failed to detonate a major explosion), a Tunisian jihadi, trained in an AS facility in neighboring Libya, killed 38 tourists, most of them British, in a beach resort near Sousse;

- and twelve days after the Paris November 2015 attacks, the presidential guard was struck in Tunis by a suicide attack that killed twelve security operatives.

It would be obviously far-fetched to portray Boubaker al-Hakim as the sole mastermind of such coordination of terrorist attacks in both France and Tunisia. But the bloody trail of his "Nineteenth district buddies" can be followed until the fourth wave of anti-French terrorism, not only through the Kouachi brothers, but also through Mohammed al-Ayouni and his radicalized "disciple" Salim Benghalem (who has been accused of organizing the arrival and training of French jihadis in Syria on behalf of the Islamic State [17] and condemned in absentia to a 15-year sentence). Former militants of the Artigat Network like Sabri Essid or Fabien Clain have already been mentioned above for their participation in IS terrorist activities. The combining of this "Artigat network" with the Nineteenth district Network one, delivers a critical mass in terms of members, propaganda and underground facilities which, along with IS guidance, inspiration and control, paved the way for the 2015 massacres in France.

From this perspective, the outfits that contributed to the sending of French volunteers to the anti-US jihad in the 2000s could very well prove to be the missing link that led to the devastating "fourth wave" of terrorism against France in 2015. The symbolic importance of those jihadi "veterans" for IS recruitment and propaganda is clear. It is to be hoped their operational role and responsibility in the actual commission of terrorist attacks will be clarified and addressed accordingly before more bloodshed occurs. In fact, the

Pentagon announced it had "targeted and killed" Boubaker al-Hakim on 26 November, 2016, during an air strike on the Syrian city of Raqqa.[18]

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Notes

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[2] GIA is the French acronym for Groupe Islamique Armé/Islamic Armed Group.

[3] FIS is the French acronym for Front Islamic du Salut/ Islamic Salvation Front.

[4] RER is the French acronym for Réseau Express Régional/ Express Regional Network and the explosion of the deadly gas canister took place precisely at the Saint-Michel/Notre-Dame RER station.

[5] GSPC is the French acronym for Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat/Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat.

[6] Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Local and Global Jihad of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib", *The Middle East Journal*, 63, No. 2, (Spring 2009),pp. 217-220.

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[14] « The Management of savagery » is a jihadi treatise that went on-line in 2004 and whose author, nicknamed Abu Bakr al-Naji, might be an Egyptian activist. This treatise became a standard reference within Al-Qaida in Iraq, and then the Islamic State.

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Plebeian Jihadism in Denmark: An Individualisation and Popularization Predating the Growth of the Islamic State

by Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen

Abstract

Already before the Islamic State's conquests in Syria and Iraq, a plebeian version of jihadism was developing in Denmark. This version resonates particularly well with the Islamic State's version, in some ways resembling it, indicating that the group is not so much creating something new as it is capturing a Zeitgeist, channelling already existing energies in its direction. This perspective allows us to view the group's mobilization in Denmark in a new light, which has implications for how to best respond to it, and it reminds us that a military defeat of the Islamic State is unlikely to end all contemporary challenges posed by jihadism.

Keywords: Denmark; jihadism; Islamic State; eschatology; crime-terror nexus

Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, Europe has been struck by numerous attacks that have been defined as jihadi terrorism. Several observers have noted that many of the perpetrators led a less than pious lifestyle, having a troubled past that often included experiences with crime and violence. This has led to the coining of popular terms like "gangster jihadism". The recent growth in numbers of such perpetrators has been linked to the rise of the Islamic State.[1]

Intuitively, this may make sense, given the timing and the fact that the Islamic State is perceived as more brutal and intellectually less demanding than groups such as al-Qaida,[2]. The group has set new standards for imaginative uses of novel forms of communication, not least via social media and in Hollywood-style video productions,[3] adding to these an eschatological narrative.[4] The question, however, is whether the Islamic State is the source of all of the above.

At least in a Danish context, developments in jihadism predating the growth of the Islamic State may have played a role in paving the way for attracting non-pious audiences. Already in the late 2000s, the writer of this article encountered both clever uses of social media and an eschatological narrative similar to that of the Islamic State in Denmark.[5]

In this article, I suggest that in Denmark one version of jihadism, which I refer to as *plebeian*, has been developing alongside other versions for at least a decade. This plebeian jihadism has strong ties to Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary, mirroring their UK-focused perspectives and relating it to the Danish situation. The Danes promote the implementation of Sharia and the establishment of a Caliphate in Denmark. They engage loudly with Danish society, the media and the authorities, seeking to appeal to a Muslim diaspora audience that is dissatisfied with its position in the Danish society.[6]

In addition to being burly, confrontational and local in its main focus, it is to some extent also an individualized version of jihadism. Adherents follow a "my opinion is as good as your knowledge"-line of reasoning, which is derived from an eschatological narrative that casts them as *the chosen few* who receive direct divine guidance. In their view, such individuals are just as authoritative as any scholar or expert. In other words, plebeian jihadism is both anti-elitist and anti-intellectual.

The main argument elaborated in this article holds that some contemporary trends, which are commonly regarded as new and attributed to the development of the Islamic State, have in fact (also) been developing in Denmark for some time. Therefore, they may just as well be indicators of this *plebeian* jihadism as results

of the Islamic State's influence on Danish jihadis. This has consequences not only for our understanding of jihadism in Denmark but also for how best to respond to it.

For the purpose of the present article, I conflate some categories that are usually treated separately. As expressions of jihadism in Denmark, I refer to individuals who sojourn or migrate to Syria or Iraq to take up residence, individuals who do so to engage in fighting or to receive training, *and* individuals who engage in (plotting) terrorist attacks in their home country or elsewhere – as long as they do so in the name of jihadism.

From the individual's point of view, these are undoubtedly different choices and should be analysed as such when one is attempting to understand what motivates an individual to do one or the other.[7] For the purpose of the present article, however, I am looking at all of them as different expressions of jihadism. This implies that the concept jihadism is used to refer to an ideology and that individuals and groups defined as jihadist are not necessarily seen as violent or engaged in illegal activities.

Expression of Danish Jihadism during the Escalation of Conflicts in Syria and Iraq

There is little doubt that a large share of the individuals, who have committed acts of terrorism with reference to jihadism in the West since the escalation of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq from 2011, have a known violent criminal past. The same appears to be the case with individuals who have travelled from the West to the countries in this period.[8]

In a Danish context, authorities estimate that about half of the individuals currently travelling to Syria and Iraq have a criminal past. It is certain that Omar Abdel Hamid el-Hussain, the presumed perpetrator behind the Copenhagen Shootings in February 2015, also had such a past.

Only two weeks prior to the attacks, el-Hussain was released from custody, awaiting the appeal of his trial after being sentenced to two years in prison for an unprovoked violent attack on a stranger in 2013. El-Hussain had numerous other convictions for violence and weapons possession. While in custody, Omar el-Hussain expressed support for the Islamic State. This had been reported to the Prison and Probation Service and to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service. Minutes before the attacks, el-Hussain pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on Facebook. In the April 2015 edition of the Islamic State's magazine *Dabiq*, el-Hussain was honoured although the group did not take responsibility for his actions.

Not all contemporary expressions of jihadism in Denmark, however, involve individuals with a known criminal past. In addition to the Copenhagen Shootings, two cases relating to terrorism on Danish soil have become publicly known since 2011.[9] In February 2013, a man disguised as a postal worker rang the doorbell of Danish journalist Lars Hedegaard and attempted to shoot him. Hedegaard managed to foil the attempt and the attacker disappeared on foot. After investigations, Danish police charged the presumed perpetrator in late 2012 and in April 2014, Turkish authorities arrested him at Istanbul Airport. Danish authorities asked for his extradition but in October 2014, they were informed that he had been released. This led to a diplomatic dispute and also to rumours about the presumed perpetrator being handed over to the Islamic State in a prisoner exchange between Turkish authorities and the group.

It is unclear what actually happened in Turkey and since the suspect is still just that, it is, at least in Denmark, illegal to reveal his identity.[10] It is, however, very easy to find out who he is. He is wanted by the police but is currently believed to be with the Islamic State; his name has appeared in connection with Danish jihadism since the mid-2000s.

His name surfaced during what has become known as the first Danish terrorism trial, the so-called "Glostrup-case" that was part of the international complex of cases known as the "Sarajevo-case", which began with the arrest of among others Danish Abdulkadir Cesur, and Swedish Mirsad Bektašević in Sarajevo

in October 2005. The presumed would-be-assassin of Hedegaard was a friend of some of the Danish defendants, but although Danish authorities have kept a keen eye on him since, he has no known criminal record.

The other incident in January 2016 involved the arrests of a fifteen year old girl and a twenty-four year old man suspected of planning bomb attacks against a Jewish school in Copenhagen and the girl's old school in Fårevejle from where she had recently been expelled. The case is still under investigation and very few facts have come out, but the male suspect has previously appeared in Danish media on several occasions to explain why he has travelled to Syria. He is known to have a criminal past.

In addition to these cases, which revolve around terrorism on Danish soil, nine individuals were accused of joining and supporting the Islamic State in Syria in April 2016. In June 2016, a tenth individual, Hamza Cakan, who had been accused of the same since March 2015, was sentenced to seven years in prison. In addition to being convicted of joining and attempting to financially support the Islamic State, Cakan was convicted of having stolen a woman's computer and telephone and of glorifying Omar Abdel Hamid el-Hussain.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the case of Mesa Hodzic. On August 31 2016, police approached Hodzic at Christiania in Copenhagen to arrest him because he was believed to be carrying the revenues from illegal dealing with hashish. Resisting arrest, he shot the two police officers and a civilian bystander after which he fled the scene. The following day Hodzic again resisted arrest, firing at the police and was killed. It soon emerged that Hodzic had appeared in a video by the group *Millatu Ibrahim* giving greetings for Eid al-Fitr and was believed to sympathize with the Islamic State. The Danish police dismissed that such sympathies had played any role in his actions, but the Islamic State soon claimed responsibility, calling Hodzic a "soldier of the Islamic State".

While some of these individuals have a known criminal past, others do not and in the Danish context overlaps between criminal and jihadist milieus are nothing new. Jihadism in Denmark has never been the domain of members of a well-educated middle class or some very pious intellectuals.[11] The share of individuals who have a criminal background may be larger or more visible today, but in the Danish context it neither makes sense to view this as a new trend, nor to view the Islamic State as the cause.

There is little doubt that the Islamic State's success in Syria and Iraq has attracted Danish jihadis and that the group has become the point of reference for some Danes who act on behalf of jihadism on Danish soil. Looking back at the historical development of jihadism in Denmark, however, there are already indications of some of the contemporary trends, which could so easily be attributed to the Islamic State, in the late-2000s.

The Development of Jihadism(s) in Denmark

Jihadism has been present in Denmark at least since the early 1990s, when members of Egyptian *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* visited or resided in Denmark. These include Omar Abdel Rahman, also known as The Blind Sheikh, whom the Danish citizen Said Mansour invited as a guest on several occasions as well as Talat Fuad Qassim, also known as Abu Talal.[12] After being convicted of participating in the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in Egypt, Qassim was granted political asylum in Denmark in the early 1990s where he stayed until 1995.[13] In 1992, Said Mansour founded the publishing house Al Nur Islamic Information in Copenhagen from which material has appeared in relation to major terrorist attack, including 9/11 and the Madrid-bombs.

The Danish Security and Intelligence Service were concerned, but these individuals enjoyed freedom of speech and movement, gave interviews about their views to mainstream media and propagandizing in a Copenhagen mosque.[14] Back then jihadism was not treated as a significant threat in Denmark, but

following 9/11 and the high-casualty attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) this changed. In fact, since 2005 there have been several trials under Danish terrorism legislation linked to jihadism.[15]

It was also in this period that jihadism in Denmark began to develop in several directions. While some remained loyal to a version of jihadism focussing on politics in, and related to, Muslim majority countries and putting emphasis on traditional sources of religious authority, a fraction with a stronger focus on Denmark and a more individualized approach to religious (and other) authority emerged.[16] Within this fraction, narratives about the End of Days, magic and supernatural powers played a role in the self-understanding of adherents as *the chosen ones* who receive direct divine guidance, thereby making them as authoritative as any scholar.

In June 2004, twelve young men travelled from Denmark to London to participate in a conference hosted by British citizen Omar Bakri Muhammad. Several of these men would later become involved in terrorist activities in Denmark and abroad. One of them in particular would become central to the development of plebeian jihadism in Denmark: Shiraz Tariq, a then twenty-five year old man. He had arranged the trip to London and in the years to follow, his name reappeared in terrorism trials in Denmark and later on in relation to Danes travelling to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State.[17]

In early 2016, documents containing details about some 22,000 individuals who had joined the Islamic State since 2013 were leaked. In those documents the names of several Danes appeared, many of whom indicating that Tariq was their recruiter. During his trial, the above-mentioned Hamza Cakan, who was the first Dane to be convicted of joining the Islamic State, confirmed the validity of the documents and that it was Tariq who facilitated his joining the group.[18]

In the years between, Tariq was involved in making plebeian jihadism in Denmark more organized and activist as well as more available to individuals with a criminal past. The latter was done through a letter-writing campaign aimed at Muslim inmates and through street proselytizing, specifically focusing on gang members.[19]

In 2009, Tariq established the group *Kaldet til Islam* (The Calling to Islam), which advocated the implementation of Sharia and the establishment of a caliphate in Denmark.[20] This group gave jihadism in Denmark a much higher public profile, communicating via websites and social media, giving interviews to media. Individuals affiliated with the group even appeared in debates with Danish politicians in a confrontational, burly and often ridiculing style.[21]

The group became known to a wider public in 2011 when it actively agitated against participation in the Danish general elections in September of that year. Shortly thereafter representatives of the group informed the press that they had implemented so-called "Sharia zones" in the residential area Tingbjerg in northern Copenhagen, in which they would patrol and keep order.[22]

Although by then Omar Bakri Mohammad had moved to Lebanon and Anjem Choudary had taken his place, Shiraz Tariq had maintained good relations in London It stands to reason that the Danish campaigns were strongly inspired by similar activities in London under the organization of Choudary in the summer of 2011.[23]

On its website, *Kaldet til Islam* linked to Choudary's endorsement of them and Anjem Choudary himself removed any doubts about the ties between Copenhagen and London during a conversation in November 2013. There, he explained that although he was pleased that Tariq had recently become a martyr in Syria, he himself had now lost his main contact in Denmark and would have to find a new one.[24]

Sometime before August 2013, Tariq had left Denmark and moved to Syria along with the spokesman of *Kaldet til Islam*, Musharaf Sahid. In August 2013, the two appeared in a series of videos entitled *Den

Forglemte Forpligtelse 1-4 (The Neglected Duty) very clearly encouraging others to join them in establishing a Caliphate there and infamously making death threats against six named Danes. Although the two men had previously represented *Kaldet til Islam*, the videos were not explicitly linked to the group.

Following the death of Tariq in September 2013 and Sahid's death later that year, *Kaldet til Islam's* activities declined and some of those who had previously identified with the group began to appear as representatives of the new group *Millatu Ibrahim* in the summer of 2014.

A period of relative openness online ended approximately at the same time as Said Mansour was sentenced to four years in prison in December 2014 for having incited to terrorism and murder through his open Facebook profile. However, the groups still exist and more importantly, some of the individuals involved still exist.

That a separate fraction within jihadism was evolving and that it was breaking with others, could be seen in the conflicts that arose around certain ideological questions, namely the idea of implementing Sharia in Denmark, the idea of establishing a Caliphate in Denmark and the individualization of authority, including the rejection of the prestige coming from seniority, experience and high levels of formal education.

Following *Kaldet til Islam's* campaigns in the fall of 2011, a Danish jihadi by the name of Abu Ahmad al-Falastini published an article in which he argued against the group's idea of implementing Sharia and establishing a Caliphate in a country where the majority of the population is not Muslim.[25]

This led to reactions from individuals affiliated with *Kaldet til Islam*; on 31 December 2011, Abu Ahmad gave a speech where he elaborated on his article and addressed the reactions of *Kaldet til Islam*. Abu Ahmad explained that representatives of the group had accused him of insulting God and referred to him a "so-called Sheikh" who was a laughing stock. In response, Abu Ahmad belittled the representatives of *Kaldet til Islam*, calling them young and ignorant and likening himself to a father who now had to reprimand his children. Abu Ahmad vehemently dismissed the idea that Sharia can be introduced in Denmark as a sign of ignorance and made it very clear that he deserved respect for his knowledge, education and age.[26]

The latter point is as crucial to plebeian jihadism as the former. The rejection of formal education and the individualization of authority are to some extent linked to an eschatological narrative in which adherents understand themselves as *the chosen ones* who receive direct divine guidance and have access to supernatural resources such as revelations through dreams and invisible soldiers.

In their Danish eschatological narrative, an overwhelming foreign occupation of an area called Khorasan will symbolise the beginning of the end. A small group of men with long hair and long beards, wearing white clothes and carrying black and white banners with the Islamic creed will defeat the occupiers, forcing them to withdraw. This area covers Afghanistan, and the Taliban's resistance to the presence of NATO and ISAF troops was perceived as part of that battle.

Following the success in Khorasan, the battle will move to an area called al-Sham, where a Caliphate will be established and al-Mahdi, a saviour, will be found. This area covers Syria, in which there was no open violent conflict in the late 2000's. After much trouble, the Caliphate will eventually spread to the entire world. In this narrative, this will all be signs that the final clash between good and evil has begun and that all human beings will have to take sides. Part of the narrative is that only a small minority of Muslims will understand this and join the battles by engaging in violent activities and that these are *the chosen few* who are not only destined for greatness and ensured a place in Paradise, but also endowed with the ability to see everything clearly, having direct access to supernatural powers.[27]

References to this narrative as well as to the belief in having access to supernatural resources can be found in the above-mentioned series of videos entitled *Den Forglemte Forpligtelse* (The Neglected Duty) which was

published in the summer of 2013, featuring, among others, Shiraz Tariq and Musharaf Sahid. In these videos the participants explain how Syria, or al-Sham as they call it, is a blessed area predestined for establishing an Islamic state and how it is predestined that only a few select individuals will be willing to fight until Judgement Day and that those who migrate to engage in combat will play a unique role. Therefore, they are granted access to special resources such as invisible soldiers who will assist them in combat. In the second video, such soldiers are mentioned in relation to a specific clash in an airport and in the first video reference is made to being victorious without firing a single shot thanks to divine intervention. In this first video it is also mentioned that these select individuals will receive guidance through dreams and become part of divine miracles.[28]

Conclusion

Key to Danish plebeian jihadism is the focus on Denmark itself, in addition to as a factor in conflicts in Muslim majority countries, and the ambition to implement Sharia and establish a Caliphate there. This implies a greater engagement with domestic politics and the public, which appeals more directly to an audience that is preoccupied and dissatisfied with its own position in Danish society.

For this audience, the individualization of authority, derived from the eschatological narrative, further adds to the appeal because it makes the requirements for admission so low that virtually anyone can join. Finally, the popular profile of plebeian jihadism, which supplements a pious and intellectual rhetoric with a confrontational, burly, streetwise and ridiculing one, resonates with new audiences.

Conflicts in Muslim majority countries and organizations such as the Islamic State and al-Qaida are undoubtedly central to Danish jihadism, including plebeian jihadism, but plebeian jihadism cannot be reduced to being an effect of those alone. Therefore, militarily defeating the organizations or even solving the conflicts will not necessarily lead to the dissolution of plebeian jihadism. Plebeian jihadism is *also* a response to domestic politics and a voice of angry, misunderstood and under-appreciated youth but it cannot be reduced to this either. If contemporary jihadism is to be countered, we must recognize and address all its aspects and, perhaps most importantly, the interplay between them.

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Notes

[1] E.g. *Washington Post*, December 20, 2015, The Islamic State creates a new type of jihadist: Part terrorist, part gangster, by Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet; URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2_story.html ; accessed November 2, 2016; *BBC Magazine*, March 24, 2016, Brussels attacks: Molenbeek's gangster jihadists; URL: http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35890960 ; accessed August 15, 2016; *CBS News*, October 11, 2016; Europe's criminals prove easy converts to "gangster jihad" for ISIS, URL: http://www.cbsnews.com/news/europe-criminals-converts-isis-gangster-jihad-super-gang-prisons/ ;accessed November 2, 2016; Basra and Neumann's article in this Special Issue.

[2] The assumption that Islamic State is less demanding intellectually may be a misunderstanding, see e.g. Graeme Wood. What ISIS Really Wants. *The Atlantic,* March 2015 Issue; URL: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/ ; accessed August 15 2016.

[3] E.g. *The Hill*, September 20 2014, Five ways ISIS, al Qaeda differ, by Kristina Wong, http://thehill.com/policy/defense/218387-five-ways-isis-is-different-than-al-qaeda Accessed August 15 2016.

[4] E.g. William McCants (2015). *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. New York: Macmillan. Jeffrey Kaplan & Christopher P. Costa (2015). The Islamic State and the New Tribalism, *Terrorism and Political Violence,* 27:5, pp. 926-969.

[5] During fieldwork carried out with Dr. Manni Crone.

[6] Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2012), Anti-democratic and violence-promoting environments in Denmark that subscribe to Islamist ideologies. What do we know? *DIIS Report,* 2012:14, note 15.

[7] See e.g. Sheikh's article in this Special Issue.

[8] See e.g. Manni Crone, 2016, Radicalization Revisited. Violence, politics and the skills of the body, *International Affairs,* 92:3, 587-604.

[9] It is worth keeping in mind that the author as a researcher who relies on open sources cannot assume to be aware of all cases that have been foiled.

[10] In March 2016, Hedegaard was fined for having revealed the man's name in, among other places, his book "Attentatet" (The Assassination) from 2015. In November 2016, the US Department of State designated Basil Hassan as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. Following this, Danish media asked the Danish courts to lift the ban against naming him and on December 15th this was sanctioned by the Eastern High Court.

[11] See Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2013), Making a case for going to court. Militant Islamism in Denmark, *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs,* 22:1, pp. 10-20.

[12] One could argue that it has been present even since 1985, when two bombs exploded in Copenhagen in front of the American airline Northwest Orient and a synagogue, killing one person and injuring 32 others. In 1989, four Palestinian members of the group Islamic Jihad were convicted but to this day the details about the attacks are unclear. For more on the attacks see e.g. Andersen, Lars Erslev, 2011, "Terrorisme som permanent krise: 9/11 i Danmark" (Terrorism as permanent crisis: 9/11 in Denmark), in: Martin Marcussen & Karsten Ronit, (Eds.), *Kriser, politik og forvaltning. De internationale udfordringer* (Crises, politics and administration. International challenges), Hans Reitzels Forlag.

[13] Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2012), Anti-democratic and violence-promoting environments in Denmark that subscribe to Islamist ideologies. What do we know? *DIIS Report,* 2012:14; Andersen, Lars Erslev & Jan Aagaard, (2005), *In the Name of God – The Afghan Connection and the U.S. War against Terrorism. The Story of the Afghan Veterans as the masterminds behind 9/11*, University Press of Southern Denmark.

[14] For more on this, see e.g. Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2012), Anti-democratic and violence-promoting environments in Denmark that subscribe to Islamist ideologies. What do we know? *DIIS Report*, 2012; Lars Erslev Andersen (2011), "Terrorisme som permanent krise: 9/11 i Danmark" (Terrorism as permanent crisis: 9/11 in Denmark), in: Martin Marcussen & Karsten Ronit, (Eds.), *Kriser, politik og forvaltning. De internationale udfordringer* (Crises, politics and administration. International challenges), Hans Reitzels Forlag; Sheikh, Mona & Manni Crone (2011), "Muslims as a Danish security Issue", in: Jørgen S. Nielsen (Ed.), *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, Lexington Books-Rowman and Littlefield; Lars Erslev Andersen & Jan Aagaard (2005), *In the Name of God – The Afghan Connection and the U.S. War against Terrorism. The Story of the Afghan Veterans as the masterminds behind 9/11*, University Press of Southern Denmark.

[15] For a list of these up to 2012, see Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2012), Anti-democratic and violence-promoting environments in Denmark that subscribe to Islamist ideologies. What do we know? *DIIS Report*, 2012:14.

[16] Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2012), Anti-democratic and violence-promoting environments in Denmark that subscribe to Islamist ideologies. What do we know? *DIIS Report*, 2012:14.

[17] Including the Glostrup-case from 2005 and the Glasvej-case from 2007. Tariq was arrested in connection with the Glostrup-case; however, he was never charged.

[18] *Politiken*, June 7, 2016, 24-årig erkender i retten: Var i Syrien med Islamisk Stat (24 year old admits in court: Was in Syria with Islamic State), by Johan Varning Bendtsen. URL: http://politiken.dk/indland/ECE3241594/24-aarig-erkender-i-retten-var-i-syrien-med-islamisk-stat/ ; accessed November 7, 2016.

[19] *Berlingske*, October 2, 2013, Fængslede muslimer skal have brev fra ekstreme islamister (Imprisoned Muslims to receive a letter from extreme Islamists); URL: http://www.b.dk/nationalt/faengslede-muslimer-skal-have-brev-fra-ekstreme-islamister ; accessed November 14 2016; Author's notes from fieldwork carried out with Dr. Manni Crone, Copenhagen, January 24, 2009.

[20]Morten Skjoldager (2016), Syv år for PET–Jakob Scharfs tid (Seven Years in Service of the Danish Security and Intelligence Service – Jacob Scharf´s days), People's Press.

[21] In July 2013, the news media Ekstra Bladet arranged a debate between Adnan Avdic and MP Inger Støjberg, who in 2015 became Minister for Immigration, Integration and Housing. URL: http://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/danskpolitik/article4503263.ece ; accessed November 9 2016.

[22] Representatives of the group occasionally also presented themselves as representatives of *ahl us-sunnah wal-jammah*, *sharia4dk*, *1ummah4dk*, *and 1ummahfordk.*

[23] This was not unique to Denmark. For parallels in other European countries, see e.g. Petter Nesser, 2016, Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History. London: Hurst Publishers; also: Lorenzo Vidino (2015), "Sharia4: From Confrontational Activism to Militancy." *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 9, no. 2.

[24] Author's notes from conversation, London, November 14, 2013.

[25] Similarly to Shiraz Tariq's, Abu Ahmad's name has appeared in relation to several Danish terrorism cases.

[26] Published at the now closed www.islamiskundervisning.com website and previously mentioned in Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2012), Anti-democratic and violence-promoting environments in Denmark that subscribe to Islamist ideologies. What do we know? *DIIS Report*, 2012:14, p. 25.

[27]An extended version of the eschatological narrative was documented in June 2009 and the part of it revolving around Khorasan can be found in Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2010), The attractions of Jihadism. An identity approach to three Danish terrorism cases and the gallery of characters around them (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Copenhagen, Denmark. In this thesis, more details about the role of dreams, magic and supernatural powers can be found. The continuation taking place in as-Sham is only mentioned in Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, 2015, Viewing jihadism as a counterculture: potential and limitations, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7:1, pp. 3-17.

[28] Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2014), Jeg en stat mig bygge vil. Når vesterlændinge drager til konfliktområder for at grundlægge Utopia (I will build myself a state. When Westerners migrate to conflict areas to establish Utopia), in Lars Erslev Andersen (Ed.) *Terrorisme og trusselsvurderinger* (Terrorism and Threat Assessments), Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, pp. 44-45.

Patterns of Involvement among Individuals Arrested for Islamic State-related Terrorist Activities in Spain, 2013-2016

by Carola García-Calvo and Fernando Reinares

Abstract

A quantitative study of 130 individuals arrested in Spain between June 2013 and August 2016 for terrorist activities related to the Islamic State (IS) shows that the vast majority of them were involved in jihadist activities together with others and not as lone actors. They were typically part of cells, groups or networks (CGN) of varied size and composition. These CGN were more often new, transnational and IS-linked than regenerated, national and only IS-inspired. Detainees who participated in CGN occupied various positions in the centre (or first-tier), in the intermediate circle (or second-tier), and the periphery, depending on their social characteristics and functions. Nearly all of them belonged to jihadist aggregates engaging in radicalisation and recruitment efforts, usually dispatching foreign fighters, raising money and distributing propaganda on behalf of IS. In addition, the majority of these individuals had either travelled to Syria and Iraq, had tried (but failed) to travel, or had the intention of doing so. About one third of the 130 individuals belonged to CGN with operational capabilities and manifested willingness to carry out attacks inside Spain. Our research on the Spanish situation shows that the threat posed by IS is highly networked and organized.

Keywords: Islamic State; Jihadist Mobilization; Terrorism Involvement; Foreign Fighters; Spain

Introduction

Spain has not been exempt from the unprecedented jihadist mobilization worldwide prompted by the Islamic State (IS) organization, though Spain is not among the Western European countries most affected, neither in absolute terms nor relative to the size of its population.[1] Between June 2013, when the first anti-IS (then still anti-ISIL) counterterrorism operation was launched inside Spain, and August 2016, the total number of detainees for IS-related terrorist activities was 130. Until the Summer of 2016, some 190 departed from Spain to join the ranks of IS in both Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters. Six of the latter were arrested upon return–though the actual number of returnees can be estimated as being up to five times larger–and are included in the figure of detainees.

To explore patterns of involvement at the individual level of analysis, we have gathered information and built a database on 130 detainees, in the Elcano Database on Jihadists in Spain (EDBJS). Our sources were the Interior Ministry's press releases, police reports and publicly accessible court documents at the *Audiencia Nacional* (National Court) in Madrid, the only jurisdiction in Spain dealing with terrorism offences. Our database has also benefitted from interviews with law enforcement experts and information gathered from systematic searches of media sources indexed in Factiva.[2] The body of information assembled was thus treated both quantitatively and qualitatively.[3]

Most individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities are men (83.8%) aged between 20 and 44 at the time of detention (80.3%), more often than not–56.7%–they were married. 43% are nationals of Spain and 41.4% are Moroccan nationals. Five out of every ten are immigrants and four out of ten are second generation descendants of (mainly) Moroccan immigrants. Some 13.3% are converts. Six out of ten were enrolled in secondary education, twice the number of those who only attended primary school. Three times as many as those detainees with only working class jobs, have been in middle class or lower middle class jobs. 16.7% had no known occupation at the time of detention, and one third had a previous criminal record as ordinary delinquents.

In Spain, just like elsewhere, different patterns of becoming involved in IS-related activities can be observed; this affects the range of expressions a terrorist threat may eventually adopt. In this sense, becoming involved as an individual acting alone is not the same as becoming involved with others as part of cells, groups and networks (CGN).[4] In this article we will explore how exactly the 130 individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist offences became involved. We also look at the position they occupied inside the CGN most of them belonged to. We will explore the nature, size, composition, scope and functions of the CGN these detainees joined. Finally, we will also look how many of them were willing to become foreign fighters or to carry out attacks in Spain, the two options being not mutually exclusive.

Modalities of Involvement and Position of Individuals in Cells, Groups and Networks (CGN)

Only 4.6% of all those arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities since 2013 became involved alone, i.e. isolated from other jihadists; they were literally lone actors, not just single actors (Table 1). When lone actors eventually plot or execute attacks, they are often referred to as "lone wolves". This epithet is used to label those self-radicalized jihadists who act independently and solely at their own initiative.[5] However, in the case of Spain, the small number of detainees who qualify as lone actors were above all dedicated to the exaltation of IS and the spreading of its propaganda via the internet and the social media. Among them, two intended to travel to Syria and join the ranks of IS, whereupon they would have ceased being lone actors. Interestingly, we found no women among lone actors.

Table 1: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) by sex and modality of involvement (%)

Modality of involvement	Individuals Arrested		
	Men	Women	Total
CGN-based	94.5	100.0	95.4
Lone actors	5.5	--	4.6
Total	(109)	(21)	(130)

Source: Elcano Database on Jihadists in Spain (EDBJS).

It should certainly not be overlooked that IS-inspired individuals involved as lone actors pose a potential threat to Western societies, Spain included. IS's leadership, as its well known, has made repeated calls for terrorist acts by individual supporters difficult for police and intelligence services to detect and arrest.[6] The limited presence of such individuals among the detainees in our database of 130 cases might therefore misrepresent their actual relevance. Be that as it may, fact remains that 95.4% of all those detained in Spain during that period involved those who were in the company of others, i.e. members of CGN.

This statistical distribution of all the mentioned detainees according to their modality of involvement shows a remarkable continuity when compared with those of individuals convicted in Spain for jihadist terrorism offences or who died as a result of acts of suicide terrorism over the preceding nine years. Between 2004 and 2012, exactly 5% of these became involved on their own, as lone actors. On the other hand, 95% were involved as members of cells and small groups, sometimes connected with jihadist organisations abroad (primarily in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa) though, on other occasions, they operated independently from such entities.[7]

Whether involved on their own as lone actors, or in the company of others, as part of CGN, all the detainees included in our database had as their organization of reference Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) or

its successor IS.[8] However, about a quarter of them, for some time prior to aligning with ISIL (later IS), initially had the Al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) as their jihadist organization of reference.[9] This is a common pattern among Western European foreign fighters, the French Cannes-Torcy network being one case in point.[10]

Focusing on individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities who became involved in the company of others – the overwhelming majority — it is remarkable that 77.9% were integrated into CGN that had some kind of organizational link with IS at different levels of IS' structure. The remaining 22.1% were members of jihadist CGN that were merely inspired by IS' ideology and propaganda (Table 2). In contrast to the men, of whom some (26.9%) only had lose ideological affiliations, all women in the dataset were part of CGN, interacting in one way or the other with IS.

Table 2: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by sex and type of link with the jihadist organization of their CGN (%)

Modality of involvement	Individuals Arrested		
	Men	**Women**	**Total**
Organizational connection	73.1	100.0	77.9
Ideological inspiration	26.9	-	22.1
Total	(93)	(20)	(113)
Missing data:	*10*	*1*	*11*

Source: EDBJS

Detainees in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities who participated in CGN occupied different position inside such ensembles. For the purpose of this article we distinguish, inside each CGN, between centre or first-tier, intermediate circles or second-tier, and periphery. Individuals in the first-tier were mainly devoting themselves to leadership, coordination and indoctrination tasks. Individuals of the second-tier undertook a diverse range of functions, including engaging in preparations to become foreign fighters. Individuals in the periphery of their corresponding CGN were basically recruited with the purpose of turning them into foreign fighters.

Accordingly, 26.7% of all those individuals arrested in Spain between June 2013 and August 2016 for IS-related terrorist activities who were involved in the company of others were located in the first-tier of their corresponding CGN. Another 51.5% of them were located in second-tier circles; exactly half of them were preparing their own journeys to Syria and Iraq. The remaining 21.8% were located in the periphery of the CGN to which they belonged (Table 3).

Table 3: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by position in their CGN (%)

Position	Individuals arrested
First-tier	26.7
Second-tier	51.5
Periphery	21.8
Total	(101)
Missing data: 23	

Source: EDBJS

Consistent with the tasks performed in the core, prominent among detainees having central positions were men aged in the average between 34 and 35. They were mainly of Spanish nationality and had typically worked in the tertiary (service) sector of the Spanish economy or were unemployed.[11] Individuals arrested who were positioned in the centre of the CGN to which their belonged came across as better informed about the Islamic creed–in a Salafist version- and Sharia law than those placed in the other two tiers. Their knowledge about the Salafist interpretation of Islam could be considered relevant in just a quarter of the cases.

Even though men dominate the second-tier of CGN, the percentage of women increases in this intermediate positions fourfold when compared to the first-tier. Individuals in this second-tier were also five years younger than those in the first-tier, with an average age of 29.2. Those detainees positioned in the second-tier were mostly Spanish nationals, most of them unemployed or working in the service sector, having a rather rudimentary knowledge of the the Salafist interpretation of Islam and its corresponding notion of sharia law.

In the periphery, men also predominated although here women accounted for one third, which means an eightfold increase compared to the first-tier and a doubling with respect to the second-tier. Consistent with the aim of becoming foreign fighters, the average age of detainees who were placed in the periphery was 23, that is to say, eleven years younger than those in the first-tier or inner circle and six years below that of the second-tier. Those in the periphery were mainly of Moroccan nationality, many of them unemployed or students and not well-informed about Islam and sharia.

Detainees by Nature, Size, Composition and Scope of their CGN

64% of all those detained in Spain for IS-related activities over the three-year period beginning in June 2013 were active as members of newly formed CGN (Table 4). That is to say, cells, groups or networks established from 2011 onwards - after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria – gathering individuals with no previous involvement in jihadist activities. The remaining 36% of these detainees were, by contrast, part of CGN which may be described as of a regenerated nature. The latter can be differed from the former by the fact that at least one member had been involved in jihadist activities in the country prior to the current mobilization over Syria and Iraq.

Table 4: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by nature of their CGN (%)

CGN Nature	Individuals arrested
Newly formed	64.0
Regenerated	36.0
Total	(89)
Missing data: 35	

Source: EDBJS

The number of detainees who belonged to CGN allows us to tentatively estimate the size of these jihadist aggregates by distributing them according to the total number of individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities, between June 2013 and August 2016, who belonged to the same cell, group or network. Following this approach, four of every 10 (43.6%) were apparently part of rather extensive CGN whereas three out of every 10 seemed to have been integrated in, respectively, medium-size (27.4%) and small-size (the remaining 29%)— size cells, groups and networks (Table 5).

Table 5: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by total number of detainees from their same CGN (%)

Detainees from same CGN	Individuals arrested
8 or more detainees	43.6
Between 4 and 7 detainees	27.4
Up to 3 detainees	29.0
Total	(124)

Source: EDBJS

Observing the different nationalities existing among the individuals arrested who were part of the same CGN makes it possible to assess the degree of internal homogeneity or heterogeneity of these aggregates. With this in mind, we distributed these individuals according to the nationalities of the detainees who were members of the same CGN. There are detainees who were part of the same CGN and shared only one nationality, detainees part of the same CGN but predominantly – over 75% – from one nationality, detainees part of the same CGN but mixed in terms of nationalities, even if the majority – between 50% and 74% – were having the same, and finally detainees who were part of the same CGN but with more diverse nationalities.

As we can see, individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities who, based on data about fellow detainees from the same jihadist aggregate, appear to have belonged to rather heterogeneous CGN, account for slightly over half of the total. The highest percentage were apparently integrated into mixed CGN, with the majority of them being Moroccan nationals (Table 6). Detainees who had no less than three quarters of its members composed by nationals of Spain became particularly salient among those individuals who had joined more homogeneous aggregates.

Table 6: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by nationalities among detainees of same CGN (%)

Nationalities among detainees from same CGN	Individuals arrested
All Spanish nationals	19.3
Predominantly Spanish nationals	14.8
Predominantly Moroccan nationals	10.2
Mixed with majority of Spanish	6.8
Mixed with majority of Moroccan	42.1
Mixed with other composition	6.8
Total	(88)

Source: EDBJS. Note: Table includes data only about individuals belonging to middle and large size CGN

Meanwhile, no more than 31.1% of all the detainees who became involved as part of CGN were actually part of cells, groups and networks confined to the Spanish territory (Table 7). On the contrary, the vast majority of those individuals who became involved in the company of others (exactly, 68.9%), belonged to CGN that operated in two or more countries and were therefore transnational in scope.

Table 7: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by scope of their CGN (%)

Detainees from same CGN	Individuals arrested
Transnational	68.9
National	31.1
Total	(106)
Missing data: 18	

Source: EDBJS

For nearly eight out of 10 of the latter (75.7%) the transnational links of their CGN extended to Morocco, specifically to northern places such as Tetouan, Fnideq or Nador, all of which are close to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla as well as to peninsular Spain (Table 8). For almost half of the same subset of detainees (47.1%) transnational links extended as far as Turkey. Lower figures correspond to Tunisia (21.4%) and Egypt (12.9%), with Libya, Mali and Indonesia each amounting to 8.6%. Turkey was, however, the real transit country on the way to Syria and Iraq for the foreign fighters originating from Spain. Turkey is also where Spanish jihadists related to IS had placed delegates, or benefitted from the help of IS facilitators who received them, provided them with accommodation, and helped them cross the border into the 'Caliphate'.

For nearly four out of 10 in the same subset of detainees (37.1%), the transnational CGN they belonged to had links to Belgium, and for about two out of 10 (22.9%) to France–both countries in which their jihadist ensembles had at least one member. It was precisely in France and Belgium that IS established the operational network whose members planned and executed the concatenated attacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris, and of 22 March 2016 in Brussels.

Table 8: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) by geographical scope of their transnational CGN (%)

Detainees from same CGN	Individuals arrested
Outside Western Europe	
Morocco	75.7
Turkey	47.1
Tunisia	21.4
Egypt	12.9
Libya	8.6
Mali	8.6
Indonesia	8.6
Inside Western Europe	
Belgium	37.1
France	22.9
Total	(70)
Missing data: 3	

Source: EDBJS

It is worth mentioning, in this respect, that two of the detainees in Spain had links with the IS Paris-Brussels network. One of them, with dual Algerian and French nationality, but living in France, was arrested in Almería on April 2014. He was related to a purported operational head of IS' operations in Europe, Salim

Benghalem.[12] Another, himself resident of Torrevieja in the province of Alicante, who joined up with IS in Syria in 2014, was arrested in Warsaw in June 2015 and subsequently handed over to the Spanish authorities. Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the presumed ringleader of the 13 November terrorists, had ordered him to return to Europe after receiving training in the use of arms and explosives.[13]

Detainees According to the Diverse Functions of Their CGN

The cells, groups and networks within which most individuals arrested in Spain were integrated, performed a wide variety of overlapping functions. As a whole, 95% of these detainees, were part of CGN focusing on radicalisation and recruitment tasks (Table 9). Moreover, some 74.8% were part of CGN sending foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. These are the highest percentages found for this set of detainees who became active as jihadists in the company of other fellow militants.

We also found that women tended to be concentrated precisely in those CGN that focussed on radicalisation, recruitment and the dispatch of foreign fighters. This reflects the fact that women arrested in Spain for IS-related activities were mainly performing such tasks via social media. However, while women had taken on an active role in this domain, it was still men who formed the core leadership of the CGN they were part of–something clearly exemplified by of one of the most important jihadist congeries dismantled in Spain by the police as a result of Operation Kibera.[14]

Table 9: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) involved with others, by sex and the functions of their CGN (%)

Functions	Individuals Arrested		
	Men	Women	Total
Radicalization	85.6	100.0	95.0
Recruitment	85.6	100.0	95.0
Sent foreign terrorist fighters	65.8	88.9	74.8
Financing	55.9	55.6	60.5
Propaganda dissemination	49.5	66.7	56.3
Operational	35.1	5.6	33.6
Training	34.2	--	31.9
Exaltation of terrorism	30.6	22.2	31.9
Logistics	5.4	--	5.0
Total	(111)	(18)	(119)
Missing data:	*2*	*3*	*5*

Source: EDBJS

60.5% of detainees involved with others were part of CGN which carried out financing tasks. Existing information suggests that they basically obtained money to cover their own economic needs, derived from their involvement. To raise money they benefited from donations and collections held in neighbourhoods such as Príncipe Alfonso in Ceuta, or in places of worship such as the M-30 Mosque in Madrid. However small-scale drug trafficking was also a source of income.[15] The members of one cell dismantled in spring 2015 in the province of Barcelona planned other forms of fund-raising, such as kidnapping for ransom, or creating a cultural association that would allow them to apply for subsidies.[16]

By contrast, two individuals were arrested in Girona, on July 2016, because of the money remittances they had sent to IS, by means of designated intermediaries located in Turkey, and following instructions from IS. In addition to contributing half of their personal monthly income, they relied on crowdfunding through Internet, asking fellow Muslims who were unwilling to migrate to Syria and Iraq themselves for an economic contribution to jihad, usually small quantities of between 50 and 100 Euro.[17] In order to transfer funds, just like in the case of a network offering logistic support to IS whose members were arrested on February 2016 in the provinces of Alicante and Valencia, and in Ceuta, they resorted to international money transfer companies, or money service business, using intermediaries, or the traditional *hawala* method.[18]

56.3% of the detainees were active within CGN whose members distributed IS propaganda. In some cases, they simply disseminated propaganda created by the jihadist organisation's media platforms. In other cases, such as with a network whose members were arrested in March 2015 in the provinces of Ávila, Ciudad Real, Barcelona and Girona, they translated the content generated by IS media outlets into Spanish. However they also produced content of their own which was more accessible to the offspring of immigrants or young Moroccans resident in Spain.[19]

Especially significant, however, in terms of the threat that IS poses to Spain, is the evidence that, of all the detainees 33.6% belonged to CGN with operational capabilities. Significant in this same respect is also the fact that 31.9% of them were members of CGN that undertook terrorist training activities on Spanish soil. Moreover, similarly about one third had joined CGN which were willing to launch attacks within Spain.[20]

From Radicalised Muslims in Spain to Foreign Fighters in Syria

No less than six out of every 10 individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities between June 2013 and August 2016–exactly 63.2% of all detainees–had either travelled to Syria and Iraq, had tried to travel, or had the intention of doing so (Table 10).[21] Remarkably, women appeared more likely to travel and join IS ranks abroad than men. While nearly nine out of every 10 detainee women had either travelled to these conflict zones, had tried to travel there, or intended to travel, the same holds true for no more than 6 out of every 10 detainee men. Those women responded positively to the explicit call from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to settle in the 'Caliphate' and contribute to its consolidation and expansion.

Table 10: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) who had travelled to conflict zones, tried to travel, or had intention of travelling, by sex (%)

Detainees who had travelled to combat zones, had tried to or had the intention of travelling	Individuals Arrested		
	Men	Women	Total
Yes	58.9	87.5	63.2
No	41.1	12.5	36.8
Total	(90)	(16)	(106)
Missing data:	*19*	*5*	*24*

Source: EDBJS

As anticipated, detainees involved with others inside CGN were also more likely to travel abroad and join the IS ranks if located in their periphery (76.5%) than if placed in intermediate (65.2) or core (56.6) positions (Table 11). Even when, more often than not, detainees in the first and second tiers had travelled to Syria and Iraq, tried to travel or had the intention of travelling, they devoted much of their efforts at radicalising

and recruiting, sometimes even training, individuals with the specific purpose of turning them into foreign fighters.

Table 11: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) who had travelled to conflict zones, tried to travel, or had intention of travelling, by position in their CGN (%)

Detainees who had travelled to combat zones, had tried to or had the intention of travelling	Position			
	First-tier	Second-tier	Periphery	Total
Yes	56.5	65.2	76.5	65.1
No	43.5	34.8	23.5	34.9
Total	(23)	(46)	(17)	(86)
Missing data:	*5*	*8*	*2*	*15*

Source: EDBJS

A large majority of detainees part of CGN who had travelled to conflict zones, had tried to or had the intention of doing so were actually arrested by Spain's police agencies before they reached Syria, Iraq and, exceptionally, other IS-related destinations (Table 12). Most underwent detention while already decided to make the journey, while they were preparing for it, at the point of embarking upon it, or even in transit. About one out of every 10 (9%), were arrested on their return (Table 12). Interestingly, the percentage of women arrested while in transit (42.9%) is particularly salient and nearly multiplies by four the figure observed for men (11.3%).

Table 12: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) who had travelled to conflict zones, had tried to or had the intention of doing so, by sex and stage of travel at the time of detention (%)

Stage	Individuals Arrested		
	Men	Women	Total
Willing to travel	24.5	7.1	20.9
Preparing to travel	30.3	35.7	31,3
Imminent trip	22.6	14.3	20,9
In transit	11.3	42.9	17.9
On return	11.3	--	9.0
Total	(53)	(14)	(67)

Source: EDBJS

As many as 76.3% of these detainees that became or intended to become foreign fighters for IS had at their disposal, inside Spain, a network facilitating their journeys to the 'Caliphate' (Table 13). Some 16.9% made use of the assistance offered by activists established in the combat zone (Syria and Iraq), and the remaining 6.8% depended upon recruitment networks in other countries. The differences between men and women shown in Table 13 reflect a somewhat higher propensity for women to be recruited online, establishing a personal contact with someone already based in these countries.

Table 13: Individuals arrested in Spain for IS-related terrorist activities (June 2013-August 2016) who had travelled to combat zones, had tried to or had the intention of doing so, by sex and according to their facilitator (%)

Facilitator	Individuals Arrested		
	Men	Women	Total
Network inside Spain	80.4	61.5	76.3
Activist in the conflict zone	10.9	38.5	16.9
Network in third country	8.7	--	6.8
Total	(46)	(13)	(59)
Missing data:	*7*	*1*	*8*

Source: EDBJS

Apart from the detainees who were once foreign fighters or aspired be, there has existed a small, but at least until the summer of 2016, growing number of jihadist militants in Syria and Iraq, mainly - but not exclusively - in the ranks of IS, originating from Spain (Figure 1). Towards the end of 2013 these were thought to number around 20, by mid-2014 some 50, one year later 116, and at the end of 2015 almost 140. In February 2016 it was calculated that the number of foreign fighters from Spain in Syria and Iraq was 153 and six months later this figure had risen to around 190.[22]

Figure 1: Cumulative number of detainees in Spain for IS-related activities and the number of foreign fighters from Spain to Syria and Iraq (June 2013-August 2016)
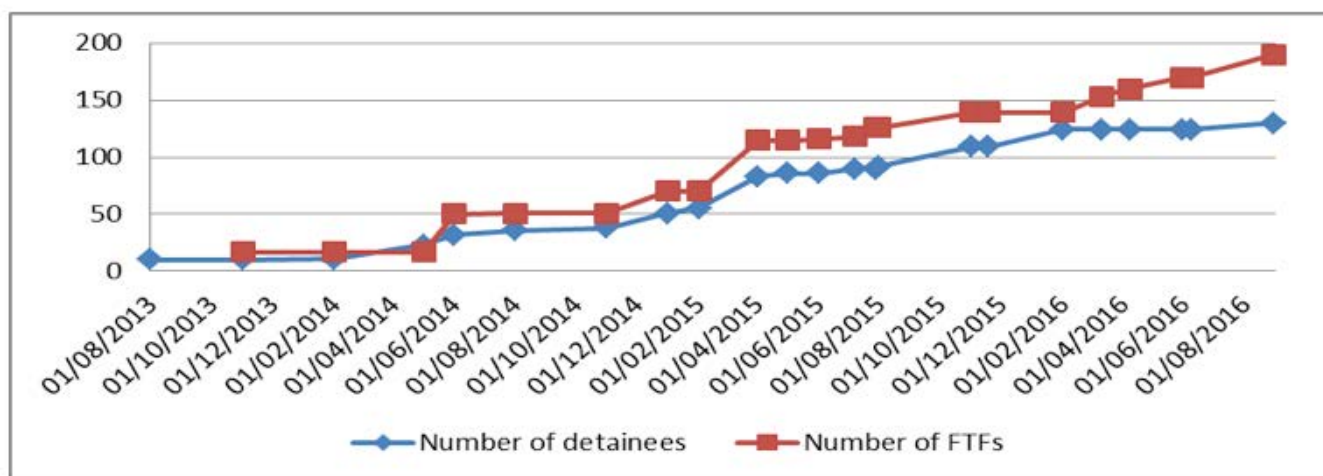
Source: EDBJS and Spain´s Ministry of Interior.

Between November 2013 and August 2016 the number of foreign fighters that had travelled from Spain to Syria and Iraq increased approximately at a rate of five per month. In the summer of 2016 there was no indication that this trend would remit or reverse. However, latest updated figures may reflect that more individuals are being identified by the security services rather than there was a real and sustained increase of the phenomenon. It is estimated that at least 47 of them, that is to say around 25%, have lost their lives in these Syria and Iraq: seven or eight in suicide attacks and the rest in the course of armed confrontations, or as a result of the aerial strikes carried out by the international coalition against IS since September 2014.

Taken together these around 190 foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq originating from Spain (up until August 2016), consist of both Spaniards and Moroccan residents of Spain. Particularly prominent among the Spaniards are those characterised by being the young offspring of Moroccan immigrants. Some of them were born in Ceuta and Melilla, others were hailing from Catalonia and Madrid. About 10% of the foreign fighters who went from Spain to Syria and Iraq in 2013-16 were thought to be women.[23]

Conclusion

In the case of Spain, the vast majority of the 130 individuals arrested between June 2013 and August 2016 for IS-related terrorist offences took part in jihadist activities with others and not as lone actors. Actually, they were typically part of cells, groups, or networks (CGN) of varying size, homogenous as well as heterogeneous ones. Inside these CGN, detainees fulfilled various tasks, occupying different positions, partly due to their social skills. More detainees belonged to new, transnationally operating and IS-linked CGN than those who were part of regenerated CGN which lacked cross-border ties, operated solely at the national level and were only inspired by IS.

Moreover, nearly all detainees who became involved with others belonged to CGN whose members were collectively engaged in radicalisation and recruitment functions. Yet they also regularly belonged to other jihadist aggregates that dispatched foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, or that carried out fund-raising and propaganda distribution on behalf of IS. A majority of all those individuals arrested had either travelled to Syria and Iraq, had tried to travel, or intended to travel. Three out of 10 belonged to cells, groups or networks that had operational capabilities, carried out training activities on Spanish soil and were willing to carry out attacks inside the country–a fact which, in addition to the phenomenon of foreign fighters originating from Spain, reflects the highly networked and organized terrorist threat inherent to the jihadist mobilization prompted by IS.

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Notes

[1] See, on this issue, Fernando Reinares, "How to Counter Jihadist Appeal among Western European Muslims", Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, *Wilson Brief*, December 2015; URL: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/how-to-counter-jihadist-appeal-among-western-european-muslims

[2] Factiva, a Dow Jones product, is a database drawing upon approximately 25,000 sources of information emanating from more than 200 countries in 28 languages.

[3] Here we wish to acknowledge the outstanding help on both data collection and database maintenance provided by Álvaro Vicente, Research Assistant of the Program on Global Terrorism at Elcano Royal Institute.

[4] It is not always easy to distinguish between cells, groups and networks. As we understand it for the purpose of this article, cells are smaller and tend to exhibit a greater degree of internal hierarchy and cohesiveness. Groups tend to be larger but have more blurred contours and are usually also a less formalized. Networks are more complex and overlapping aggregates, where individuals may also belong to other cells or groups.

[5] On this issue, see Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), pp. 253-65.

[6] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser (2015), "Assessing the Islamic State commitment to attacking the West", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 9, nr 4, p. 16-17; Europol, European Counter Terrorism Centre, "Lone actor attacks. Recent developments", The Hague: Europol, 2015.

[7] Carola García-Calvo and Fernando Reinares (2014), "Pautas de implicación entre condenados por actividades relacionadas con el terrorismo yihadista o muertos en acto de terrorismo suicida en España (1996-2012)", Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, *Documento de Trabajo 15/2014*; URL: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/9eb6d480463cfadabea8fe1c56628e08/DT152014-GarciaCalvo-Reinares-Pautas-implicacion-condenados-terrorismo-yihadista-muertos-terrorismo-suicida-Espana-1996-2013.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=9eb6d480463cfadabea8fe1c56628e08

[8] Between February 2013 and June 2014, the Islamic State (IS) was still known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL).

[9] This circumstance came about before the al-Nusra Front was formally designated as the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda and, therefore, prior to ISIL being expelled from the global structure of al-Qaeda. See Fernando Reinares (2015), 'Yihadismo global y amenaza terrorista: de al-Qaeda al Estado Islámico', Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, *ARI 33/2015*, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/terrorismo+internacional/ari33-2015-reinares-yihadismo-global-y-amenaza-terrorista-de-al-qaeda-al-estado-islamico; also, Charles Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State*, Doha: Brookings Doha Center, *Analysis Paper no. 13* (2014); URL: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/en_web_lister.pdf

[10] "Raid on ISIS suspect in the French Riviera"; URL: http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/28/world/europe/france-suspected-isis-link; "La tentaculaire cellule islamiste de «Cannes-Torcy»", 26 March 2014; URL: http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2014/03/26/01016-20140326ARTFIG00399-la-tentaculaire-cellule-islamiste-de-cannes-torcy.php;

[11] The following three paragraphs are based on the data corresponding to the period June 2013-May 2016, offered in Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo, *Estado Islámico en España*, (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2016), pp. 61-62; URL: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/publicacion?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/publicaciones/informe-estado-islamico-espana; "Cellule de Cannes-Torcy : le terrorisme, affaire de potes", 16 December 2015, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/12/16/cellule-de-cannes-torcy-le-terrorisme-affaire-de-potes_1421308

[12] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "Recent attacks illuminate the Islamic State's Europe attack network", Jamestown Foundation Hot Issue, 27 April 2016; URL: https://jamestown.org/program/hot-issue-recent-attacks-illuminate-the-islamic-states-europe-attack-network/

[13] "El cerebro de los atentados de París envió a España a un yihadista que fue detenido", Europa Press, 21 November 2015; URL: http://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-cerebro-atentados-paris-envio-espana-yihadista-fue-detenido-20151121113934.html

[14] Operation Kibera, conducted by the antiterrorism branch of the Cuerpo Nacional de Policía (CNP) in five subsequent phases, from August 2014 to September 2015. See Ministerio del Interior, Oficina de Comunicación y Relaciones Institucionales, *Nota de prensa*, 16 December, 2014; URL: http://www.interior.gob.es/noticias/detalle/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_1YSSI3xiWuPH/10180/2997422

[15] Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información, and Cuerpo Nacional de Policía, Comisaría General de Información, *Diligencias Previas 02/2009*, *Atestado Policial 9883/2013*, delivered 24 June 2013 to the National Court's Central Investigative Court no. 2, p. 22-25; 'La Brigada Al Andalus recaudaba fondos para la yihad en la mezquita de la M-30', *El Español*, 10 April 2016; URL: http://www.elespanol.com/espana/20160410/116238422_0.html

[16] Audiencia Nacional, Juzgado Central de Investigación no. 1, *Auto*, 10 April 2015, p. 4; "Dinero público para hacer la yihad", *El Blog de El Español*, 17 April 2015; URL: http://blog.elespanol.com/actualidad/dinero-publico-para-hacer-la-yihad

[17] Ministerio del Interior, Oficina de Comunicación y Relaciones Institucionales, "La Guardia Civil cree que la documentación incautada a los detenidos en Arbúcies (Girona) revelará datos relevantes sobre la financiación de DAESH desde España", *Nota de prensa*, 27 July 2016;URL: http://www.guardiacivil.es/es/prensa/noticias/5878.html

[18] Ministerio del Interior, Oficina de Comunicación y Relaciones Institucionales, "Los siete yihadistas detenidos por la Policía Nacional crearon una red delictiva internacional para enviar material logístico a las organizaciones terroristas Jabhat al Nusra y Daesh", *Nota de prensa*, 7 February 2016, p. 3; URL: http://www.interior.gob.es/es/web/interior/noticias/detalle/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_1YSSI3xiWuPH/10180/5599678/

[19] Audiencia Nacional, Juzgado Central de Instrucción no. 6, *Auto* of 15 March 2015, p. 3; "El líder de la célula yihadista evitó su arresto en España al irse a Siria", *Europa Press*, 13 March 2015; URL: http://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-lider-celula-yihadista-evito-arresto-espana-irse-siria-20150313194150.html

[20] See Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo, *Estado Islámico en España*, op. cit., pp. 66-68; URL: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/publicacion?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/publicaciones/informe-estado-islamico-espana

[21] These data further corroborate a well-known argument on foreign fighting as the more frequent choice of Western-based jihadists, as advanced by Thomas Hegghammer in "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107, no. 1 (2013), pp. 1-15.

[22] Europa Press, "190 combatientes del Daesh viajaron a Siria o Irak, un 25% ha fallecido y un 15% retornó", 15 October 2016;URL: http://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-190-combatientes-daesh-viajaron-siria-irak-25-fallecido-15-retorno-20161015100747.htmlhttp://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-190-combatientes-daesh-viajaron-siria-irak-25-fallecido-15-retorno-20161015100747.html

[23] Interview conducted by Dr García-Calvo with a senior law-enforcement officer of the Secretaría de Estado de Seguridad, Ministerio del Interior, in the second week of September 2016.

Jihadism in Norway: a Typology of Militant Networks in a Peripheral European Country

by Brynjar Lia and Petter Nesser

Abstract

Jihadism in Norway has witnessed a huge shift from consisting primarily of foreign ethnically homogenous networks with a low capacity for mobilization, to the current situation where a loose country-wide network of domestic extremists have demonstrated a considerable capacity for foreign fighter recruitment over the past four years. In this article we introduce a typology for better understanding how jihadism takes root in Europe's periphery.

Keywords: Jihadism; Norway; IS; periphery

Introduction

What characterizes jihadi networks in Norway, a European periphery country in terms of geographical location, political weight, and demography, and also marginal with regards to exposure to jihadi terrorism?

Over the past two decades, European Jihadism has clearly had certain geographical points of gravity, London being a main hub. Even if Jihadi networks in Europe have always been transnational in nature with numerous nodes in many countries, the terrorism threat emanating from European Jihadism has historically been much greater in places like Paris, Brussels or London, than in Oslo. Hence, when examining jihadi networks in Norway, it might be helpful to integrate *a periphery perspective* in our analysis. We may accomplish this by introducing *a typology of militant networks* that captures the variations of militant Islamist activism beyond the immediate attack cells, and which *describes manifestations of jihadism in regions where attacks occur rarely*.

If one were to sum up the history of jihadism in Norway in one sentence, it would be like this: Jihadism in Norway has witnessed a huge shift from consisting primarily of foreign ethnically homogenous networks with a low capacity for mobilization, to the current situation where a loose country-wide network of domestic extremists have demonstrated a considerable capacity for foreign fighter recruitment over the past four years.

In order to better understand this shift, this brief article[1] explores Jihadism in Norway through the lenses of an analytical framework – more precisely a typology – in which militant Islamist networks are classified according to criteria such as organizational structure, activity, degree of overtness and outreach, and recruitment base. The five archetypes constituting the typology are as follows: (i) "militant exiles", (ii) "diasporic support networks", (iii) "militant visitors", (iv) "(al-Qaida) attack cells" and (v) "homegrown extremists".

When applied to the empirical evidence of jihadism in Norway since the mid-1990s, one finds that the first type of networks ("militant exiles") was dominant in the early phases while the "diasporic support networks" became a serious concern in the latter part of the 2000s. Both were, however, confined by ethnic-linguistic barriers and they hardly interacted with mainstream Norwegian society. During most of this period, there were isolated examples of the third and fourth types, i.e. "militant visitors" and "al-Qaida attack cells". By 2012, however, jihadism in Norway had matured sufficiently to give birth to a significant network of "homegrown extremists". The latter milieu consisted of Norwegian-speaking youth of multiple ethnic origins, including a number of Norwegian converts. They had a high capacity for outreach and recruitment, making contacts and linking up with counterparts in Europe and the Muslim world and participating as foreign

fighters in jihadi war theatres, particularly in Syria. These homegrown extremists were part of a generation of young Muslims who grew up with the war on terror and were fully exposed to the media frenzy surrounding "Islamic terrorism" and the difficult identity issues that came in the wake of the securitization of Islam in European discourse.

In theory, the five network types may all produce or inspire foreign fighter recruitment and international terrorism. In practice, however, they differ significantly with regards to such a capacity. In the Norwegian case, we find that both "diasporic support networks" as well as "homegrown extremists" have been very capable of mobilizing fighters to conflict areas in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Their involvement in international terrorism plotting has been limited, however, and attack plotting in Europe by Norway-based networks has remained the exception.

This article seeks to explain the evolution of Norway-based jihadism drawing upon this new typology and as such it offers a theoretically grounded assessment of why Norway has faced a limited threat.

Militant Exiles: the Case of Mullah Krekar

Militant exiles resemble politicians more than guerrillas. They usually act as spokesmen, ambassadors, or leadership figures for a militant Islamist party, or guerrilla movement, operating in a Muslim majority country, or in a safe haven nearby. From the late 1980s onwards a number of such militant exiles sought and obtained refuge in Norway. Their activities have often been relatively overt, and they have sometimes even served as go-to guys and informants for Norwegian authorities at various stages.[2] Still, by virtue of their involvement with militant Islamist movements, these exiles have faced the threat of loss of residency rights, scrutiny by the security services and anti-terrorism investigations.

Although there have been quite a few such militant exiles in Norway, most of them have remained unknown to the general public. One of them, the Afghan Pashtun politician Abdul Rauf M., came to Norway via the UNHCR as a refugee from Peshawar around 2000. He was a former Deputy Minister of Education in the Taliban government, and styled himself as an Islamist preacher with his own program on an Afghan TV Channel, speaking mostly in Dari and Pashto. Another was Qaribur R. S., an Afghan Pashtun politician, who had served as spokesman for Gulbuddin Hekmatiyar and his *Hezb e-Islami* guerrilla faction in Afghanistan and Pakistan since the late 1980s. A third example was Abdirahman A. O., a leading supporter of the *Islamic Courts Union* (ICU) in Somalia, and important fundraiser for the organization until his arrest in 2007, on terrorism fundraising charges. There were also North African exiles with leadership positions in militant Islamist groups in Morocco and Algeria. Mohsine B. had issued statements from Oslo in his capacity as spokesman for the Moroccan *Chabibah* movement during the 2000s, while Djamel S. acted as spokesman for the Algerian Islamist party *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) in Norway in the late 1990s.

The most famous of these militant exiles is of course Najmuddin Faraj Ahmed, better known as Mullah Krekar. He was the only militant Islamist figure in Norway with a significant international standing and an extensive network of contacts and supporters. Mostly known for being the first *emir* of the hardline Islamist group *Ansar al-Islam,* founded in Iraqi Kurdistan in December 2001, Krekar had a long history of political and military involvement in the Kurdish Islamist movement since the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, he obtained permanent residency in Norway with his family via the UNHCR quota system, but continued to visit Northern Iraq to pursue his political and military involvement with *the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan* (IMIK), while also traversing Europe for proselytization and fund-raising purposes.

Ansar al-Islam's role in the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 put Krekar in the international spotlight. Following his return to Norway in early 2003, Krekar was subject to numerous court cases and judicial processes, initially over his suspected (financial) involvement with terrorist networks and subsequently over his right to residency in Norway. In Internet chat rooms, he issued relatively specific

calls for violence and suicide attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq, and his alleged role in inspiring attacks in Iraq reportedly provoked U.S. authorities sufficiently that specific plans were made in 2003 to organize a snatch operation ("extraordinary rendition") to spirit him out of Norway.[3] Krekar was placed on the list in late 2006.[4] Over the past five years, Krekar has also been convicted and imprisoned for making threats and inciting violence. He was subject to an assassination attempt in 2010, whose perpetrators have not yet been identified. Despite being prevented from travelling outside Norway, Krekar has engaged in extensive proselytization via Internet chat rooms. He began reconstituting parts of the international *Ansar al-Islam* network through a new organization called *Rawti Shax* in the late 2000s. According to Italian prosecutors, a *Rawti Shax* cell in Italy plotted acts of violence in revenge of Krekar's imprisonment in 2012. [5] Italian authorities filed formal requests to have Krekar extradited from Norway. The case traversed the judicial system in Norway only to be withdrawn by Italian authorities in late November 2016, days after the Norwegian Supreme Court had endorsed the extradition request.[6]

Although Krekar's case is complex and intriguing, he very much falls within the category of a militant exile. All these militant exiles had in common that their constituency was mostly limited to their country of origin and their countrymen in exile. They preached in their native language, and their eyes were set on the political scene in the countries from which they had fled. Foreign fighter recruitment from these networks was minimal (with the exception of the Somali network addressed below) and plans for violent action in Europe rarely materialized. When such plans did surface, as in the case of Mullah Krekar in 2012-2014, the attempts were halfhearted and were meant to put pressure on the authorities to release the imprisoned Mullah. Compared to the ongoing ISIS campaign of terrorism in Europe[7], Krekar's *Rawti Shax* network was a small nuisance. Hence, when Italian prosecutors in 2015 described their investigation against *Rawti Shax* as "the most important police operation in Europe in the last 20 years", it sounded like a bad joke.[8]

There were overlapping connections between Krekar and a new network of Norwegian "homegrown extremists", called *Profetens Ummah* ("The Prophet's Ummah", PU). Krekar was never part of that group, but some young Norwegian radicals nevertheless looked to Krekar and other "veterans of jihad" living in Norway as religious teachers and role models, and they turned up in court in a show of solidarity whenever Krekar or other senior militants were on trial.[9]

Support Networks in Diasporas: The Case of Shabaab

Diasporic support networks go beyond an individual spokesman or leadership figure. They share some common ground with the militant exile type since both have a specific ethno-national and geographic focus, but they differ in terms of scale. Diasporic support networks represent social movements and often have significant capacities in terms of fund-raising, mobilization and propaganda outreach. One of the Norway-based militant exiles who clearly was part of a diasporic support network was the Somali Islamist politician Abdirahman A.O.. He was one of several prominent Somali politicians who had found refuge in Norway since the late 1990s. However, Abdirahman A.O. was also a key figure behind a fund-raising campaign to support the Islamist resistance against the Federal government in Somalia, in the wake of the Ethiopian invasion in late 2006. When Abdirahman A.O. was arrested on terrorism financing charges in 2007, hundreds of Norwegian-Somalis in Oslo rallied in demonstrations to protest against what they perceived as a highly unfair treatment of a respected political figure in the Somali diaspora. At the time ICU and its militant offshoot group, the *Shabaab* militia, enjoyed widespread support. This popularity was linked to *Shabaab*'s ability to promote itself as a military resistance group defending the country from Ethiopian aggression. However, as the movement's suicide operations and atrocities became more well-known and the group gravitated towards global jihadism and subsequently joined al-Qaida, the *Shabaab*'s support in the diaspora also dropped.[10]

During the late 2000s, the *Shabaab*-linked diasporic support network in Norway demonstrated not only a capacity to rally popular support and run fundraising campaigns, but also to recruit fighters from the Somali diaspora in Norway. An estimated 30 young men from the Somali community in Norway reportedly joined the *Shabaab* guerrilla movement.[11] This was not a uniquely Norwegian network. In fact, *Shabaab* has maintained strong ties to all of Scandinavia, and especially to Sweden.[12] Swedish-Somalis have figured prominently in the movement's leadership, and Swedish-, Danish- and Norwegian-Somalis have committed suicide attacks on its behalf.[13]

Although *Shabaab*-controlled areas in Southern Somalia became a "jihad-front" destination for a number of non-Somali foreign fighters, there was no evidence of non-Somali Norwegian militants traveling there. *Al-Shabaab's* diasporic support network remained very much "a Somali thing" in Norway, and Somalia's appeal as a "land of jihad" was never close to that of Syria and the ISIS "Caliphate" half a decade later. As a diasporic support network, the Somali *Shabaab* supporters were linked to a larger international network which connected Norwegian-Somali nationals to *Shabaab* recruitment websites abroad, and, in some cases, to leading international terrorist operatives. The following empirical examples may be illuminating:

Around 2009 "Abdi", a 27-year-old Norwegian-Somali and former soldier of the Norwegian Royal Guard, joined *Shabaab* as a military trainer. "Abdi" had arrived in Norway as a seven-year-old refugee at the end of the 1990s.[14] Being part of the Somali community in Oslo, he went to school, participated in sports, and made Norwegian friends. Yet, he struggled to adapt to Norwegian society, and started accessing Islamist forums online, consuming video-sermons by the infamous militant American-Yemeni preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, the most popular preacher for young jihadi sympathizers in the West at the time. "Abdi" contacted *Shabaab* via e-mail and was urged to join the struggle for an Islamic state in Somalia and al-Qaida's war on the U.S.. At a mosque in Oslo he encountered a *Shabaab* representative who spent time in Norway's capital on behalf of the movement's Scandinavian recruitment network operating out of Rinkeby and Gothenburg in Sweden. Encouraged by the recruiter's offer to assist with contacts and travel expenses, "Abdi" decided to leave for Somalia after ending his military service in the Royal Guard.[15] In March 2011, he was reported to have been killed in clashes with government forces in Somalia.

Recruitment of Norwegian-Somalis for *Shabaab* received renewed attention in wake of the attacks on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, in October 2013, where 67 people were killed. It turned out that a 23-year-old Norwegian-Somali raised in Norway, Hassan Abdi Dhuhulow, was among the attackers.[16] Unlike "Abdi", Dhuhulow had a troubled childhood. He was orphaned in Somalia and came to live with a relative in Norway in 1999. He was bullied and exposed to racism in school, struggled with his temper, and made few friends. Dhuhulow did not drift into crime or drop out of school, but found comfort in Islam. His online postings on Muslim discussion forums display a sad story of loneliness and of a gradual turn to religious extremism.[17] As he "prayed to Allah/God to give me some friends", he also blamed media and politicians for making it difficult for him to be accepted as a Norwegian. While surfing websites associated with *Shabaab* and al-Qaida, and listening to the sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, Dhuhulow grew increasingly religious and politically radical. Gradually, he embraced the idea that there was a global war on Muslims, and became obsessed with the war in Somalia while eulogizing *Shabaab*.

Dhuhulow did not radicalize all by himself. He acquainted radical Muslims online and got to know Mohyeldeen M., a central figure in the increasingly more organized extremist milieu in Norway. Both of them hailed from Larvik. At some point Dhuhulow also got in touch with a *Shabaab* recruiter in Rinkeby, Sweden. When the latter called upon all visitors on a Swedish-based pro-*Shabaab* web forum (al-Qimma) to swear allegiance to *Shabaab*, Dhululow did so promptly. The Sweden-based facilitator later traveled to Somalia where he continued to recruit and organize the influx of foreign fighters. Upon finishing high school in 2009, Dhululow also went to Somalia, returning in March 2010. By then Dhululow had already been on the watch list for some time. In fact, the security service was concerned about him already when he was in

second grade of high school. The PST questioned him on his arrival back in Norway, and again when he was heading for Somalia for the last time in August 2010.[18] In response to the PST's concerns about his links to *Shabaab*, he merely responded "do I look like a terrorist?" Two years later he surely did, on the CCTV footage of the Westgate massacre.

An even more important *Shabaab* militant residing in Norway in the late 2000s was Mohamed Abdikadir Mohamed, better known as Ikrima al-Muhajir. He rose in *Shabaab*'s ranks from being a skilled bomb-maker to become a key commander with responsibility for the movement's operations in Kenya. When Ikrima came to Norway in 2004 as a political refugee, he does not seem to have had connections to militant networks. However, during a trip back to Somalia in 2006, Ikrima reportedly established ties to *Shabaab* for the first time, after which he began recruiting for the movement in Scandinavia and Europe. He repeatedly traveled forth and back to Somalia, Kenya and Scandinavia and was also instrumental in establishing ties between *Shabaab* and AQAP.[19] Ikrimah was also reportedly involved in developing a Kenyan arm of *Shabaab* dubbed *al-Hijrah*, suspected of having orchestrated multiple plots and attacks in Kenya, including the deadly Westgate mall attack in September 2013. Ikrimah was deemed so dangerous by authorities that a U.S. Navy Seal team was dispatched to Baraawe, Somalia, to kill or capture him in October 2013, a raid which ultimately failed.[20] By then his links to Norway was past history, however. He had left the country for the last time in 2008 pending a final decision regarding his asylum application, and most of his terrorist plotting occurred after his departure.

The Somali case exemplifies how diasporic support networks may produce high levels of fund-raising and recruitment to conflict zones, but it also highlights their limitations. Despite being linked to an Islamist guerrilla movement, the *Shabaab* supporters in Scandinavia hardly ever recruited fighters beyond the Somali diaspora. Furthermore, the near absence of *Shabaab*-orchestrated attacks outside the East African conflict zone (Somalia, Kenya, Uganda), despite threats by the group to carry out Westgate style attacks in Western cities, also suggests that this type of diasporic support networks are unlikely to evolve into a truly global terrorism force.[21]

Militant Visitors: The Case of Algerian Extremists

Compared to the above-mentioned network types, a more likely candidate for producing international terrorist attacks, but not foreign fighter mobilization, is what we term "militant visitors", or "outer ring militants". They entered Norway for a temporary stay and/or for a specific purpose, and were not integrated into a Norwegian Islamist extremist milieu. Instead, they operated on the periphery of jihadi networks whose core members were located abroad.

While such militant visitors may act on their own and carry out acts of violence, for personal or political reasons, they are very unlikely to carry out any sustained campaigns of terrorism. For countries at the periphery of European jihadism, such cases are nevertheless a significant challenge for the security services. When suspected jihadi operatives in Europe are placed under surveillance, a wide network of contacts is often discovered, providing leads to a large number of individuals, from the inner tiers to the periphery. Some of them might happen to be residing in a provincial Norwegian town, and making sense of their actual importance and future risk may be quite difficult.

From what is known in open sources, there have been a significant number of militant visitors in Norway over the past fifteen years. The most well-known cases have involved Algerian nationals. In the early- to mid-1990s, a small number of Algerian militant Islamists were believed to have sought refuge in Norway, including sympathizers from the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) and the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA).[22] The latter operated networks for propaganda, fundraising and recruitment in France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden and other places at the time.[23] However, in contrast to the situation in these countries,

the few individuals in Norway were too few and peripheral to be categorized as a diasporic support network. [24]

By the early 2000s, individuals with ties to international jihadi networks came under increased scrutiny, and an Algerian national named Rabah Idoughi was found to be hiding in Norway. He had ties to an important al-Qaida-linked terrorist cell plotting attacks against U.S. targets in France, Belgium and other European countries in 2001, but was a relative peripheral affiliate involved in logistics. Attempting to escape prosecution in the Netherlands, Idoughi sought refuge in the Southern Norway coastal town of Mandal where he eventually was detected, held in custody and later deported.[25]

Another example of militant visitors involved two Algerian nationals based in Italy; they were believed to be supporters of the Algerian insurgent group *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC), a GIA successor group with a European-wide network of sympathizers. By the mid-2000s, the GSPC was actively supporting the jihadi insurgents in Iraq and assisted in foreign fighter recruitment to the country. During the summer of 2004, the two Algerian militants showed up in Oslo, where they appeared to be seeking recruits for the Iraq insurgency among Oslo mosque visitors. Italian authorities also suspected the two Algerians of plotting attacks, either in Oslo or in Italy. They were later arrested and convicted in Italy.[26]

Yet another version of the militant visitor was Omar Cheblal, an Algerian national who had spent ten years in a Moroccan jail for arms trafficking on behalf of Algerian Islamist rebels. Upon his release in 2004, he was resettled to Norway with the assistance of the UNHCR, and remained relatively anonymous until *The Prophet's Ummah* emerged in 2012. His role then shifted from that of a former militant and Islamist prison veteran to becoming a key organizer and mentor for the first extremist Islamist group to engage in public activism in Norway.[27]

While all these cases of militant visitors are different, they share some commonalities. Since they were all Algerian nationals, the Algerian civil war and its repercussions were a common backdrop. So were their common experiences as refugees and their desire to escape Algeria and help others escape, by legal or illegal means. Norway has never been a preferred destination for militant Islamists, given its periphery location and small Muslim community. For the militant visitors, however, Norway held a certain attraction as a place where one might seek refuge from judicial prosecution and police crackdowns in Algeria, France or other Europe countries.

Attack Cells: Mikael Davud's Mini-Network and the AQAP Convert

Almost by definition, attack cells linked to *al-Qaida* or IS would be the most likely to carry out terrorist attacks on Norwegian soil. After all, they emerge specifically with the purpose of plotting attacks on behalf of those militant organizations. However, precisely due to their contacts with known organizations and top-level handlers, this network type is also the most likely to attract surveillance and be detected. In the current European context where security services are being overwhelmed by too many IS-linked networks, the chances for attacks inevitably increase. However, in the context of a periphery country the number of direct connections between individuals residing in Norway and *known al-Qaida* or IS operatives or organizational structures has remained relatively low; hence attack cells will have a limited chance of success. This assumption seems to be corroborated by the historical evidence of a near absence jihadi terrorist attacks and plots in Norway.

The only *al-Qaida*-directed attack cell to be detected on Norwegian soil was the small Mikael Davud network, intercepted in the summer of 2010. At the time, it was the most developed terrorist plot by jihadis in Norway. The three-man-cell was headed by a Norwegian citizen of Uyghur origin, Mikael Davud, previously known as Mohammad Rashidin.[28] It was part of a *wider al-Qaida* network, which involved multiple attack plots across several continents, including the so-called New York subway plot and plans to bomb

shopping malls in Manchester. By the time of the arrest of Davud in July 2010, however, most of the other network nodes had been captured.[29] During the trial, it transpired that the Davud cell was plotting attacks in Denmark, from its safe haven in Norway.[30] Hence, while this particular attack cell initially seemed to confirm a long-held concern that Norway, despite its geographical and political distance from continental Europe, could no longer escape the jihadi terrorism threat, the actual attack plans nevertheless demonstrated the opposite. The attack cell did not intend to avenge Norway's military involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, or elsewhere, but aimed instead at the most popular terrorism target at the time, the *Jyllands-Posten* Newspaper in Copenhagen, and its main cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. Again, the Muhammad cartoon affair was the motivating factor, not Norway's role as a close U.S. ally.

While the Davud cell members were able to carry out a good deal of preparation in Norway for the attack before being arrested, another *potential al-Qaida* attack cell with a Norwegian element never got that far. The latter example refers to Anders D., a Norwegian convert in his early thirties, who joined al-Qaida's most potent franchise in terms of international terrorism, *Al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula* (AQAP) in Yemen in late 2011. According to US authorities, Anders D. had attended AQAP training camps where he was "taught to make bomb-belts, improvised explosive devices, and larger explosives used in car bombs".[31] Western intelligence services feared that the Norwegian AQAP recruit had been designated as suicide bomber in a plan to down trans-Atlantic airliners, or participate in attacks targeting the London Summer Olympic in 2012.[32] His case attracted massive media attention, not only because of his unusual background, but also because of dramatic terrorist plots in which he was suspected of being the star actor. Two years later, in July 2014, Anders D. was listed by U.S. authorities as "Specially Designated Global Terrorist", and the Norwegian convert suddenly had his mugshot alongside that of the top al-Qaida leaders.[33] As for his potential role in an attack cell, this possibility was probably much reduced by the fact that he had joined and trained with AQAP in Yemen. By doing so, especially as a "white" convert, with a Norwegian passport, he quickly attracted so much attention that Western intelligence services red-flagged him worldwide.

The case of Anders D. is perhaps more interesting in terms of understanding the next and last category of jihadi networks in Norway according to our five-legged typology, namely the "homegrown (or domestic) extremist" type . Anders D.'s radicalization occurred at a time when the *Prophet's Ummah* was emerging, the first overtly organized extremist Islamist milieu in Norway, a network which gradually became a key conduit for Norwegian foreign fighter recruitment to Syria.

Anders D. was clearly different from the average European jihadi; his case seemed to suggest that global jihadism may also find sympathizers and recruits among the average Norwegian upper middle class of non-Muslim origin. Being a white convert was not an obstacle. In fact, over the past few years, a dozen or more Norwegian converts have travelled to Syria as foreign fighters and joined IS. Also from a European perspective, the background and the links attributed to Anders D., although uncommon, were not entirely unique.

The Norwegian AQAP member grew up in the suburban town of Nesodden near Oslo. He hailed from a relatively privileged family and, contrary to most Islamist extremists in Norway, he had no criminal record. Anders D. worked in construction and at a kindergarten, while pursuing indie-music and left-wing activism.[34] He was drawn to philosophy and conspiracy theories, staunchly rejecting the official accounts of 9/11.[35] Anders D. has been characterized as a quiet impressionable "seeker", who seemed gloomy, maybe depressed at times.[36] As a youth he developed an interest in punk rock and started playing in a hardcore band of Oslo's alternative music scene. He also joined a Marxism-oriented "working group", and contributed to its anti-Capitalist fanzine.

In 2008, Anders D. converted to Islam as he married the daughter of a Moroccan diplomat. The couple had met when both worked at the same kindergarten. His friends described his conversion to Islam as part of the "love story" rather than heartfelt belief, as he had always been a fervent atheist.[37] He had courted the

woman for a long time before eventually asking her father for her hand. The marriage was held in Morocco in 2010. Soon, the convert cut ties with old friends and habits and concentrated fully on Islam. He quit drinking and spent much time in the large mainstream Rabita mosque in Oslo and a mosque in Drammen. At the latter, he reportedly joined "an extremist milieu", which had caught PST's attention.[38] In the late fall of 2008 he travelled to Yemen for religious studies and Arabic training. After staying in Yemen for nearly one year, Anders D. returned as an austere believer carrying a Quran and a prayer bead, announcing that he had pleaded loyalty to Islam and located the truth in its philosophy. At this time, in late 2009, he also participated in the so-called "Gaza-riots" in Oslo, violent street protests against Israel's air campaign targeting the Hamas government in Gaza. A number of youth participating in those riots later became part of the *Prophet's Ummah* (PU).

Anders D. subsequently undertook several trips to the Middle East, including a visit to Egypt, where he was flagged by the security services for interacting with Islamists who were under surveillance. When the convert went missing, failing to return from Yemen in 2012, an investigation into his activities was launched. It revealed that he had taken active steps to remove online information about himself.[39] While there are few clues as to the exact reasons why he radicalized, an interview with him by the Norwegian state broadcaster *NRK* showed him to be an identity-seeking individual critical of the political status quo and materialism, finding truthfulness and purity in Islam.[40] Moreover, contact points with extremists in Drammen, Oslo and in Muslim countries seem significant.[41]

Homegrown Extremists: The Case of the Prophet's Ummah

Homegrown Muslim extremism in Norway first caught headlines in 2006. In September that year, eleven shots were fired at the Jewish synagogue in Oslo, and Arfan B., a former gangster-turned Islamist, was suspected; later he was convicted of complicity.[42] A Norwegian national of Pakistani origin, B. had been drawn towards radical Islam since the early 2000s. Following his released from prison in 2009, he emerged as a central recruiter and leader for young Islamist extremists in Norway, a milieu that later became known as *The Prophet's Ummah* (PU).

The group's origins can be traced back to the so-called "Gaza Riots" in 2009. A peaceful antiwar demonstration against the Israeli air campaign in Gaza in 2008-2009 got out of hand and turned violent, with numerous participants being injured and many arrested. Several young Muslims who had taken part in those riots came to form the core of the PU, some of them apparently radicalized by the violent confrontation with the police. In this atmosphere of discontent, B. began mobilizing youth, together with Mohyeldeen M., a young Norwegian-Iraqi student from the city of Larvik. The latter had spent some time at religious seminaries in Saudi Arabia, but was dismissed due to his political activism. M. became an important ideological voice among the PU's followers. The group included entrepreneurial figures, who were well-versed in Norwegian politics and culture, and far more capable of engaging Norwegian youth than the militant exiles of the past.

From early 2012 onwards, this small extremist Islamist milieu constituted itself as an organized group. On 20 January 2012, nearly forty demonstrators gathered in front of Norway's Parliament building in Oslo. They gathered to voice their protests against the deployment of Norwegian troops to Afghanistan. All men, the majority well under the age of 30, they donned a typical combination of Islamic robes and Norwegian winter wear, some also sporting camouflage garments. Speeches were held, some more militant than others, in which themes and languages were borrowed from jihadi textbooks. A YouTube video was distributed just days before the event, containing threatening language aimed at the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and even the Crown Prince.[43] The public was shocked. Norwegian Muslims had never publicly displayed extremism in such a manner. The extremists would receive massive attention in the media and public discourse during the following months,–and years. The demonstrators later came to be known *The Prophet's*

Ummah (PU), initially the name of a Facebook group used to mobilize supporters.[44] The group quickly became more organized with an identifiable leadership, an emir, spokespersons, religious study classes, public *da'wa* activities, a website, YouTube productions and PalTalk chatrooms.[45] While public demonstrations and local proselytization (*da'wa*) dominated their early activities, by early 2013, foreign fighter facilitation, and war-fighting in Syria and Iraq had become an all-consuming issue for its followers.

In short, the PU became the most visible manifestation of the activities of a small, but hardcore network of extremists who came together in the late 2000s. Around a critical mass of experienced activists and authority figures, a wider web was spun to Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. They interacted closely with the radical preacher Omar Bakri Muhammad, an important militant preacher in the UK who had left London for Lebanon in 2005, and his protégé Anjem Choudary, who remained in London. PU members established direct contacts with more experienced counterparts in Scandinavia and other European countries, especially with the *Islam4/Sharia4*-movement and Anjem Choudary's British network. Through mutual visits and cooperation on Internet proselytizing on PalTalk chatrooms, the Norwegian extremists resembled a local branch of *the Islam4/Sharia4*-movement, even when they operated under their own name. As such, the PU was part of a new generation of European jihadis, which grew out of the remnants of Europe-based jihadi networks formed back in the 1990s as these gained new traction by the Iraq war and the U.S.-led Global War on Terror.

The PU quickly became part of European-wide Islamist efforts to mobilize support and recruit fighters for the Syrian conflict. Beginning in late 2012, an increasing number of Norwegian youth, many of them affiliated with PU, departed for Syria. Initially they joined the ranks of the Syrian al-Qaida affiliate *Jabhat al-Nusra* (JAN), *Ahrar al-Sham*, or insurgent groups operating under *Free Syria Army* (FSA).[46] While typically claiming to be providing humanitarian aid only, many of the Norwegian "Syria farers" (as they became known) were armed and took part in military operations. As the *Islamic State* (IS) launched its "Caliphate" in the summer of 2014 and outcompeted JAN as the dominant jihadi fighting force in Syria, a number of Norwegian foreign fighters reportedly switched their loyalty to IS. In December 2015, it was estimated that some 90 Norwegians had spent time in Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters. The number was high, when compared to Norway's small population of only five million and a relatively small Muslim diaspora.

How come Norway ended up producing so many "Syria farers"? The Norwegian case contradicts common wisdom about why radicalization occurs, such as socio-economic deprivation and lack of integration. The Norwegian welfare state has repeatedly been crowned as "the world's best country to live in" by the UN's "Human Development Index".[47] It has a rock solid economy, low levels of socio-economic inequality, and relatively few problems related to integration. Also, Norway is geographically far away from Middle East conflict zones, and unlike other countries such as the UK, Norway has not been a favored destination for radical Islamists, seeking refuge in Europe. Moreover, although Norway has participated militarily in Afghanistan and, for brief periods, in Iraq, it lacks the colonial history of those countries most exposed to jihadism in Europe (UK and France in particular). Lastly, Norway is not known for any high-profile events, attracting the jihadis' attention such as the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons, which put the Danes in the jihadis' cross hairs.

The astonishing upsurge in foreign fighter (FF) recruitment in Norway is perhaps less surprising if one conceptualizes violent radicalization as a diversified phenomenon with many possible outcomes. Hence, FF participation and international terrorism plotting may be seen as end points in two relatively different trajectories. This is especially true for large-scale FF recruitment to a civil war zone. The Norwegian case provides some evidence for this assumption. Even if Norwegian "Syria farers" embraced violent rhetoric, joined jihadi insurgent rebel groups and took part in an extremely violent civil war in Syria, there was hardly any public evidence of terrorist plotting in Europe involving these young men and women. In fact, when the PST informed the public that a possible terrorist attack in Norway had been thwarted in early 2015, the

suspected plotter was reportedly "not part of the Norwegian Islamist milieu", and the individual had been apprehended and expelled.[48] Hence, the plotter seemed to fit one of the other archetypes outlined in this study, such as that of a "militant visitor" model or an "attack cell" member, but not that of homegrown extremists.

As in many other European countries, the sharp increase in foreign fighter recruitment in Norway from 2012 onwards resulted from a combination of internal and external factors. The spread of militant Salafism among the millennials was partly a result of the post-9/11 climate affecting a generation who came of age and became politically conscious and active during the Global War on Terror.[49] The opportunity structure for foreign fighter participation also radically changed in the Middle East with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the policies pursued by Syria's neighbours facilitating easy access to a jihadi war theatre.[50] For a brief period after 2011, "participation in jihad" had been never been easier for Western Muslim youth, and it paved the way for the largest foreign fighter mobilization from Europe, Norway included, a trend that only recently abated.[51]

There is little doubt that PU played a key role in encouraging and facilitating foreign fighter recruitment to Syria. Its leading activists participated on social media platforms in which the Syria conflict and humanitarian aid efforts were discussed, in particular on a Facebook group called "Support and Dua to our Siblings in Syria", whose rhetoric was more mainstream than the PU's own Facebook site. In both forums, however, participants were encouraged to support the Syrian insurgency through prayers, money and humanitarian efforts. On a few occasions, postings would also call upon participants to supply "mujahidin" with money and weapons. There were few examples of explicit calls for joining the insurgents, but those who did travel and subsequently died on the battlefield in Syria were celebrated as heroes and role models. Moreover, photos of martyred fighters were used as avatar pictures by a number of forum participants.[52]

In addition to its online activities, the PU contributed significantly, in cooperation with its sister organizations abroad, in facilitating foreign fighter recruitment. In October 2012 PU-leader Ubaydullah H. revealed that the group had assisted "many" in going to Syria and that around ten members had gone to "protect and defend the civilian population".[53] The shift on the part of the PU from street proselytization and demonstrations in Oslo to Syria foreign fighter facilitation came in the wake of a high-profile visit to the PU in Oslo by Anjem Choudary and his disciples in late 2012. This connection was significant in more than one respect. Not only did it provide the PU with a new *raison d'être* at a time when internal conflicts and scandals threatened the organization.[54] It also linked the PU more explicitly to high-profile jihadi organizations abroad and to the emerging Islamic State project. The PU's closest European counterparts – the various *Islam4/Sharia4*-movements, and its leading figures Omar Bakri Mohammed and Anjem Choudary – had sided with the Islamic State following the escalating rivalry between IS and al-Qaida in Syria. Its network held sway over many European extremists, ensuring that foreign fighter mobilization in Europe over Syria benefitted the Islamic State more than any other insurgent group.

There exist several open-source surveys in which the background of Norwegian Islamist extremists, including the Syria farers, is described in some detail.[55] The majority were young men from Muslim families of foreign origin, with more than 60 per cent having immigrated to Norway in their childhood or teens.[56] Nearly three quarters were Norwegian nationals, and they also included a substantial share of converts, perhaps as many as 18 percent.[57] The extremists were mostly young men, some of them still teenagers and as many as 65 per cent under the age of 30 years.[58] Women remained a small, but growing minority, constituting some 12 percent of the Islamist extremist milieu by mid-2016. The family backgrounds varied, but there was a high over-representation (21 percent) of young people who have lost one of their parents, or both, during childhood. The latter segment also had high scores on maladjustment, drug abuse, and lack of upper secondary education.[59] According to several estimates, the majority of the Islamist extremists have low education, very little formal employment, and a high percentage of them also have criminal records.

[60] In fact, one survey suggested that 50 percent of Norwegian Islamist foreign fighter returnees had been legally prosecuted for crimes.[61] The PST's most recent assessment found that as many as 68 percent of male Islamist extremists in Norway "have been suspected of, charged with or sentenced for criminal acts prior to the time of radicalization", especially in drug related and violent crime.[62] Furthermore, a significant portion (17 percent) of the Islamist extremists had begun their criminal career before the age of 15 years. Female Islamist extremists were also far more likely to have been involved in crime prior to their radicalization than the average population.[63]

Initially, the Islamist extremist milieu was concentrated around Oslo and in cities relatively close to the capital in South Eastern Norway, including Drammen, Skien, Larvik, Moss and Fredrikstad.[64] The latter city attracted world media attention when it turned out that nearly a dozen Norwegian foreign fighters all originated from the city, many of them living in the same city district.[65] The Syria farers were also recruited from many parts of the country, including in Mid-Norway (Trøndelag), Western Norway (Vestlandet) and even the far north. A majority of Islamist extremists were not born in Norway, and a large number of nationalities were represented. Those with an immigrant background tended to have family ties to North Africa (mainly Algeria), Kosovo, North-Caucasus, Iraq (including Iraqi Kurdistan), Pakistan and Somalia, while at least one central figure originates from Eritrea, and another from Chile. As for the Islamist extremist milieu as a whole, estimated at between 100 and 200 individuals, the two largest Muslim diaspora groups in Norway, the Pakistanis and Somalis, were significantly underrepresented while other smaller Muslim minority groups were overrepresented as were also Norwegian Muslim converts.[66]

While being somewhat geographically scattered and from different ethnic origins, a common feature was that friendship and kinship had played a role in the recruitment process. Quite a few were brothers, belonged to the same family, hailed from the same area in a country of origin, or had attended the same school. Through social networks and social media, the foreign fighters sought to convince others to join them. Veterans shared their experiences from the conflict zone with relatives, friends and acquaintances, bringing it all to life with the use of images and videos, religious justifications and practical advice on how to access the battlefield. The veterans have also provided recruits with contacts to facilitation networks in Norway, Turkey and Syria.[67]

Of the five network types discussed in this article, the "homegrown extremists" category is clearly the most challenging and time-consuming for the authorities, not necessarily because they represent the greatest potential for terrorist attacks, but because they involve Norwegian nationals, and they are far more numerous than the other network types. These are mostly young members of society with a troubled past, and whose reintegration into Norwegian society is both costly and demanding. It also requires finding the right balance between punitive coercive means, including arrests and legal prosecution and soft preventative strategies in which rehabilitation, not punishment, is prioritized. The near absence of Norwegian foreign fighter recruitment since late 2015 may suggest that the current strategies have been relatively successful.

Conclusion

Jihadism in Norway has evolved considerably since the 1990s. From being mainly an imported phenomenon, manifesting itself in the shape of political refugees acting as militant politicians in exiles, jihadism in Norway today has taken on a distinctly Norwegian character. While the militant exiles would distribute paper copies of Arabic-language military communiques written by jihadi insurgent groups in faraway countries, or run websites of little known militant Islamist groups from their safe haven in Norway, the young Islamist extremists of today interact directly with Norwegian society and recruit successfully from different segments of mainstream society, defying the limits of class, ethnicity and geographical distance. Norwegian language jihadi propaganda is no longer such a rarity, helped by factors such as the social media revolution. This shift towards homegrown jihadism is partly the product of the global war on terrorism and the securitization of Islam and identity issues. More important, however, is the youth rebellion which is part and parcel of the

jihadism success story.[68] The generational shift from middle-aged Islamist politicians to youth activists involved in aid work and foreign fighter participation have created new avenues for youth participation in a way militant Islamist activism in the past did not.

Although the future of jihadism in Norway also depends on the ability to strike a fine balance between coercive and soft means in countering radicalization and foreign fighter participation, it is important to bear in mind that events and dynamics beyond Norway's border will also greatly influence the scope of the threat. European jihadi networks are extremely transnational, with attacks being planned in one country and occurring in another. Furthermore, the geopolitics of the Middle East and the actions of Norway's allies will also influence the terrorism threat level in Norway.

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Notes

[1] The empirical part of this article is taken from our book chapter: Petter Nesser and Brynjar Lia, "Norwegian Muslim Foreign Fighters", to be published in the forthcoming volume M. Ranstorp and F. Reinares (Eds.), Jihadist Mobilization in Western Europe.

[2] See e. g. "- Møtte Osama bin Laden: Eks-minister: Måtte rømme fra Taliban", VG Nett, 7 June 2009; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/moette-osama-bin-laden/a/554605/

[3] "CIA tror Krekar beordrer aksjoner", NRK.no, 24 January 2004; URL: https://www.nrk.no/norge/cia-tror-krekar-beordrer-aksjoner-1.511942; and "- CIA-agenter ville kidnappe mulla Krekar", Dagbladet.no 6 November 2009; URL: http://www.dagbladet.no/2009/11/06/nyheter/innenriks/mulla_krekar/cia-agent/8908485/

[4] "Krekar på FNs terrorliste", NRK.no, 8 December 2006; URL: https://www.nrk.no/norge/krekar-pa-fns-terrorliste-1.1459634

[5] The Italian investigation claimed that Rawti Shax may have plotted to kidnap Norwegian and British diplomats with a view to exert pressure on Norwegian authorities to release Krekar from prison. The Italian authorities also suspected the network to plan unspecified terrorist attacks in Italy and Norway. See e. g. "Suspects held across Europe in alleged plot to kidnap Norwegian diplomats," The Guardian, 12 November 2015; URL: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/12/suspects-detained-across-europe-in-anti-terror-operation; and "Dette mener politiet er Krekars nye terrorgruppe," Aftenposten, 12 November 2015; URL: http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/Dette-mener-politiet-er-Krekars-nye-terrorgruppe-8240330.html

[6] "Lagmannsretten: Krekar kan utleveres til Italia", NRK.no, 21 October 2016; URL: https://www.nrk.no/norge/lagmannsretten_-krekar-kan-utleveres-til-italia-1.13189500; "Anken avvist: Krekar kan utleveres til Italia", VG Nett 23 November 2016; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/anken-avvist-krekar-kan-utleveres-til-italia/a/23854293/; and "Italia trekker begjæringen om utlevering av mulla Krekar", Aftenposten.no, 30 November 2016; URL: http://www.aftenposten.no/norge/Italia-trekker-begjaringen-om-utlevering-av-mulla-Krekar-610151b.html

[7] See statistics in "How Many People Have Been Killed in ISIS Attacks Around the World", New York Times, 16 July 2016; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/03/25/world/map-isis-attacks-around-the-world.html

[8] "Jihadist cell in Europe 'sought recruits for Iraq and Syria'", BBC.co.uk, 12 November 2015; URL: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34802317.

[9] "Bhatti bortvist fra Krekar-rettsak", VG Nett, 7 August 2012; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/mulla-krekar/bhatti-bortvist-fra-krekar-rettsak/a/10052356/

[10] "Advarer mot norsk-somaliere i Al-Shabaab," VG, 20 March 2014; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/artikkel.php?artid=10146546.

[11] "Advarer mot norsk-somaliere i Al-Shabaab," VG, 20 March 2014; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/artikkel.php?artid=10146546

[12] "The Swedish Connection," Hate Speech International, 18 January 2016; URL: https://www.hate-speech.org/the-swedish-connection-2/

[13] Stig Jarle Hansen, Al Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[14] "Muslimer blir behandlet som jødene etter annen verdenskrig. Vi blir angrepet," Aftenposten, 14 May 2011.

[15] Ibid.

[16] The most thorough account of Dhuhulow's background is Lars Akerhaug, En norsk terrorist. Portrett av den nye ekstremismen. Oslo, Kagge forlag, 2015.

[17] "Dhuhulow ble mobbet og utsatt for rasisme," NRK.no, 21 October 2014; URL: http://www.nrk.no/dokumentar/dhuhulow-ble-mobbet-og-utsatt-for-rasisme-1.11990212

[18] "Svensksomalier fikk Dhuhulow til å avlegge terrored," NRK.no, 21 October 2014; URL: http://www.nrk.no/dokumentar/svensksomalier-fikk-dhuhulow-til-a-avlegge-terrored-1.11990259

[19] According to the Danish informant Morten Storm, al-Muhajir cooperated with al-Shabaab's former top-leader Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame in establishing ties between the movement and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). He also corresponded with Anwar al-Awlaki about connecting the two groups, and he was also the author of an article about bomb-making in the infamous AQAP's propaganda magazine Inspire. See Morten Storm, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, Agent Storm: A Spy Inside Al-Qaeda (Penguin, 2015); and Inspire Magazine, issue 3, November 2010; URL: http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/inspire-magazine-3.pdf

[20] "U.S. official: Raid's target was Al-Shabaab foreign fighter commander," CNN.com, 7 October 2013; URL: http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/05/world/africa/somalia-us-shabaab-raid/

[21] "Al Shabaab Calls For Westgate-Style Attacks On Western Shopping Malls In New Video", Vice.com, 22 February 2015; URL: https://news.vice.com/article/al-shabaab-calls-for-westgate-style-attacks-on-western-shopping-malls-in-new-video. See also "Europe could be next on al-Shabaab's hit list", The Independent, 13 July 2010; URL: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/europe-could-be-next-on-al-shabaabs-hit-list-2025097.html

[22] For media reports about alleged GIA cells in Norway, see "Muslimske terrorceller i Norge," VG, 29 September 1995; URL: http://vg.subnett.no/visArtikkel.asp?id=1129271

[23] For a discussion of GIA's European-wide network, see Brynjar Lia and Åshild Kjøk, Islamist insurgencies, diasporic support networks, and their host states: The case of the Algerian GIA in Europe 1993-2000. Kjeller: FFI, FFI-Report-2001/03789, 2001; URL: http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2001/03789.pdf

[24] In 2002 the UK-based jihadi preacher Omar Bakri told Norwegian reporters that the transnational radical political Islamist movement Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) and its militant spin-off al-Muhajiroun (AM) had set up networks and cells among Muslim university students in Oslo. He added that he had been in Norway a couple of times to support this effort. See "Vil ha Norge som islamsk stat", VG Nett, 24 April 2002; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/vil-ha-norge-som-islamsk-stat/a/4749071/

[25] "Terrormistenkt var i Norge–ble utvist", VG Nett 18 November 2005; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/terrortrussel-mot-norge/terrormistenkt-var-i-norge-ble-utvist/a/109593/

[26] According to media reports, they had discussed launching an attack on the synagogue in Oslo, or a shopping mall. "Bodde i Norge i fjor sommer", VG Nett, 17 November 2005; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/krigen-mot-terror/artikkel.php?artid=109572 and "- Planla terrorangrep i Oslo: Algeriske terrorsiktede var på vei til Oslo", VG Nett 11 September 2006; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/artikkel.php?artid=130053

[27] Cheblal travelled to Syria and Iraq in 2015 where he was reportedly killed outside Mosul, presumably fighting with ISIS. See "Familien: Norsk-algerisk IS-kriger drept i Irak", VG Nett, 22 January 2016; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/syria-farerne/familien-norsk-algerisk-is-kriger-drept-i-irak/a/23601306/

[28] For a detailed discussion of the plot, see Petter Nesser & Brynjar Lia. "Lessons Learned from the July 2010 Norwegian Terrorist Plot". CTC Sentinel 3, no. 8 (2010): 13-17; URL: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/lessons-learned-from-the-july-2010-norwegian-terrorist-plot

[29] "Norway Announces Three Arrests in Terrorist Plot," New York Times, 8 July 2010; URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/09/world/europe/09norway.html; "Terrorplaner i Oslo, London og New York kobles sammen," Aftenposten.no, 8 July 2010; URL: http://www.aftenposten.no/norge/Terrorplaner-i-Oslo_-London-og-New-York-kobles-sammen-216389b.html; and "Han tystet om norsk terror-celle," VG Nett, 9 July 2010; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/terrorisme/han-tystet-om-norsk-terror-celle/a/10003188/

[30] Most likely the cell had planned a bomb attack against the Jyllands-Posten newspaper, which published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005, or to assassinate Kurt Westergaard, one of the cartoonists. Davud and two accomplices (one of whom was acquitted altogether) had gathered a small amount of chemicals suitable for producing the explosive TATP. They had also sought ways to obtain a handgun for the purpose of an assassination; Verdict against Mikael Davud et al., Oslo Tingrett, dated 30 January 2012. See also "Davud og Bujak dømt for terrorplanlegging", VG Nett, 20 January 2010; URL: http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/terrorisme/davud-og-bujak-doemt-for-terrorplanlegging/a/10077183/

[31] Cited in "Terrorist Designation of Anders Cameroon Ostensvig Dale", U.S. Department of State, Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Washington, DC, July 15, 2014; URL: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/229277.htm.

[32] "Dette er den terrorsiktede nordmannen Anders Dale (35)", TV2.no, 16 July 2014; URL: http://www.tv2.no/a/5815714/

[33] "USA har satt norsk statsborger på terrorliste", TV2.no, 15 July 2014; URL: http://www.tv2.no/2014/07/15/nyheter/5813710

[34] "Raddis-fortid, barnehagejobb og kone med diplomatfar," Dagbladet.no, 5 July 2012; URL: http://www.dagbladet.no/2012/07/05/nyheter/jemen/innenriks/terror/al-qaida/22421980/

[35] "Trodde han ble muslim fordi han fant drømmedama," Dagbladet.no, 6 July 2012; URL: http://www.dagbladet.no/2012/07/05/nyheter/jemen/innenriks/terror/al-qaida/22432046/

[36] "Raddis-fortid, barnehagejobb og kone med diplomatfar," Dagbladet.no, 5 July 2012; URL: http://www.dagbladet.no/2012/07/05/nyheter/jemen/innenriks/terror/al-qaida/22421980/

[37] "Trodde han ble muslim fordi han fant drømmedama," Dagbladet.no, 6 July 2012; URL: http://www.dagbladet.no/2012/07/05/nyheter/jemen/innenriks/terror/al-qaida/22432046/

[38] "Knyttes til Drammenmoské," Utrop, 7 May 2012; URL: http://www.utrop.no/Nyheter/Innenriks/23091

[39] This could simply have meant that he wanted to break with his atheist, non-Muslim past, but it could also mean that he wanted to keep a low-profile as an AQAP operative.

[40] "Jeg har aldri vært så sikker," NRK.no, 6 July 2012; URL: http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/norge/1.8235019

[41] "Knyttes til Drammenmoské," Utrop, 7 May 2012; URL: http://www.utrop.no/Nyheter/Innenriks/23091

[42] Arfan B. was also prosecuted, but acquitted of alleged plans to hurl hand grenades at the US and Israeli embassies. See "Hvem er Arfan Bhatti?" Aftenposten.no, 16 January 2015; URL: http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/Hvem-er-Arfan-Bhatti-7864498.html

[43] "Video truer kronprinsen, Støre og Stoltenberg", Aftenposten.no, 17 January 2016; URL: http://www.aftenposten.no/norge/Video-truer-kronprinsen_-Store-og-Stoltenberg-167550b.html

[44] For a short period in mid-2012, the group also referred to themselves as "Ansar al-Sunnah".

[45] Brynjar Lia, "Profetens Ummah og sosiale medier". In Forebygging av radikalisering og voldelig ekstremisme på internett, edited by Inger Marie Sunde. 105-112. Oslo: Politihøyskolen, PHS Forskningsrapport No 2013:1; URL: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/43716ef78a2b410c9e9fb8601dff0216/rapport_forebygging-rad-eks.pdf

[46] In the fall of 2012 the Chief of Norway's intelligence service confirmed that seven Norwegian's had joined Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN), al-Qaida's arm in Syria. See "Syv personer kjemper med Al Qaida i Syria", NRK.no, 17 October 2012; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/flere-norske-muslimer-til-syria-1.8361699 Then, in December 2012, an officer in the Free Syria Army (FSA) told the Arabic daily al-Hayat that 13 Norwegians were fighting in the ranks of JAN. See "I'tibar "jabhat al-nusra" irhaban juz' min ittifaq niha'i 'ala al-hazm al-'askari," al-Hayat, 13 December 2013; URL: http://alhayat.com/Details/461601

[47] "Best country in the world to live? Still Norway, according to the U.N.", CNN.com, 16 December 2015; URL: http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/16/travel/undp-most-liveable-country/

[48] "PST kan ha avverget terrorangrep", nrk.no, 9 February 2016; URL: https://www.nrk.no/norge/pst-kan-ha-avverget-terrorangrep-1.12795251

[49] Petter Nesser, Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History. London: Hurst, 2016, pp. 267ff.

[50] Brynjar Lia, "Jihadism in the Arab World after 2011: Explaining its Expansion", Middle East Policy 23, no.4 (2016): 74-91.

[51] There was a sharp decline in foreign fighter recruitment from Norway to Syria and Iraq, beginning in late 2015. See "Drastisk fall i antall norske fremmedkrigere", Nettavisen, 19 April 2016; URL: http://www.nettavisen.no/nyheter/innenriks/drastisk-fall-i-antall-norske-fremmedkrigere/3423215154.html

[52] Brynjar Lia, "Profetens Ummah og sosiale medier". In Forebygging av radikalisering og voldelig ekstremisme på internett, edited by Inger Marie Sunde. 105-112. Oslo: Politihøyskolen, PHS Forskningsrapport No 2013:1; URL: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/43716ef78a2b410c9e9fb8601dff0216/rapport_forebygging-rad-eks.pdf

[53] "– Et titall medlemmer av vår organisasjon i Syria," NRK, 17 October 2012; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/_-er-der-for-a-forsvare-sivlie-1.8362077

[54] See e.g. "«Noen av mennene i Profetens Ummah har et storforbruk av koner. De finner dem på Facebook»", TV2.no, 7 March 2013; URL: http://www.tv2.no/a/4003937

[55] For example, in June 2014, the PST released an assessment based on a survey of some 50 individuals that had been to Syria. The government-owned TV Channel NRK also published a survey of 45 foreign fighters, most of them being in Syria, and some in other war theaters (such as Yemen and Somalia). A study conducted at the Norwegian Police University College surveyed the background of ten Norwegian Islamist extremists who were also converts, seven of whom were foreign fighters. Finally, in September 2016, the PST released a detailed survey of Norwegian Islamist extremists of which the foreign fighter contingency was a substantial part. Together, these sources give an overall sense of the foreign fighters' socio-economic background as well as patterns in radicalization. See "Norske fremmedkrigere i Syria", PST Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste Report (18 June 2014; URL: http://www.pst.no/media/utgivelser/norske-fremmedkrigere-i-syria/; and "Stor kartlegging: Dette er dei norske framandkrigarane", NRK.no, 27 November 2014; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/desse-vart-framandkrigarar-1.12061691; Ruben Antony, "Ekstreme konvertitter: En dybdestudie av ti radikaliserte norske konvertitter til islam". Oslo: Norwegian Police University College, MA-thesis, June 2015; URL: http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/id/363654/master_Antonty_2015.pdf; and "What background do individuals who frequent extreme Islamist environments in Norway have prior to their radicalisation?" PST–Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste Report, (12 September 2016); URL: http://www.pst.no/media/82364/Radikaliseringsprosjektet_rapport_ugrad_eng_12-09-16.pdf

[56] "What background do individuals who frequent extreme Islamist environments in Norway have prior to their radicalisation?" PST–Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste Report, (12 September 2016; URL: http://www.pst.no/media/82364/Radikaliseringsprosjektet_rapport_ugrad_eng_12-09-16.pdf

[57] Ibid. Previous estimates suggested an even higher proportion. In November 2013 NRK reported that ten out of forty Norwegian foreign fighters were converts. See "10 norske konvertitter i Syria", NRK.no 25 November 2013; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/10-norske-konvertitter-i-syria-1.11373011.

[58] Ibid. NRK's foreign fighter survey found that 64 percent of the travelers were between 18 and 25 years old, "Terrorforskere om fremmedkrigere: – Mange har mislyktes i livet", NRK, 26 November 2014; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere_—_-mange-har-mislyktes-i-livet-1.12066062

[59] Ibid.

[60] "Norske fremmedkrigere i Syria" (PST, June 18, 2014); URL: http://www.pst.no/media/utgivelser/norske-fremmedkrigere-i-syria/ . According to NRK's survey 33 % had been convicted of crimes and 33 % dropped out of secondary educaton (high school), "Terrorforskere om fremmedkrigere: – Mange har mislyktes i livet", NRK, 26 November 2014; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere_—_-mange-har-mislyktes-i-livet-1.12066062. The study of ten extremist converts revealed that they typically had experienced troubled family backgrounds, performed mediocrely in school and work life, and that several had dabbled in crime. Ruben Antony, Ekstreme konvertitter: En dybdestudie av ti radikaliserte norske konvertitter til islam. Oslo: Norwegian Police University College, MA-thesis, June 2015; URL: http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/id/363654/master_Antonty_2015.pdf.

[61] "Halvparten av fremmedkrigerne som har returnert fra Syria og Irak, er straffeforfulgt", Aftenposten.no 28 January 2016; URL: http://www.aftenposten.no/norge/Halvparten-av-fremmedkrigerne-som-har-returnert-fra-Syria-og-Irak_-er-straffeforfulgt-19644b.html

[62] "What background do individuals who frequent extreme Islamist environments in Norway have prior to their radicalisation?" PST–Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste Report, (12 September 2016) ; URL: http://www.pst.no/media/82364/Radikaliseringsprosjektet_rapport_ugrad_eng_12-09-16.pdf

[63] 31 per cent of them had been suspected of, charged with or sentenced for, criminal acts prior to the time of radicalization. Ibid.

[64] "Se hvor de norske jihadistene kommer fra", NRK, 27 November 2014; URL: http://www.nrk.no/norge/se-hvor-de-norske-jihadistene-kommer-fra-1.12061557

[65] "A Norway Town and Its Pipeline to Jihad in Syria", The New York Times, 4 April 2015; URL:http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/world/europe/a-norway-town-and-its-pipeline-to-jihad-in-syria.html?_r=0

[66] "What background do individuals who frequent extreme Islamist environments in Norway have prior to their radicalisation?" PST–Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste Report, (12 September 2016); URL: http://www.pst.no/media/82364/Radikaliseringsprosjektet_rapport_ugrad_eng_12-09-16.pdf

[67] "Slik blir de rekruttert: Nettverk i Norge etterforskes for å sende unge nordmenn til Syria", VG Nett, 27 July 2014; URL: http://pluss.vg.no/2014/07/27/1701/1701_23261886

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Countering Violent Extremism with Governance Networks

by Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen

Abstract

It is often noted that one-size-fits all solutions are unlikely to work when it comes to countering violent extremism. This research note argues that central government needs multiple, diverse local and civil society partners to mobilize the knowledge and resources needed to differentiate from case to case. It suggests that public administration research into governance networks offers a useful lens on the practical challenges, limits, and opportunities of working against violent extremism in such a broad coalition of actors.

Keywords: CVE; radicalization; disengagement; networks.

Introduction: Unbalanced Discourses and Reactions to Terrorism

Scholars frequently point out that effective counterterrorism strategies balance disparate elements. Coercive measures to deter and contain threats need to be complemented by inclusive and preventive measures to reduce the appeal of extremist narratives. Policies aimed at combating the structural preconditions that fuel grievances, e.g. bad governance or socioeconomic inequalities, need to be supplemented by measures that target the problems and perceptions of the specific individuals who are flirting with extremism.[1] When it comes to these measures, it is commonly assumed by academics and analysts that one-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to work. The individual variation in terms of causes, triggers, and trajectories of violent extremism is simply too wide.[2]

Nevertheless, political debates, particularly in the wake of terrorist attacks, tend to concentrate on punitive measures and on the role and responsibility of central government. These are important aspects of overall counterterrorism strategies. However, the challenge is that criminalization of an ever wider range of acts and expressions makes it difficult to differentiate from case to case. In effect, it reduces local actors' room for maneuver as they strive to target and tailor interventions to individual cases of extremism.[3] The result might well be suboptimal or directly counterproductive policies that inadvertently add to the problem of violent extremism they were intended to reduce.

In this essay I argue for the need to deemphasize central government and punitive measures to the advantage of a networked, collaborative approach that includes local government, and civil society in efforts to counter violent extremism; A network is more likely to possess the necessary resources and expertise to tailor interventions to individual cases than any single agency of central government, no matter how competent the agency may be.

The essay draws from a combination of insights generated within terrorism studies and public administration research. First, it outlines, in light of what we know about radicalization and disengagement, why sanctions-centered and one-size-fits-all approaches are suboptimal. Next, it introduces some basic points from public administration research on governance networks. It then discusses the advantages as well as the drawbacks of handling security challenges in a network, and concludes that a governance network is the least bad solution to the complex challenge of limiting recruitment into and expediting disengagement from violent extremism.

Radicalization or Exit from Violent Extremism? Sanctions Work both Ways

The policy and research interest in why and how people enter or exit violent extremism has grown enormously since a group of young British men attacked London's mass transit system in 2005.[4] The

success of the so-called Islamic State in attracting thousands of foreign recruits to its cause has added further urgency to the quest for answers and countermeasures. Botched and successful attacks by solo-terrorists – whether inspired by militant Islamism or extreme right wing militancy – have added new questions, such as what is the role of social media, on-line identity communities and on-line propaganda with regard to radicalization? Violent attacks by apparently deeply troubled and unstable individuals have raised questions about how mental illness play into the decision to take violent action.

Some researchers have emphasized the role of structural factors, such as socioeconomic marginalization, stigmatization, and lack of opportunities in driving radicalization. Others have pointed to the presence of extremist narratives, offering meaning and direction to individuals in search of a cause. Others again have emphasized the active role of extremist networks and ideologues in spotting, reaching out to, and cultivating vulnerable individuals. Turning to the questions why individuals disengage from violent extremist groups and subcultures, there is also evidence of multiple factors and triggers. A comprehensive review falls beyond the confines of this essay. In general, however, researchers tend to agree that the phenomena of entry into and exit from violent extremism are complex, dynamic, and multifaceted.[5]

One point, however, is crucial to the argument of this essay: Stepping back and looking simultaneously at the evidence of the role of judicial, administrative, or social sanctions in radicalization processes and in disengagement processes, it appears that sanctions can work both ways.

I have argued elsewhere that measures, which in some cases help prompt an exit from violent extremism in other cases actually push an individual further towards an extremist group or mindset. Context, timing of countermeasures, and a set of individual factors play decisive roles.[6]

On one hand, for example, researchers have pointed out that some individuals are drawn towards violent extremism because it offers an effective way of provoking mainstream society and the parental generation. [7] In these cases, social sanctions and confrontational attempts to dissuade extremism by family members, mainstream religious figures, other establishment figures, or government authorities are likely to make things worse. On the other hand, studies of how individuals disengage from extremism show the importance of credible counter voices and persons outside the extremist environment, who care to engage in a critical dialogue and take a personal interest.[8] Obviously, the question of who would constitute a credible counter voice is individual and needs to be considered on a case by case basis. The point is that the effect of the same type of intervention can range from positive to negative, depending on individual circumstances.

Researchers have also pointed out that coming down hard on extremism might cause groups to splinter and segments to radicalize further, while feeding into extremist narratives about persecuted minorities and a repressive state.[9] However, at the same time case studies of disengagement indicate that the threat of judicial or administrative sanctions makes some individuals reconsider their extremist engagement.[10] For example, a case study by Ilardi shows how one former militant Islamist reacted with the conclusion that "this is not for me" to the fact that other militants were being put on trial.[11] And in a case study by Olsen, a former left wing militant explains how he got out because of fear that his friends or family might come under scrutiny by police or intelligence services.[12] Serving time in prison might likewise work both ways. Whereas prisons are widely identified as a setting where individuals are dislocated and potentially vulnerable to extremist influences, studies have also indicated how prison terms allowed time for convicted extremists to reflect, nuance, and reconsider their opinions.[13]

In sum, judicial, administrative or social sanctions might reduce or intensify the extremist engagement of targeted individuals, depending on context, timing, and individual circumstances. Thus, one-size-fits-all solutions are likely to produce suboptimal results.

An Alternative to Centralized Efforts: Countering Violent Extremism with Governance Networks

How could the responsible government agencies mobilize the necessary resources, insights, and expertise to tailor and individualize interventions to prevent violent extremism?

Research on how local communities act to prevent, contain, and bounce back from violent extremism have begun to map the broad variety of actors that play a role, including local police, social workers, schools, families, local businesses, voluntary associations, and religious associations. When such actors manage to come together in trust-based networks, they are able to mobilize a range of useful skills and resources ranging from providing someone with a job to offering religious counselling.[14]

The challenge of coping with complex problems in cooperation with disparate actors is not unique to the field of national and societal security. Public administration research has shown similar challenges across from a range of public policy areas including health, environmental protection, infrastructure development – areas where government agencies need to work with multiple stakeholders to reach sustainable solutions – and offered the concept of governance network as a lens through which central agencies might try to understand, navigate, and manage such collaborations.[15] Governance networks cannot be steered from one single center, as they tend to be informal and based on voluntary participation; They challenge the classical notion of hierarchical control. Instead, they depend critically on trust and on the abilities of the involved actors to coordinate their perceptions and activities, to solve problems collaboratively, and learn as they go along. [16] Network governance of complex challenges requires patient, diplomatic, persistent efforts to approach a common understanding of the nature of causes behind and possible solutions to the problem at hand.

When it comes to countering violent extremism, efforts to build governance networks are likely to be particularly challenging in societies that are already struggling with the polarization and lack of societal trust engendered by terrorist attacks, extremist propaganda, and possibly hard-handed government responses. Working in a network is likely to be frustratingly slow, tedious, and muddy to law enforcement personnel or social workers, eager to create and show results – at least initially in the process of building trust and iterating ahead towards workable collaboration patterns and intervention methods.

It is also going to require great courage on part of decision makers in politics and in national security bureaucracies to delegate authority and decision making power to local and front line actors, trusting them to make the right judgement calls about how to treat individual cases of radicalization. It is not difficult to imagine the kind of dilemmas that might arise: For example, having incomplete knowledge about the disposition and intentions of a returnee from the conflict in Syria/Iraq, do you hand it over to local actors to attempt to rehabilitate the returnee? Or do you opt for applying the power of central government to surveil, disrupt, and investigate/prosecute? Even if historical evidence from previous conflicts that attracted foreign fighters indicates, that few returnees become terrorists, you might want to err on the side of precaution, even if that is expensive and risks leaving individuals stuck in extremist networks that they might actually prefer to leave.

In sum, countering violent extremism with governance networks is no easy solution. However, it offers the best hope of matching the complexity and dynamism of the phenomenon of violent extremism via a broad alliance of actors who, in between them, are much more likely to be able to intervene effectively to counter individual cases of violent extremism than any one single government agency acting on its own.

Conclusion

The public and political inclination to demand strong and decisive countermeasures by the state is understandable when a democracy is faced with a growing threat from terrorism. Analysts have noted the

danger of self-defeating policies in which liberty and fundamental freedoms are jettisoned in a climate of fear, in turn fueling extremist narratives about a repressive state.[17] In this essay, I have argued that there are additional reasons why "strong" policies, designed to protect citizens of democratic states against violent extremism, might defeat their purpose. The variety and complexity of the factors that causes individuals to engage with or disengage from violent extremism are too great. Sanctions that makes some individuals back away from violent extremism could easily lead others to intensify their extremist engagement.

A classical, punitive, state-centric approach to counterterrorism complicates efforts to differentiate on a case to case basis.

A networked governance approach to counter violent extremism is no easy solution. It is less manageable from a classical executive point of view, and possibly less psychologically satisfactory to politicians who want to display strong action. However, it offers the best chance at mobilizing the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to individualize interventions, counter the appeal of violent extremism, and induce individual disengagement from extremist networks.

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Notes

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[11] Ilardi, op. Cit., p. 733.

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Why States Fail to Counter Foreign Fighter Mobilizations: The Role of Intelligence Services

by Timothy Holman

Abstract

Why is it so difficult to disrupt foreign fighter flows? Governments know that foreign fighters can be a threat to both domestic and international security, yet they struggle to prevent would be foreign fighters from leaving their country and track them subsequently. This article seeks to open up the black box of counter-mobilization by examining the ways in which states deal with foreign fighter mobilizations. It argues that there are two main reasons why they may be unable to effectively contain foreign fighter mobilizations. The first is the challenge of inter-state intelligence cooperation due to conflicts of interests between countries. Linked to this are problems in how intelligence is shared. The second reason is the tension, at the domestic level, between collection and prosecution concerns in the investigation of foreign fighter networks. Countering foreign fighting is not the same as countering terrorism, and sometimes the two objectives are in opposition to one another. The article concludes by calling for more research on how states counter foreign fighter mobilizations, particularly focusing on the activities of intelligence, security and police agencies. Counter-mobilization is an important intervening variable that shapes the scale and nature of foreign fighter mobilizations to a greater extent than hitherto reflected in the literature.

Keywords: Foreign fighters; counter-mobilization; intelligence

> *"The return to our territory of individuals motivated by religious fanaticism and trained in violent action has the effect, by the aura given to them from their military experience, to unite around them a group who would themselves benefit from this knowledge with the goal of destabilization [in France]."*[1]- French judicial police report, February 1995

> *"The return to the national territory of jihadists, strongly indoctrinated and trained in the handling of arms and explosives, obviously constitutes a grave threat for the national territory."*[2] French internal security service report, July 2004

Introduction

This article examines why foreign fighter mobilizations are difficult for states to contain. It contends that there are two primary factors; The first is the challenge of inter-state intelligence cooperation due to conflicts of interests between countries. Connected to this are a number of problems in how intelligence is shared between states. The second is the tension, at the domestic level, between collecting information and prosecuting offences in the investigation of foreign fighter networks. The initial evidence presented here tends to suggest that countering foreign fighting is not the same as countering terrorism, and sometimes the two objectives are in opposition to one another. This article has six sections; first, it outlines the counter-mobilization challenge; second, it reviews the intelligence studies literature on liaison and intelligence failures. Third, the article addresses conflicts of interest between states and ensuing intelligence cooperation issues; fourth, a case study of the early French experience with foreign fighters is used to highlight these issues; fifth, the article suggests that there is the domestic tension between countering terrorism and countering foreign fighter mobilizations; sixth, examples from the French experience are used to demonstrate this point. The article concludes by suggesting a need for increased research on state responses to foreign fighter mobilizations. The evidence used in the article comes from a combination of primary sources (autobiographies or biographies of counter-terrorism officials as well as the testimony of these officials in public hearings or inquiries) and secondary sources (press and media accounts).[3]

On 23 September 2014, at around 1 pm, the French television channel *iTélé* announced that three individuals had been arrested at Orly airport after returning from Syria and that they had been transferred to the headquarters of the French internal security service (*Direction générale de la sécurité interieure* (DGSI).[4] Some eight hours later a press release from the French Ministry of the Interior denied the arrests. According to *Le Monde* the three were not in custody but were walking freely around Marseilles.[5] Prior to the flight, they had been held in administrative detention in Turkey after leaving Syria. In an agreement between the Turkish and French authorities, they were scheduled to be flown from Istanbul to Paris on 23 September 2014. However, the pilot of the airplane on the Istanbul to Paris flight refused to let them board. Instead, the Turkish authorities put them on a flight to Marseilles without informing the French authorities. Upon arrival in Marseilles, they entered French territory without being stopped because the information system with their details as individuals of interest was not functioning at the time of their arrival. A day after arriving in France they turned themselves into the Gendarmerie in Caylar where they were arrested and put into pre-trial detention.[6]

This incident is surprising given that since the mid-1990s, the French authorities have consistently assessed the travel abroad of French nationals and residents to conflict zones as posing a threat to the domestic security of France. Between September 2012 and September 2014, the French authorities had dealt with 10 plots or attacks, including five involving returnees from Syria.[7] How is it possible that in early 2014, three French residents were able to travel abroad to Syria and Iraq to join the *Islamic State in Iraq and Syria* (ISIS) and then, after detention by the Turkish authorities in August 2014, return to France without being detained or arrested upon arrival? In this particular case it is all the more surprising as these individuals were part of a wider network associated with Mohamed Merah, the individual responsible for the 2012 Toulouse attacks. Two reasons were given for the mishandled arrival of the three; firstly, the Turkish authorities had changed the previously agreed flight and not notified the French authorities; and secondly, there was a technical problem in the database dealing with passenger arrivals.

The episode demonstrates that by September 2014 the French authorities were struggling to deal with the large numbers of French nationals and residents – approximately 500 – who had traveled to Syria and Iraq. This number would reach more than 1,000 by November 2016.[8] In addition to those who had traveled, there was a nearly equal number of individuals assessed as wanting to travel. As the number of travelers and potential travelers increased, so did the number of plots and attacks; as many as 43 between September 2012 and November 2016.[9] In response to this increase in foreign fighters and plots and attacks, there have been two parliamentary enquiries, new laws, reorganizations of the intelligence structures to include inter-agency task forces, the creation of de-radicalization centers in prisons among other initiatives and a bitter debate between academics about the causes of this surge in violence.[10] Some of the initiatives appear to be responses to events and not necessarily the result of a considered study of past foreign fighter mobilizations and lessons learned from these. France is not the only state confronted with this challenge but due to the scale and nature of the foreign fighter mobilization and attacks in France, its responses have been widely reported and commented upon.

The Counter-Mobilization Challenge

While the reasons given may explain this particular event, this case and the French foreign fighter experience since 2012 is indicative of a broader puzzle related to foreign fighters and government responses to their activity. Why is it that cooperation between states is less than perfect on the issue of foreign fighters despite the fact there is a growing consensus in the academic literature as well as in government assessments that foreign fighting is undesirable and detrimental to the interests of states?[11] Further, alongside this interest-based consensus there is a broadening acceptance of a norm that foreign fighting is not legitimate and that states must work to prevent it and to mitigate the risks arising from this activity.[12]

Foreign fighter mobilizations vary in nature and scale, some like Afghanistan (1980-1989) and Syria (2012-) attract large numbers of volunteers while others like Somalia (2006-2010) or Mali (2012-2014) comparatively few.[13] Some have attracted diverse demographic populations; there are an estimated 300 French females and 400 minors currently in Syria.[14] Others like Afghanistan were relatively homogenous with a demographic profile that was primarily male and almost exclusively from North Africa and the Middle East. The mobilizations also vary in nature, some generating considerable security concerns while others relatively fewer.[15]

The scale of foreign fighter mobilizations is shaped by a range of factors. It is unclear which variable is the most influential but without their presence, a mobilization is unlikely to occur. These include whether or not a conflict fits with jihadi ideology, the presence of groups in the conflict zone that are willing and able to host foreign fighters, pre-existing transnational connections or the ability to make these connections, and whether the conflict is accessible.[16] For example, the Central African Republic did not see a foreign fighter mobilization by jihadis despite some propaganda efforts.[17] This is likely due to the absence of the above factors. In contrast, the Syria conflict was aligned with jihadi ideology, had groups that were willing to host foreign fighters, there were numerous pre-existing transnational connections and where these were absent, social media was able to connect volunteers, the conflict was easily accessible from Turkey, a well-connected international tourist hub, and finally many states did not start to become concerned about the mobilization until large numbers of fighters had already left.

Government concern about foreign fighter activity has been uneven across time with most governments seeking to deal with the domestic security threat from foreign fighters rather than prevent travel. The commitment to stopping travel became an issue with the United States' invasion of Iraq and the pressure applied by the U.S. on country of origin governments to limit flows of fighters.[18] It was the U.S. that was at the forefront of driving efforts to bring the issue of foreign fighters to the forefront of security agenda in the Syria conflict through sponsoring a Security Council resolution.[19] This article looks at constraints of the foreign fighter mobilization process. Foreign fighters do not make decisions purely based on the importance of the cause or attractiveness of the destination. They face a range of obstacles, not least the efforts of states to disrupt, hinder and interdict the travel to foreign insurgencies.

This article looks at why states struggle to disrupt and deter this phenomenon. In order to address the question, I examine the literature from intelligence studies, which deals with both issues of cooperation as well as dysfunction.[20] These themes are of interest because for a state to disrupt or interdict a transnational mobilization, it will have to interact with other states, and secondly, if states fail to disrupt these mobilizations despite their awareness of the threat to domestic interests, an intelligence failure or dysfunction may have occurred. Drawing on this literature, the article argues that there are two possible reasons why states find it difficult to effectively disrupt and deter foreign fighter mobilizations. The first is intelligence cooperation and issues related to conflicts of interests between states. Linked to this are problems in how intelligence is shared. The second reason is concerned with how intelligence and security organizations engage foreign fighter mobilizations and whether or not these means might enable mobilizations.

The term counter-mobilization refers to the broad range of government activities ranging from counter propaganda and recruitment efforts to intelligence or judicial measures and finally, in some cases, the use of military means. For the purposes of this article, the term refers exclusively to the intelligence and police response. This is an understudied area in the foreign fighter literature. Existing studies tend to address who foreign fighters are, why they fight, their influence on insurgencies and the impact of foreign fighters on domestic security.[21] Three aspects of state responses have been looked at; 1) radicalization perspectives dealing with issues related to counter-radicalization or de-radicalization; responses at the very beginning or at the end of the process;[22] 2) Accounts of the conflicts as well as books by retired military figures relating to how they dealt with foreign fighter mobilizations;[23] 3) a growing policy literature from think tanks,

governments and international organizations containing recommendations to governments to limit foreign fighter activities.[24] There is a need for an increased focus not just on factors influencing the supply (foreign fighters) or demand (the insurgent or terrorist group) but also of intervening variables in the process that may influence mobilization outcomes, particularly the role of intelligence and police activity.

The Intelligence Studies Literature

Intelligence is important in countering transnational terrorism; by extension it is probable that it is necessary in deterring or disrupting foreign fighter mobilizations.[25] Richard English has suggested that there are six key elements to successfully responding to terrorism and to eventually bringing a terrorist campaign to an end, of which intelligence is the most vital element.[26] Reveron writes "Intelligence is the first line of defence against terrorism. It can guide law-enforcement activities, focus covert action, and define the scope of U.S. military operations."[27] Wilkinson agrees that intelligence is necessary to thwart terrorism and to mitigate its effects. He also recognizes that the transnational dimension of terrorism requires international cooperation.[28] However, Stephen Lander, the former head of MI5, wrote, "international intelligence co-operation is something of an oxymoron."[29] Despite Lander's skepticism when it comes to intelligence cooperation, Patrick Calvar, the head of the French DGSI, recently stated, it is along with technical methods and human sources, one of the three key sources of intelligence acquisition for agencies.[30] Further, heads of security and intelligence agencies often emphasize the number of their liaison relationships to underline their importance. Bernard Squarcini, the former head of the DGSI, stated that they had 170 external liaison relationships. In comparison, the German Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND – federal external intelligence service) maintains contact with 451 agencies in 167 states.[31] Intelligence cooperation is a necessary but complex endeavor for reasons outlined below.

The intelligence studies literature contains two themes of relevance to understanding how states deal with intelligence cooperation and foreign fighter mobilizations. The first theme deals with the issue of cooperation. It finds that states cooperate based on their interests but that norms may also play a role in cooperation. These interests and norms may impose constraints on how states cooperate. In light of these constraints, the best cooperation occurs where there are personal relationships and trust. This means that states tend to prefer bi-lateral cooperation. Finally depending on these factors, states engage in varying types of intelligence exchange. The second theme of relevance in the literature looks at intelligence failures and dysfunctions and finds that intelligence organizations are dealing with enemies that seek to hide from, disorientate or otherwise escape their scrutiny. These organizations face challenges in executing their missions due to their internal processes and conflicting imperatives. The actions of the intelligence and security organizations may lead to paradoxical outcomes.[32]

Conflicting Interests

Cooperation is founded on self-interest and utility, based on perceived threat, and where there is a convergence, it is only temporary due to the fluid nature of the international system and changing threats and priorities.[33] Shared interests and a common understanding of a threat are not enough to ensure cooperation, culture or norms play a role, particularly in building confidence between partners.[34] The cooperation problem is a central issue in countering foreign fighter mobilizations. A foreign fighter will typically mobilize from their country of origin, travel through one or more transit locations before arriving in the destination country. Often, they will be aided by facilitators, and frequently these individuals make use of transit states to operate. Because of their presence, transit states are frequently identified as playing a key role in limiting access to the conflict zone. A recurring issue with the transit states is that they often perceive the foreign fighter influx differently to the destination state or the state of origin, which can lead to frustration between states.[35] The US commented that, "Not all of that [flow] is preventable, but a lot of it

is preventable–if we've got better cooperation, better coordination, better intelligence, if we are monitoring what's happening at the Turkish-Syria border more effectively…."[36] Historically, it has proven difficult to achieve coordinated responses to foreign fighter mobilizations across origin, transit and destination states. This is an issue of threat perception and divergence of interests between countries.

Transit States

The majority of foreign fighter destinations since the 1980s have had one or more neighboring countries that have played the role of a transit state, examples include Pakistan, Croatia, Syria and Turkey. Pakistan's involvement dates from the 1980s and continued, with pauses, into the late 2000s. Croatia's connection was for a brief period in the early 1990s. Syria was a key transit state during the foreign fighter mobilization to Iraq from 2003 until 2010. Turkey has seen unprecedented levels of transit activity from 2012 onwards with the current mobilization for Syria.[37] A former foreign fighter stated they transited into Bosnia-Herzegovina using Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as cover, and were allowed to move weapons into Bosnia-Herzegovina on the condition that they provided the same amount of arms and munitions to the Croats.[38] There were repeated criticisms of Syria for not denying access to transiting foreign fighters, and similarly there has been criticism of Turkey since 2012. Both states have maintained that they are doing what they can, but that they are not being adequately supported by states of origin, or the destination state.[39] In reality, both countries at times either allowed or did not actively interdict foreign fighter flows; Syria because it perceived that a U.S. military engaged in Iraq was less likely to invade Syria; Turkey because it is opposed to the Assad regime and would like to facilitate its' downfall.[40] As the conflict developed, the Turkish government assessed the role of Kurdish militias in Syria and Iraq and the support from some states to them as problematic.[41] While some perceive the Kurdish militia as useful allies, the Turks perceive engagement with them as legitimizing and empowering them and detrimental to their interests.[42]

Transit state unwillingness to provide sustained long-term cooperation can be overcome if the destination state has the capacity to detect, degrade and interdict cross-border smuggling operations bringing in foreign fighters. During the Iraq conflict, the U.S. and later Iraqi security forces expended significant resources to limit the ability of foreign fighters to cross the border from Syria. The U.S. conducted a cross-border operation to kill or capture an individual assessed to be a key Syria-based foreign fighter facilitator.[43] More recently, it has come to light that the U.S. engaged in their own unilateral information collection operations in Syria because they were unable to acquire adequate cooperation from the Syrians.[44]These efforts did not completely halt foreign fighter flows but they did increase the difficulty of entering Iraq and, combined with country of origin efforts, led to a decline in the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq. In other cases, for example Afghanistan or Somalia, the destination state had limited resources to deploy against in-coming foreign fighter flows, and was unable to stem the flow through its' own efforts. In the case of Pakistan, the initial reactions to foreign fighter activity in Pakistan did not occur until the early-1990s and it was due to pressure from Algeria, Egypt and the United States as militant activity and attacks in these countries were connected back to individuals with connections to the "Afghan-Arabs".[45]

While transit states may assess that their interests lie in not cooperating, or cooperating on their own terms, few transit states have escaped from violence linked to foreign fighter flows. Some states have experienced less than others but there is a cost associated with allowing access to foreign fighters. In Pakistan, the Egyptians bombed the Egyptian Embassy in 1995, following deportations of their members. During the Bosnia conflict, they also carried out an attack in Croatia in 1995 in retaliation for Croatian involvement in the arrest of a leader, Talaat Fouad Qassem.[46] Syria, during the first Iraq war, saw a bombing in 2006, and Turkey has seen a series of bombings on its territory in the past three years, attributed to IS.[47] In the case of Syria, the consequences were not just occasional attacks but the development of militant networks that later re-emerged and have caused serious problems for the former transit state.[48]

Even where interests align, states may choose strategies which conflict or privilege approaches which are difficult to coordinate. For example, in destination state, the military may have the lead, in a transit state, it is the intelligence agencies and in the state of origin police or the judiciary. There are mechanisms for similar types of entities to cooperate, i.e. military to military or between intelligence services or police to police cooperation but, historically, it is rare that the transnational coordination can occur between different types of entities.[49] This appears to be changing as suggested by a recent statement from Interpol that "Cooperation with the US Department of Defence and Interpol's National Central Bureau in Washington DC [that] turned declassified information from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan into invaluable investigative leads abroad…and facilitation and recruitment networks [were] dismantled."[50]

Constraints on Cooperation

Alongside issues of interests there are other constraints on cooperation. These include; 1) the difference in the distribution of power between cooperating agencies, 2) human rights, 3) legal issues, and 4) intelligence being used for unintended purposes.[51] Cooperation may also be constrained by differing counter-terrorism cultures; for example, the U.S. being more militarized and the EU more, regulatory, using judicial and law enforcement measures.[52] This has led to disagreements about the use of electronic surveillance, the timeliness of judicial cooperation and European reluctance to share intelligence with the U.S. for fear of it being used in a manner not compatible with EU laws, i.e. renditions or drone strikes, and finally a fear of leaks of sensitive material to newspapers in the U.S. Concerns about treatment of prisoners or how intelligence is obtained also limit the ability of entities to work together.[53]

Intelligence cooperation occurs within a wider political context which imposes constraints on which services can cooperate with whom and to what degree cooperation is allowed to occur. It can create problems between the intelligence services and other parts of the government; for example, U.S. counterterrorist cooperation with Uzbekistan at the same time the U.S. Department of State was criticizing the same country for human rights abuses.[54] In the case of France, a political decision to cut ties with Damascus led to the intelligence services also not cooperating with the Syrians, a decision that was criticized by the former head of the DGSI. He argued that even when political relationships are poor to non-existent, intelligence cooperation should be maintained even if only at minimal levels.[55] The current head of the DGSE voiced a contrary view, indicating that the Syrians had sought political conditions for intelligence engagement. He stated that, based on information other European services appeared to be obtaining, liaison with Syria was unlikely to produce intelligence of interest as, "the Syrians had never made fighting terrorism a priority."[56]

Another constraint in cooperation is obtaining agreement about how to deal with terrorist structures. Not all services have the same tolerance for risk. There may be disagreement about whether and when arrests should be made, kinetic activities used or if an individual should be kept in play to gather further information. Actions by the United States are alleged to have pushed the United Kingdom to act against the 'liquid bomb' plot in 2006.[57] The UK were waiting to collect further evidence but the U.S. were reported to have shut-down the investigation by providing information to Pakistan that led to an arrest. The UK was then obliged to arrest the group in the UK before that group learned about the action in Pakistan. The U.S. was concerned that the group in the UK would act despite surveillance and monitoring. This goes back to the difficulty of having an analytical framework of the threat that converges between states.

The Preference for Bilateral Cooperation

Even where interests are aligned and constraints are overcome, cooperation is further complicated by a preference for bi-lateral over multilateral cooperation.[58] Bilateral cooperation is seen as the most effective because personal trust can be built. The presence of trust is important due to the sensitive nature of the

material being exchanged.[59] In a bilateral exchange relationship, states are able to better control and manage the risks associated with intelligence exchange, source loss, or penetration by the other service. This preference is problematic during a foreign fighter mobilization where there are tens and sometimes more than a one hundred states involved. Only large intelligence or security services have the capacity to develop all of the bi-lateral relations necessary to acquire enough information to disrupt their foreign fighters mobilizing or mitigate the impact of the mobilization.

Where multilateral cooperation does occur, it is often between services that already have strong ties; for example, the Paris-based *Alliance Base* multi-lateral counter-terrorism center involved in operations against al-Qaeda, included members from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Australia and the United States.[60] Despite differing cultures, these countries had a shared assessment of the threat and had developed enough trust for this arrangement to function. In other settings such as Europol or Interpol, the ability to put in place counter-mobilization initiatives has been more complicated. This is evidenced in the amount of time it took for Europol to acquire large amounts of foreign fighter data from member states. In 2015, Europol only had information about 2,000 foreign fighters from an estimated European contingent of 5,000. Following the attacks in France and Belgium in late 2015 and early 2016, this number rose to 5,353, although only about 3,000 had been reported by member states to Europol.[61] Interpol reported that it has some 9,000 foreign fighters logged in its systems, despite estimates of upwards of 15,000 foreign fighters still remaining in the conflict zone.[62] The preference for bi-lateral cooperation makes combating foreign fighter mobilizations difficult due to the number of countries and the difficulty of obtaining cooperation on a bi-lateral basis from each state.

What is Shared

Cooperation is fundamentally about two issues – who cooperates and what is shared – that is the agencies involved and the granularity of the product.[63] Intelligence exchange is a form of barter but can manifest itself in a number of ways.[64] Simple cooperation involves two services exchanging material on one agreed target. Complex liaison is where intelligence is exchanged to acquire other types of benefits–political, military or economic–from the provision of intelligence.[65] These relationships may be symmetric, where both parties perceive the exchange to be of equal benefit, or asymmetric, where one party benefits from the exchange more than the other.[66] There are risks to engaging in asymmetric relationships over a long period of time. Finally, there are also adversarial relationships where two services cooperate despite that fact that their intelligence interests do not converge.[67]

All of the above factors can be seen in the complicated relationship with Turkey since the beginning of the foreign fighter mobilization in 2011-2012. It is not only the issue of interests that impacted on cooperation with Turkey. A number of other factors appear to have complicated the relationship. One area is concerns about data protection as some EU states have apprehensions about providing Turkey with intelligence in the absence of data protection legislation.[68] Related to this are worries about differences in penalties for terrorism.[69] A further area of concern is the replacement of officers in the Turkish intelligence and police services due to disquiet about Gülenist infiltration.[70] This has led to some states losing individuals that they trusted and have been able to work with on counter-terrorism issues.[71] Finally, factionalism within the Turkish services and suspicion about what interactions they may have had with the various groups in Syria appear to have limited cooperation in the early part of the foreign fighter mobilization to Syria.[72] Even where Turkish interests have aligned with other states, there have been other factors common to intelligence liaison and cooperation that may have hampered cooperation.

Early French Liaison Efforts in Afghanistan

Early French efforts in Afghanistan show that most of these factors–diverging interests, asymmetrical intelligence demands, problems in sustaining cooperation and trust issues–were present at one point or another over a 20-year period from 1980 onwards. The initial French presence was linked to monitoring the war in Afghanistan, and in 1980, the *Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage* (SDECE – the former name of the *Direction général de la sécurité extérieure* – DGSE, changed in 1984) opened a post in Islamabad, Pakistan.[73] The post was under cover of a Defense attaché and was not welcomed by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[74] The SDECE sought to work with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). In return for their cooperation, the ISI requested permission to operate on French territory against opposition groups. This was refused and they then asked for information about the Mirage aircraft sold by France to India.[75] This request was also declined. The relationship with the ISI was further complicated by ISI expectations about money, given ISI's interaction with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) brought in large sums of money.[76]

It was not until 1988 that the SEDCE, now renamed the DGSE, started to become interested in foreign fighters, submitting their first report on Bin Laden in 1988.[77] In 1994, following the bombings in Marrakech, Morocco, the French intelligence and security services started to pay attention to the travel of their nationals to the region; 16 of the group linked to the Marrakech attacks had trained in Afghanistan.[78] In response, in 1995, the DGSE sought to recruit new sources, including an Egyptian as well as Afghans, to collect information on foreign fighters. An asset was also deployed from Paris and successfully entered an al-Qaeda training camp. The DGSE tried to deploy a locally recruited Kashmiri jihadi to the camps but the individual was rejected due to suspicion on the part of al-Qaeda's counter-intelligence function that he was an intelligence asset.[79] Other sources of information used by the French included identifying visitors to the Alliance française as well as monitoring visa requests to the region and passport renewals at the Embassy.[80] Massoud, the Afghan commander, provided information to the French on foreign fighters as well as photographs of the training camps.[81] At some point in the 1990s, the cooperation between the ISI and the DGSE appears to have waned. In 2000, the DGSE sought to revive their relationship, in exchange the ISI requested access to satellite imagery products.[82]

There were attempts to share information between the U.S. and the French due to their mutual interest in Bin Laden and foreign fighters. Notin relates a meeting between a French officer and a U.S. officer. The French officer showed photographs of the interior of the al-Qaeda training camps and the U.S. officer produced high resolution satellite imagery. Both were able to look at each other's intelligence but not able to exchange the material.[83] Even where two agencies were working on the same threat actor there were issues of trust in relation to sources and means. Following the 9/11 attacks, the French services were interested in tracking and locating French nationals or residents leaving Afghanistan. However, the French were unable to compete with the large payments, the U.S. was making to the Pakistani agencies for captured foreign fighters.[84]

The French were initially interested in what was occurring inside Afghanistan in relation to the Soviets and the Afghan resistance. This collection was driven by their interests but the activities of the DGSE were constrained by a political decision to not allow them to operate in Afghanistan. Their interest on collecting intelligence on foreign fighters was motivated by attacks involving French nationals, first in Morocco and then in France. The cooperation with the ISI was complicated due to diverging interests; the French in foreign fighters and the Pakistanis in Indian acquisition of French military material. The French also found themselves in a position where they were competing with other agencies to acquire information on the same or, at least, a similar target set.

It was not only the relationship between DGSE and ISI that was complicated, there were tensions between the DGSE and the *Direction de la surveillance du territoire* (DST, the former name of the DGSI). This occurred when the DST deployed two liaison officers to Islamabad. In the French case, there had long been tension

between the DGSE and the DST concerning whether or not the DST should operate overseas.[85] The DGSE regarded activity outside of France as its preserve. A second set of tensions existed between the DST and the criminal police in France, which has a mandate to investigate terrorism, but which at one point in time, was excluded from investigating jihadi terrorism. The mission of the DGSE is to disrupt attacks against French interests abroad as well as the planning of attacks from abroad in France. The mission of the DGSI is to prevent attacks in France, and the responsibility of the police is to investigate following an attack.

Finally, the investigating magistrates and the justice system build cases and prosecute suspects in court based on evidence provided by the criminal police. These differing missions at times result in blind spots. For example, if the DGSI hands a file to the French judicial system, and the individual or individuals implicated are being charged, they can no longer be targeted as objects of surveillance by the DGSI.[86] With the conflict in Syria, the French have sought to resolve some of these issues through the creation of inter-agency task forces – *Hermès* – between the DGSE and French military intelligence (*direction du renseignement militaire*, DRM) and *Allat* between the DGSI and six other organizations.[87] Nonetheless, even with the best efforts, the differing organizational cultures and missions mean that cooperation problems persist.

Agrell summarizes the situation states find themselves as they try to disrupt foreign fighter mobilizations through engaging in intelligence cooperation:

> *"To sum up, in theory intelligence liaison should be guided by reason, logic and trade-offs. The actual conduct of intelligence liaison might be something quite different. The pattern of liaison and the political setting of the intelligence relations are at best complicated and full of contradictions, at worst irrational, obscure and impossible to comprehend in terms of a coherent security strategy."*[88]

Intelligence cooperation between states is subject to interests not only defined by the agencies themselves and their assessments of threats but also as defined by their political masters leading, at times, to conflicts and to undesirable outcomes. Cooperation between states and within states is important in counter-mobilizations but there is an additional factor that also plays a role which occurs at the domestic level within states.

Counter Terrorism and Counter-mobilization

The cooperation problem does not, in and of itself, fully explain why states cannot better contain foreign fighter mobilizations. A second factor is present and this concerns the tension at a domestic level between countering terrorism and countering foreign fighters. The tools used for countering terrorism and the collection and engagement practices of state agencies may produce outcomes at odds with the desired result. In short, the counter-terrorist practice and the routines of states may enable, in the short-run, foreign fighter mobilizations. Counter-mobilization efforts to mitigate the risk of violence on their territory may create space for volunteers to travel. Intelligence organizations face not only "outside enemies" but also "inherent enemies."……"[These] enemies are a collection of mental limitations, dilemmas, contradictory imperatives, paradoxical interactions, and trade-offs amongst objectives in the intelligence..."[89] These all seem to be at work in some form or another as states engage with foreign fighter issues.

Outside Enemies

"Outside enemies" are the targets of intelligence operations. In the case of foreign fighters, it may be the facilitators or the would-be volunteers. The foreign fighter networks are not passive targets, allowing themselves to be easily observed. They engage in employing methods to limit the effectiveness of surveillance and infiltration. The use of multiple pre-paid and anonymous mobile telephones, false travel documents and encrypted communication methods have all been widely reported.[90] These networks may take more aggressive methods. Mohamed Merah took measures to ensure he was not being followed or monitored,

including verifying if the vehicle he was using had a surveillance device attached and driving slowly on the hard shoulder of the road to detect cars that were following.[91] Another member of the Artigat network is reported to have destroyed an audio and video surveillance system put in place by the French services. The same individual beat up a person suspected of being an informant.[92] In another, more recent, case, a female posed as a male on social media channels to recruit and motivate another female. This deception took some time for the security services to understand and analyze.[93] While intelligence and security services may target facilitators and foreign fighters, there is no certainty that they will always be able to do exactly what they want because their adversary is acting to avoid detection and attempting to negate the efforts of the services.

Conflicting Imperatives

In terms of counter-mobilization, states seek to mitigate the risk of domestic attacks and acquire information on future intent, and in doing so, they may temporarily enable foreign fighter travel by not immediately disrupting facilitation. While this may have been efficient when foreign fighter numbers were relatively low – a few dozen persons per year – the benefits of this approach appear to be fewer when numbers reach tens of persons per week traveling. This is not a normative judgment regarding the ways in which states deal with foreign fighters, but rather an observation of how threat perception and state strategies to deal with the identified threat influence, indirectly, processes related to foreign fighter mobilizations. This impact can be to the benefit of facilitation in the short-run, by permitting it to function and to the detriment of other states as foreign fighters arrive to participate in conflicts.

Paradoxical Outcomes

The interaction between facilitation and counter-mobilization creates a paradox – in order to know who the facilitator is and how they operate, the agents of state need to engage either via a proxy – a human source, for example, an agent or an asset – or through observing the facilitation activities via physical surveillance or technical collection (telephone billings, or intercepts).[94] This interaction or engagement with the facilitation means that for the state to acquire knowledge of future activities and intentions, government agencies sometimes allow facilitators to carry out their role of providing information and resources to would-be foreign travelers. Even where the state wants to disrupt and arrest the facilitators, the requirements of the judicial system imply that evidence must be collected to prove that activities prohibited by law have indeed occurred. The process of collecting evidence is time-consuming, and while this goes on, the facilitators continue to function. In short, for state responses – intelligence and evidence collection – to operate, they need to engage the facilitation and in doing so allow it to function. This is an example of the issue of the 'trade-offs amongst objectives' – should the facilitators be permitted to operate so that the agency knows who has left and who might come back, or should they be stopped to prevent travel. Three examples are provided of attempts to deal with facilitation and suspected travelers.

The first is the case of an individual in a recent foreign fighter trial in Belgium provides an example. The defense lawyers and a defendant believed that the individual was an asset of the Belgian police and played a role as a facilitator, as much as, or even more than their client. This led the journalist to write, "the former informant appears in so many of the conspiratorial meetings, elusive telephone contacts, and the activities facilitating the departure to Syria, that he necessarily becomes a main link in the network."[95] It is tempting to see only bad faith on the part of the state in not prosecuting the individual, but this example points to complicated and messy outcomes of state attempts to engage the activities of facilitators.

A second example is the March 2015 arrest by Turkish authorities of an individual they asserted had been working as an asset for the Canadian authorities. While the press is unlikely to have had the full details of

this case, it is nonetheless further evidence of the, at times, confusing consequences of the engagement of state responses and facilitation mechanisms. The individual was found with documents related to money transfers to the United Kingdom, and images of passports assessed as belonging to foreign fighters. He told the police that, "I was transferring money to Raqqa [in Syria]. My mission was to learn details about contacts of [DAESH] members and relay this information to my liaison at Canada's Embassy in Jordan…"[96] This shows that for information to be collected, state engagement with the facilitation mechanism enables it to function. In this case, it is unclear, whether the goal of running the asset was to acquire information about Canadian nationals traveling to Syria – three females were stopped as they sought to access Syria – and thus the Canadians were not interested in disrupting activity linked to other nationalities, unless this information was subsequently used in intelligence exchanges to leverage the acquisition of information of interest to the Canadians.

A third example, is provided by Verkaik who writes that MI5 approaches to at least 6 individuals in London suspected of sympathy for al-Shabaab may actually have led to two of them radicalizing.[97] He relates that the individuals were approached repeatedly and in an aggressive manner, including visits to their homes, stop and searches on the street and intimidating phone calls.[98] One of the individuals was later arrested after fighting with al-Shabaab, while a second traveled to Syria.[99] The way in which organizations seek to engage would-be foreign fighters may at times have unexpected or unwanted consequences.

Counter-Terrorism and Foreign Fighters in France

Since the mid-1990s, the French assessment of the jihadi threat has been that foreign fighters are a direct threat to the territory of France. Therefore, the mitigating strategy has been directed at the protection of French territory from violence–a point consistently stressed by heads of the French internal security service from Yves Bonnet to Bernard Squarcini.[100] Marc Trévidic, a French investigative magistrate, formerly involved in counter-terrorism investigations, detailed French judicial routines prior to the Syria mobilization. [101] French practice with "filieres" [networks] was to monitor the departure and return of individuals, to build a case against the individual leading to a long prison sentence.[102] Trévidic stated that the period after the return of an individual was particularly important to building a case. Extensive and extended periods of monitoring permitted authorities to build a case based on the discovery of plotting by the returnees. Proving the plotting aspect meant that longer sentences could be obtained. Over time the French judicial evaluation evolved; Trévidic wrote that letting travelers leave came to be seen as a risk, given that they were likely to be more dangerous upon return. He also noted that France had a sort of moral obligation to what he terms, "international public order" to not let its citizens make the situation of allies more difficult or dangerous. [103] Again, this is an example of "contradictory imperatives," the protection of the French territory and obtaining long prison sentences versus obligations to allies.

The application of this type of strategy led to a situation where facilitators and travelers are permitted to operate while information and evidence is collected. The goal is not the prevention of foreign travel or facilitation, but stopping attacks on French territory. David Thomson reported that some of the Syria travelers felt that they were "allowed" to leave. While this might be their perception, in reality the French authorities were following an established practice related to foreign fighters.[104] This practice was later called into question when the volume of travelers greatly exceeded previous foreign fighter streams. A change in French responses to the foreign traveler issue has indeed occurred, and in the past year some 400 persons have been banned from leaving France. This change has led to another issue, the problem of obstructed, or frustrated wannabe-travelers. Persons who have been prevented from traveling overseas may choose to carry out domestic attacks. This is a "paradoxical interaction" where the intent to prevent harm abroad by stopping would-be fighters may increase the risk of harm at home. A number of would-be foreign fighters stopped from traveling abroad have instead turned to attacking at home. For example, one of the individuals involved

in the killing of the priest in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, France, tried on two occasions to travel to Syria but was unsuccessful.[105] This interaction within the counter-mobilization mechanism is a source of friction that can result in ambiguous outcomes or situations.

Does It Matter?

Do efforts to counter facilitation and foreign fighter travel matter? Is it not enough to focus on countering violent extremism, counter-narratives and de-radicalization? If people can be persuaded not to travel or if the efforts of terrorist entities to recruit are negated and those who do travel can be guided away from violence, then whether or not states can cooperate is less important. This might be true, but given the demands for increased collection authority, more legal powers, and more human and financial resources, it is important to examine how security, intelligence and police conduct their counter-mobilization mission. This is not a novel insight but to date research has largely dealt with other aspects of counter-mobilization.[106] Arguably, none of the soft measures matter, if the interests of states do not align; when they are unable to cooperate, facilitators can move between the gaps created by this lack of cooperation, and the means that agencies employ to investigate allow facilitators and foreign fighters to act over short periods.

Conclusion

This article has examined a previously under-explored aspect of foreign fighter mobilizations, namely counter-mobilization efforts by states, particularly efforts by intelligence and enforcement agencies to disrupt foreign fighter access to the battlefield. It suggests two possible explanations why states have difficulties in disrupting and interdicting foreign fighter mobilizations, at least, in the short-run. Counter-mobilization strategies against facilitation and foreign fighter mobilizations, more generally, are hindered by, first, the difficulty of aligning interests between states and their organizing agencies so that they cooperate and share intelligence; and second by adopting means that disrupt travel as opposed to enabling it. There is an apparent tension between countering foreign fighting and countering terrorism. The means employed to combat the first are not necessarily those that are required to deal with the second. To date, many states have sought to deal with foreign fighting using existing counter terrorism methods and do not always appear prepared to consider alternatives.

This analysis of counter-mobilization provides a number of insights for those dealing with foreign fighter mobilizations. States should be aware of, and prepare for, dealing with transit states and finding ways to either encourage them or apply pressure to them from the outset of a mobilization so that these states do not allow foreign fighters to transit. Second, inter-agency coordination needs to occur from the outset of a foreign fighter mobilization and not when facilitation has become well-established and returnees are already beginning to travel back to their countries of residence. Third, governments need to find alternative means to deal with infiltration operations enabling foreign travel. This is important as facilitation has moved from primarily physical relations and connections to leveraging virtual networks. The time needed to seek out and engage facilitators has been reduced and the judicial methods used to deal with facilitation require more time than is available to stop travel.

Finally, the article suggests that it is important to move beyond studying only counter-radicalization or de-radicalization aspects of the counter-mobilization effort. It is important to examine the activities of intelligence and police agencies in a rigorous manner. There are at least two inter-linked reasons why this is necessary. The first is a need to better understand how counter-mobilization works, given the frequency and increasing scale of foreign fighter mobilizations. Without a clear understanding, designing or recommending strategies and policies could lead to unintended as well as unwelcome consequences. The second reason is to better assess the claims of agencies for more resources or increased legal powers. If, as Hegghammer suggests,

there is an upward trajectory in jihadi activity and violence, which looks set to endure, then these demands are likely to manifest in ways that impact on privacy and liberty.[107] Terrorism scholars should and need to be able to critique and examine the claims of these agencies as well as those of their political masters, based on informed research and analysis.

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The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View

by Thomas Hegghammer

Abstract

This article presents a ten-year forecast for jihadism in Europe. Despite reaching historically high levels in recent years, violent Islamist activity in Europe may increase further over the long term due to four macro-trends: 1) expected growth in the number of economically underperforming Muslim youth, 2) expected growth in the number of available jihadi entrepreneurs, 3) persistent conflict in the Muslim world, and 4) continued operational freedom for clandestine actors on the Internet. Over the next decade, the jihadi attack plot frequency in Europe may follow a fluctuating curve with progressively higher peaks. Many things can undercut the trends and lead to a less ominous outcome, but the scenario is sufficiently likely to merit attention from policymakers.

Keywords: Europe; jihadism; forecasting

Introduction

Europe has recently experienced something of a jihadi terrorism crisis, marked by several mass-casualty attacks and a veritable exodus of foreign fighters to Syria. Now that foreign fighter flows are subsiding and Islamic State is weakening, many are hoping that the worst is over. In this speculative article I argue that it is probably not. Things may calm down in the short term, but four macro-trends point to a future with even larger radicalization and terrorism challenges than today. While this pessimistic scenario need not materialize, policymakers would be well advised to brace themselves for it.

The article starts with a description of recent developments and a reflection on the short-term prospects. After presenting the framework for the long-term assessment, I describe the four macro-trends that underpin the assessment. Then I ask how exactly the long-term increase may play out, before discussing reasons why the prediction may be wrong. The conclusion reflects on the value of the prediction and its policy implications.

The Jihadism Crisis

The last few years have seen historically high levels of jihadi activity in Europe. There has been a negative development on a range of indicators, including:

- *Deaths*: Between 2014 and 2016, jihadi attacks killed 273 people, more than in all previous years combined (267).[1]

- *Attacks*: In 2015 and 2016, there were 14 jihadi attacks, about 3.5 times more than the biannual average (6) for the preceding fifteen years.[2]

- *Plots*: In 2015 and thus far in 2016, there were 29 well-documented attack plots, about 2.5 times more than the biannual average (12).[3]

- *Execution rate*: In 2015 and 2016 about half of the serious plots reached execution, compared with less than a third in the preceding fifteen years.[4]

- *Foreign fighters*: Between 2011 and 2016 over 5,000 European Muslims went to fight in Syria; about five times more than the number that went to all previous destinations combined.[5]

- *Arrests*: Between 2011 and 2015, almost 1,600 people were arrested in jihadism-related investigations in the EU (excluding the UK); an increase of 70% compared with the previous five-year period.[6]

There have also been ominous qualitative changes to jihadi operations. The November 2015 Paris attack, which involved nine operators, all equipped with functioning suicide vests, who struck near-simultaneously in three separate locations, was one of the most complex terrorist operations ever carried out in Europe.[7] Some plots were even more ambitious, and one network may even have taken active steps toward acquiring radioactive materials.[8] Moreover, the Paris and Brussels attacks in November 2015 and March 2016 were probably the first case since 1995 of the same jihadi cell being able to strike hard twice (most previous cells were dismantled after their first major attack). All this happened while European security services were larger and more experienced with counterterrorism than perhaps at any time in their history.

Nobody before 2011 predicted this jihadi resurgence, and its precise causes remain unclear. In retrospect, three factors seem to have played a particularly important role. The first and most obvious was the eruption of the Syria war in 2011, which provided European Islamists with an unusually visible and accessible foreign fighter destination.[9] The second was the social media revolution of around 2010, which facilitated recruiting by allowing for more propaganda distribution and safer communication between activists.[10] The third was the rise of Islamic State in 2013-2014, which provided an appealing new brand of jihadism and a territory from which to plot attacks in Europe.

Short-term Decline?

The jihadism crisis has been met with a range of countermeasures. Governments have adopted tougher legislation and more aggressive prosecution practices against foreign fighters.[11] Security services have been given larger budgets, and some, especially the French ones, have been granted more intrusive powers.[12] The same services have worked actively to root out recruitment networks and dismantle so-called "gateway groups" such as *Islam4UK* and its many spin-offs across Europe.[13] Many countries have developed countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies involving prevention and rehabilitation programs.[14] Several European states are also involved in the military effort against Islamic State and probably run intelligence operations in and around IS's territory. Meanwhile, intelligence services have no doubt learned much about the networks that emerged in the first half of the 2010s. All these efforts have presumably made it harder for European jihadis to recruit, to travel, and to plot.

The combined effect of these measures may well be a decline in jihadi activity in the short run, i.e., in the next two to five years. There are already signs that this is happening; foreign fighter departures have been down for at least a year, and the past few months have seen slightly fewer and less potent attack plots than late 2015 and early 2016.[15] Some fear that the Islamic State may lash out as Mosul and Raqqa come under attack, but it is not clear whether the group has spare capacity to further escalate in Europe under the current constraints. This is certainly not to say that jihadi attacks will cease in the near future, only that it would be reasonable to expect a moderate decline compared with the plot frequency of 2015 and early 2016. After all, strong states such as those of Europe virtually always "win" against known terrorist adversaries, because the resource asymmetry is so large. The reason terrorism persists and often comes in waves is that states have an information problem in the early phase of terrorism campaigns. When new groups and networks emerge, states do not know exactly who and where the rebels are, and this gives the latter an advantage until the states have mapped the networks.[16]

The Risks and Limits of Long-term Prediction

The main question, as far as the long-term future is concerned, is to what extent we will see new jihadi networks emerge in Europe. The problem, however, is that speculating about such long-term futures involves

great uncertainty. There is also an ethical dimension to such speculation, because it can veer into alarmism, something for which terrorism analysts have a well-earned reputation.[17] Alarmism in counterterrorism is costly; it can lead to over-expenditure, human rights abuses, undermining of the rule of law, and polarization between groups in society. In this particular case, however, the trends pointing in a negative direction are unusually strong, and it is arguably better to discuss them than to ignore them.

The following sections will describe four macro-trends which, if they continue, may in combination facilitate the emergence of more jihadi activism in Europe some five to fifteen years from now. I identified the trends one by one over the past two years as I conducted my own research and read that of others. It was when I realized there were several of them, and that they combined to a worrying whole that I decided to write this article. The four trends are: 1) a growth in the number of economically underperforming Muslim youth, 2) a growth in the number of veteran activists, 3) persistent armed conflict in the Muslim world, and 4) persistent operational freedom on the Internet.

While the list of trends is inductively generated, its relevance is to some extent theoretically underpinned. The four trends all touch on elements prominent in "resource mobilization" approaches to political activism. Resource mobilization is a perspective from the social movements literature that views surges of activism less as a response to broader socio-political strains and more as a function of the ability of entrepreneurs to craft activist networks and exploit protest technologies.[18] The first of the four trends concerns the availability of recruits; the second affects the number of entrepreneurs available to build networks; the third relates to the availability of political grievances and safe havens outside the West, while the fourth affects operational capacity. In an ideal-type jihadi network-building effort, each of these variables is presumably important: activism requires entrepreneurs; entrepreneurs need manpower; manpower comes more easily with political grievances; and both recruitment and operations are improved by online freedom.

Are there other salient variables? Perhaps, but many of the factors usually invoked to explain jihadism are in fact constants. Jihadi ideology, for example, is practically always available. There will "always" be a variety of jihadi ideologies around, with bodies of literature to back them up and firebrands to promote them. The degree to which larger numbers of people embrace a given jihadi ideology at a given time is arguably a function less of the doctrine's finer points than of the resources available to spread it and the political developments that give it empirical credibility. Similarly with the various motivations or processes by which individuals are recruited to jihadi groups; for example, we know that many are attracted to the adventure or camaraderie of clandestine activism, but these rewards are found in all radical groups, and they presuppose the existence of a group in the first place. By contrast, the four factors highlighted here are variables, and they affect central aspects of the network-building enterprise.

The prediction exercise is complicated by the fact that jihadi activism can take at least three different forms – attack plots in Europe, foreign fighting, and non-violent agitation – and that each ideal type of activism involves different types of constraints. Non-violent agitation is relatively constraint-free, so the level of agitation depends primarily on the supply of motivated activists, and is therefore more predictable. The level of foreign fighter flows, however, depends on the availability of foreign fighter destinations and the ease with which these can be reached. This is unpredictable, as the Syrian war demonstrated. The level of plot activity, meanwhile, depends on the countermeasures that governments are willing and able to muster. The relationship between plotting and countermeasures is strategic, which means that what government do depends on what the terrorists do. For example, a surge in plotting is typically followed by police repression, which brings the plotting frequency down, at least temporarily. The point is that while macro-trends probably can indicate the expected general level of activism, it is very hard to say exactly which specific types of activism will be prevalent at any one place and time.

Macro-trend 1: A Larger Recruitment Pool

The first macro-trend is that the main demographic pool from which European jihadis have historically been recruited, namely economically underperforming Muslim youth, seems to be growing. We know that the majority of European jihadis are young Muslim men of immigrant background from the lower half of the socioeconomic ladder. We do not yet know whether or not their economic underperformance has a causal effect on radicalization, but we know that a majority of them are drawn from this demographic. Tens of large-n studies have found European jihadis, as a group, to score worse than national averages on indicators such as education level, employment rate, and criminal conviction rate.[19]

We also know that the size of the European Muslim population is increasing as a result of immigration and relatively high (but declining) fertility rates. According to Pew Research, the Muslim population in Northern, Western and Southern Europe is set to increase with around 50% from 2010 to 2030, from around 25 million to 37 million.[20] The highest relative increase is expected in Northern and Western Europe, with a 98% and 45% increase respectively (3.8 to 7.5 million in Northern Europe, and 11.3 to 16.4 million in Western Europe). The share of the total population is expected to increase from 3.8% to 7% in Northern Europe, from 6% to 8.6% in Western Europe, and from 6.9% to 8.8% in Southern Europe.

Pew also projected the Muslim population in all European countries except the Balkans to have a male surplus in 2030, albeit a slightly smaller one than in 2010. Some countries such as the UK, Norway, Spain and Italy expect sex ratios of over 120 men per 100 women in 2030. The Muslim population is also generally younger than the non-Muslim population, and although the gap is expected to decrease slightly compared with today, the proportion of the European Muslim population under age 30 in 2030 is expected at around 42%, compared with 31% for non-Muslims. The Pew analysis was conducted before the refugee crisis in 2015, which brought around 1 million asylum seekers from Muslim-majority countries to the European Union, over 60% of whom were men under 35.[21]

Most important, we have good reason to expect the European Muslim population to continue to be economically underperforming on average. In most European countries, Muslims are the most economically disadvantaged major religious group.[22] This is likely the result of three factors: first, that many Muslim immigrants arrived with low education; second, that social mobility in the EU is generally mediocre (except in Scandinavia)[23]; and third, that there is documented anti-Muslim discrimination in the labour market.[24] Put more simply, many early Muslim immigrants entered the labour market as working class, and their children were not able to climb the social ladder. This situation is likely to persist, because first-generation Muslim immigrants continue to arrive with relatively low education on average, and there is little to suggest social mobility will increase or anti-Muslim discrimination will decrease in the EU in the coming decade. We therefore have good reason to believe that the number of economically disaffected Muslim youth in Europe will be larger in 2030 than today.

None of this needs to matter. Only a tiny fraction of European Muslims become involved with militancy, and the proportion varies across host countries and between ethnic subsets of the Muslim community.[25] There is also a substantial minority of converts in European jihadi networks.[26] It is therefore not a given that the jihadi community will grow proportionally, or even at all, if the Muslim population increases. Socio-economic discontent on its own is more likely to lead to crime or the occasional riot than to terrorism. The size of the jihadi community is presumably affected much more by intervening variables such as the availability of radical organizations and recruitment networks. However, if we expect such networks to exist in 2030, then these demographic trends may make their recruiting task somewhat easier.

Macro-trend 2: More Entrepreneurs

A second and more important trend is that the number of people who can serve as entrepreneurs and local network-builders may be larger in the coming ten years than it was in the previous decade. This is because the recent jihadi crisis has produced an unprecedented number of foreign fighters and other activists who will command authority if and when they try to rebuild jihadi networks in the future.

We know recruitment usually happens through social networks and that former foreign fighters and other veteran activists often play important roles in the formation of new radical communities.[27] This is presumably because their experience and reputation afford them authority vis-à-vis younger recruits. This mechanism has thus far ensured a remarkable historical continuity in the networks that have made up European jihadism. Activists from the 1980s radicalized a new generation of militants in the 1990s, who in turn built new networks in the 2000s, who in turn influenced new recruits in the 2010s.[28] With several of the networks operative today we can trace a network genealogy going all the way back to the 1990s.[29]

Historically, a proportion of European jihadis appear to have been "in it for life," in the sense that they continued with their activism over many years, both during and after serving prison time. Such veterans often stayed clear of direct involvement in attack plots, because they knew they were on the radar of the authorities, but they continued to recruit and advise new networks. The proportion of new activists who went on to become entrepreneurs and network-builders appears to have been small. Some were killed in action, some got very long prison sentences, and many demobilized. However, the few who kept going were able to do considerable damage. There is arguably no reason why the most recent generation of European jihadis should not also include a certain percentage of people who are in it for the long haul.

There are presumably two main types of activists who can obtain veteran status and serve as future network-builders, namely, foreign fighters and people imprisoned on terrorism-related counts. The past five years have seen both of these groups grow very large. Between 2011 and 2016 around 5,000 European Muslims went to Syria, most of them to join radical groups such as Islamic State or Jabhat al-Nusra.[30] By contrast, the total number of Islamist foreign fighters from Europe for the entire 1990-2010 period was probably less than 1,000.[31] To be sure, the number of radical Syria veterans in Europe will be smaller than 5,000, because not everyone comes back, and not everyone comes back a committed jihadi. According to some reports, between 20% and 30% (i.e., between 1,000 and 1,500) of the Syria travellers have returned thus far.[32] The number of returnees will presumably increase somewhat in the next few years, but it is difficult to estimate the final number. In any case, many will be potential future activists; a recent study by German authorities suggested only about 10% of foreign fighters returning from Syria were disillusioned with jihadi ideology.[33]

As far as detainees are concerned, Europol reported that between 2011 and 2015, 1,579 individuals were arrested in connection with Islamist terrorism investigations. The figure for the previous five-year period (2006-2010) was 937.[34] These figures exclude data from the UK, which does not report disaggregated arrest data to Europol. However, the UK has separately reported that it made 1,199 terrorism-related arrests between 2011/12 and 2015/16 (and 932 in the previous five-year period).[35] Not all were Islamism-related, but we know that in the 2001-2012 period, 88% of the people arrested in the UK in terrorism-related cases and for whom the religion was known, were Muslims.[36] Of course, not all arrests end with a conviction, and some individuals may have been detained more than once, so these figures must be treated with caution.

Another measure is the number of people currently serving time for jihadism-related terrorism crimes. In the UK, for example, there were 152 such convicts as of September 2016.[37] An additional 1,000 people in UK prisons were considered "at risk of radicalization" to various ideologies, including both jihadism and neo-Nazism.[38] In France, the number of inmates on terrorism crimes was 349 as of October 2016, with an additional 1,336 individuals detained on radicalization counts ("prévenus et condamnés radicalizes"), and another 359 "radicalized" individuals in open detention.[39] In Belgium, the number of detainees on terrorism counts (including individuals awaiting trial) was 117 in June 2016.[40]

A conservative back-of-the envelope calculation would suggest Europe has today at least a couple of thousand radical Islamists with either foreign fighter experience or prison experience, or both. Perhaps only a small proportion of them will be lifelong militants, but the absolute numbers are such that the number of surviving veterans who can potentially take on an entrepreneurial role will be substantial. We have to bear in mind that the operational networks we have seen in the past emerged on the back of much smaller numbers of veterans.

The challenge of veterans serving as entrepreneurs is compounded by two features of the European criminal justice system, namely prison radicalization and relatively short sentences (at least compared with the United States and the Middle East). There has long been widespread concern about Islamist radicalization in European prisons.[41] Many who enter prison with jihadi convictions do not deradicalize, and some common criminals radicalize through interaction with ideologically committed inmates.[42] *Sky News* recently reported that:

> *Around three-quarters of the 583 people imprisoned on terror charges in the years since the 9/11 attacks have now served their sentences and been released from UK prisons, many still holding the same extremist beliefs that got them jailed in the first place. […] around two-thirds of those released refused to engage with prison deradicalisation programmes aimed at addressing their extremist behaviour.*[43]

Moreover, many inmates with radical convictions serve sentences of a few years only. In 2012, according to Europol, the average sentence in terrorism cases in Britain, Germany, and France was six, six, and five years respectively, and in 2013 it was nine, four, and seven respectively.[44] Moreover, few convicts serve their full sentence, and some serve as little as half. In the past, several individuals committed or plotted terrorist attacks after serving time in prison.[45]

We do not have sentencing length data for the last few years, but there is every reason to think that they are relatively short on average, because they involve many cases of foreign fighting or attempted foreign fighting, which is usually considered a less serious crime than plotting attacks inside Europe. This gives reason to believe that the next 5-10 years will see the release of many individuals with jihadi credentials who are still in their late twenties or early thirties, i.e., with potentially many years left in their militant careers. If history is a guide, some of these individuals may well become the jihadi entrepreneurs of the 2020s.

Macro-trend 3: Persistent Conflict in the Muslim World

The third major trend is the apparent persistence of armed conflict in parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Existing conflicts show few signs of ending, and new ones may erupt. The region therefore looks set to supply European jihadis with both rallying causes and training opportunities for the foreseeable future, as it has in the past.

The evolution of jihadism in Europe has always been closely connected with political developments in the Muslim world. For a start, jihadism arguably first came to Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s with Islamist insurgents who found in Europe a fundraising ground and a refuge.[46] After Europe developed an indigenous jihadi community from the mid-1990s onward, conflicts in the Muslim world continued to affect this community in two important ways. The first was by providing grievances that interested Muslim immigrants in Europe and gave resonance to jihadi narratives about an Islam under attack from infidels and apostates. European jihadis have arguably always been more preoccupied with wars and insurgencies in the Muslim world than with "domestic" European issues such as headscarf bans. Conflicts such as the Algeria war in the 1990s, the second Palestinian intifada from 2000, and the war in Syria after 2011 all featured very prominently in internal discussions among European jihadis and in radicalization accounts by militants.[47]

Conflicts that involve Western military intervention, such as Afghanistan after 2001 or Iraq after 2003, have tended to have a particularly strong mobilizing effect on European jihadism.[48] In fact, when European

jihadis justify attacks in Europe, it is most often with reference to European countries' military actions in the Muslim world. The post-9/11 era has seen a vicious cycle whereby terrorist attacks in the West directed by jihadi groups in the Muslim world prompt Western military action against those groups, which in turn fuels radicalization in the West. The ongoing war against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria suggests that this vicious cycle is far from broken. However, even if we assume zero Western military action in the Muslim world in the coming decade, history suggests European jihadism could still thrive on external conflicts. The post 2011 Syria war, for example, drew record numbers of European foreign fighters before European militaries started bombing IS targets in Syria in late 2014.

The second mechanism by which conflicts in the Muslim world affect European jihadism is by facilitating the rise of jihadi organizations that can host European foreign fighters. Many conflicts that erupted in the Muslim world after 1990 saw the involvement of one or more jihadi groups. Not infrequently, those groups proved willing to host foreign fighters from Europe. As a result, European foreign fighters have trained and fought in a variety of conflict zones over the past 25 years, including in Tajikistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Somalia, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Mali, Libya, and Syria.[49] Foreign fighting fuels European jihadism by transferring military skills to the foreign fighters, by radicalizing some of them, and by giving them a social status they can exploit for recruitment purposes when they return. We know that returning foreign fighters are overrepresented among plotters of jihadi attacks in Europe, that their attacks are deadlier on average than other attacks, and that some of them have become important recruiters and authority figures.[50] Some jihadi groups outside Europe, such as al-Qaida and Islamic State, have also sought to systematically attack the West and have trained European foreign fighters for sophisticated attack missions in Europe. Conflict zones outside the Muslim world thus function as safe havens and capacity-boosters for European jihadis. This strategic depth is particularly valuable in an era when Western societies are highly regulated and well-policed, and it goes a long way toward explaining the resilience of European jihadism. Other radical movements in Europe, such as the extreme right, have not enjoyed the same strategic depth and thus found themselves "caught" in Europe, where their organizational structures were at the mercy of security services. (That, incidentally, may be part of the reason why some Western European neo-Nazis recently jumped to the chance of foreign fighting in the Ukraine, but the numbers, in the high tens, are still too small to make a difference.[51])

The past five years has seen the eruption of several new conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in Syria, but also in Yemen, the Sinai Peninsula, Libya, Mali, and Northern Nigeria. Meanwhile, few if any of the existing conflicts – be it in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, or Somalia – have been resolved. The result is a belt of wars and insurgencies from Mali to Afghanistan, all of which feature one or more militant Islamist groups. There has been a measurable increase in the number, size, and activity of jihadi groups in the region.[52] The most egregious example is Islamic State, which in the course of a few years grew from a small Iraq-based militia to a proto-state with tens of thousands of soldiers. But jihadi activity increased in many other locations. According to the Global Terrorism Database, terrorist incidents in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia skyrocketed from about 3,500 incidents in 2010 to 12,000 in 2014. Other conflict datasets show similar trends.[53]

At the current time of writing, few of these conflicts seem likely to end any time soon. The Syria war, for example, has many of the features associated in the civil war literature with conflict longevity, such as rebel fragmentation and external interference.[54] In Afghanistan, the Taliban has made major advances in recent years, presumably setting the country on track for more war.[55] The Iraqi government looks set to recapture most of the territories lost to Islamic State in 2014 within a year or two, but uncertainties remain about the country's long-term stability.[56] The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is militarily cold, but politically as bitter as ever.[57] Yemen is in total disarray.[58] In Somalia, al-Shabaab has recently achieved a comeback.[59] Libya has no central government and is torn by two even-sized warring parties–another recipe for lengthy conflict. [60]

Meanwhile, several of the countries in the region that have avoided major conflict face problems of various kinds that suggest we should not take their stability for granted. Several of them, especially Egypt, have moved in a more authoritarian direction since the so-called Arab spring in 2011.[61] Many countries face severe economic problems, either because of lower oil prices, declines in tourism, or the refugee burden.[62] Regional instability after 2011 has reduced foreign direct investment in many countries.[63] Several countries face large youth waves and suffer endemic youth unemployment.[64] In short, many of the strains that were invoked to explain the Arab uprisings in 2011 are present today, in many cases to an even greater degree than before.

None of this is to say that the situation in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia will necessarily deteriorate. It could improve, for the world is unpredictable and this part of the world arguably even more so. However, it is very unlikely that the entire region stabilizes and all jihadi groups are decimated in the course of the next decade. In ten years' time there will presumably be at least a few conflicts in which jihadi groups can thrive. That may be sufficient to provide European jihadism with the political inspiration and training opportunities it needs to keep going.

Macro-trend 4: Continued Operational Freedom on the Internet

The fourth macro-trend is greater freedoms for clandestine actors on the Internet, which, if these persist, will continue to allow European jihadis to spread propaganda, recruit, and plan operations online.

The internet comes with a wide range of potential benefits for terrorist groups. It is a faster, cheaper, longer-range, and more scalable communication technology than most analogue alternatives. It can dramatically reduce the transaction costs of key rebel tasks such as propaganda distribution, recruitment, fundraising, reconnaissance, and operational coordination. In practice, however, terrorist groups have never been able to tap the Internet's full potential, because of government countermeasures such as denial, surveillance, infiltration and counter-messaging. In the face of online repression, rebels face several problems, including an access problem (making sure they are not blocked from online services), a security problem (making sure police is not listening in on communications), a trust problem (making sure their interlocutors are not infiltrators), and a saturation problem (making sure their propaganda is not drowned out by competing messages). The degree to which terrorist groups are able to overcome these problems at any given time depends on the level of online repression and on the quality of the available technologies. Because repression is shaped by politics and because technological developments come in bursts, terrorists' ability to exploit the Internet has varied over time. At times, they have enjoyed more freedoms, at other times less. In the early 2000s, when the Internet was fairly new, jihadi groups were leading the cat-and-mouse game between states and rebels. In the second half of the 2000s the tables turned, and jihadis were far more constrained in their Internet use.[65] Stable websites were blocked, discussion forums were infiltrated, communications were often intercepted, and many people were arrested as a result, including for "minor" crimes such as propaganda distribution.

Around 2010, however, the situation changed again in what I have previously labeled "the jihadi digital empowerment revolution."[66] It happened gradually as a result of several changes. One was the advent of social media, which gave jihadis a wider range of user-friendly communications platforms. Paradoxically, social media also offered more security, at least for small-fish radicals, because governments could not hack or monitor Twitter and Facebook as easily as they had jihadi discussion forums in the 2000s. Another change was the increased availability of encryption, for example in the form of end-to-end encrypted messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram. This increased the online stealth capability of actors seeking to avoid surveillance.[67] A third change was the sheer increase in the number of jihadi activists after 2011, both inside and outside Europe. The combination of more surveillance targets and a larger variety of

communication platforms left security services overwhelmed and forced them to reduce digital policing of all but the most serious suspects.

The result was a general easing of the constraints which had hampered jihadis in the late 2000s; they simply got away with much more than they had just a few years earlier. From 2010 onward, jihadi groups were able to distribute propaganda on much larger scale than they had before, and they could post sensitive tactical information on blogs and websites without it being taken down.[68] And because they could communicate more securely one-on-one, they could recruit, fundraise, and even coordinate operations over the Internet to a larger extent than in the 2000s. For example, in 2013 and 2014 foreign fighters in Syria could communicate with friends back home with an ease that would have been unthinkable for foreign fighters in Waziristan or Yemen in the 2000s. This particular capability probably helped increase the number of foreign fighters, because it allowed for a "bridgehead effect" whereby recruits back home could be inspired, persuaded, or reassured to go to Syria by personal conversations with friends who had gone before them.

An ominous recent development has been the increasing boldness with which jihadis in Europe use digital communications in operational settings. In the 2000s, attackers generally avoided discussing tactical matters over the phone or over the Internet in the last stages of a planning process for fear of being intercepted. Recently, however, we have seen jihadis coordinate things over the phone right before or even during an operation (for example during the Paris attacks in November 2015).[69] Similarly, in the 2000s, when al-Qaida dispatched an attack team to Europe, they seemed to limit communication with the team to an absolute minimum after their departure. Recently, by contrast, IS appears to have communicated extensively with operatives in Europe. There have even been cases of IS cadres in Syria grooming IS sympathisers in Europe via the Internet for attacks, without them ever having met in real life.[70] This type of behavior was rare in the 2000s and reflects a greater confidence in the security of digital communications. It is presumably for this and other reasons that several European security services have recently complained about occasionally "going dark" on surveillance targets.[71]

If jihadi groups continue to enjoy a similar level of online freedom over the next ten years, it will be relatively easy for committed entrepreneurs to build networks and plan operations. Jihadi groups outside Europe will also be able to recruit foreign fighters and direct attacks in Europe. Of the four trends presented here, this is probably the most uncertain, because it can be partially reversed with technological innovations (which are hard to predict) or with a political decision to allow more digital surveillance. Still, at this point it is difficult to see how, given the proliferation of encryption, we would return to pre-2010 levels of online policing.

How European Jihadism Returns

If these four trends are accurate, and if they hold for the coming decade, we have reason to expect extensive jihadi activity in Europe also in the mid- and long-term future. We may even see higher activity levels, at least periodically, than we have seen thus far.

It is impossible to predict exactly how such a resurgence might occur, but my guess is that future jihadi entrepreneurs will follow a strategy similar to that of the so-called "gateway groups" of the late 2000s, that is, to establish organizations that operate just within the boundaries of the law, whatever national law is at that point. The gateway groups, such as *Islam4UK* and its spin-offs such as *Sharia4Belgium, Fursan al-Izza,* and the *Prophet's Umma,* were probably an adaptation to the anti-al-Qaida repression in the early and mid-2000s. Radical Islamists appeared to have learned that organizational structures which dabbled with things like training, fundraising, or foreign fighter recruitment quickly got taken down, while groups that limited themselves to *verbal* support for jihadi causes were left alone. Gateway group leaders such as Anjem Choudary became masters at knowing exactly how far they could go without getting into trouble. As a result, these groups were able to grow quite large, and it was only when they "gave in to the temptation" of militancy

and started sending people to Syria that governments could clamp down on them. Thus even Choudary was sentenced in September 2016 to over five years in prison. Future entrepreneurs may draw lessons from this and try the gateway group strategy again, but with more discipline.

Of course, European governments will also learn and will likely emerge from the jihadism crisis of 2011-2016 with somewhat sharper counterterrorism tools and new laws to constrain grey area activism such as gateway groups and foreign fighting. For example, they will probably try to lower the "incrimination bar" further in order to prevent the re-emergence of gateway groups. However, there are presumably limits to how low the bar can be set without infringing on freedom of speech and other human rights, so there will likely be room for new, more cautious gateway groups to arise. These groups will be careful not to engage in unlawful activity, but they will propagate jihadi ideology and quietly encourage the emergence of clandestine operative networks around them. It is probably from these clandestine networks that the militant activity will arise.

It is important to note that "increased activity" need not mean more successful terrorist attacks. European security services will adapt to the threat and ask for more resources to prevent violent activity. They will likely get it, because publics will not tolerate high terrorism levels over time. We may therefore see an increase in plots, but most of them will be foiled, as has long been the case in Europe. We may also see other types of activity such as foreign fighting or non-violent agitation. The bottom line is that we need not see substantially more violence, but we probably will see security services grow very large – and high-security prisons too.

Beyond the vague notion of "an increase on a five to fifteen-year timeline" it is difficult to say precisely how activity levels might evolve. If we envisage a diagram with years on the x-axis and the number of plots on the y-axis, it is unlikely to be a straight line or a clean exponential curve, because periods of high plotting activity will likely be met with government counteroffensives that bring the level down again. Most likely it will be a fluctuating curve with high years and low years, but with progressively higher peaks. Even in this pessimistic scenario, activity is unlikely to increase forever, but it is hard to say when it may start declining. One hypothesis is that it will continue to increase for as long as the activists that were recruited in the early 2010s are politically active, that is, for another fifteen to twenty years. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the jihadism crisis of the early and mid-2010s produced an exceptional number of new activists due to legal loopholes on foreign fighting and the accessibility of the Syria war. But this is only a guess; the increase could last shorter or longer than fifteen-twenty years.

How this Prediction May Prove Wrong

It is not certain that this pessimistic scenario will materialize, because unexpected things can happen. For one, each of the four trends might be broken in various ways. For example, the economic integration of young Muslims in Europe may go better than expected and leave a smaller pool of people susceptible to jihadi recruitment. The number of future entrepreneurs may turn out to be smaller than anticipated, for example if the current numbers include more opportunists and fewer true believers than assumed, or if we develop more effective de-radicalization programs. Conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia may end sooner than expected, by negotiation, by one side winning, or by war fatigue. And governments can regain control over the digital sphere, either by a technological breakthrough or by a political decision.

For another, governments may prove better at policing future jihadi networks than expected. This could happen either through learning, i.e., by their knowledge of networks accumulating past a major effectiveness threshold, through some technological breakthrough, for example with new analytical tools, or by a political decision to allow more heavy-handed or intrusive policing methods that today are still considered beyond the pale. France's implementation of a state of emergency in the wake of the Paris attacks is an indication of the lengths to which certain European governments are willing to go if the perceived threat is large enough.

However, heavy-handed policing can also backfire and worsen the radicalization problem by creating grievances and undermining trust between police and the Muslim community.

A third possibility is that the Muslim world or European Islam is swept by a normative shift toward even more comprehensive rejection of radical Islamism. Today the vast majority of the world's Muslims reject violence in the name of Islam, but a substantial minority does not, as is evidenced by the sheer size of jihadi groups and by Pew polls that find popular support for groups like al-Qaida in the several percent (and in some countries over 20%).[72] In Europe, too, the reality is that thousands of individuals have been seduced by "jihadi cool" in recent decades.[73] It is conceivable that the excesses of Islamic State or a series of particularly bloody terrorist attack in Europe will prompt a normative backlash that stigmatizes participation in jihadism to an even greater degree than it does today.

There are also unpredictable factors that could make things worse. The most obvious is a further rise in anti-Muslim xenophobia and more terrorism against Muslims in Europe by the extreme right. There has been much concern about a possible polarization between European jihadis and European far-right extremists.[74] There has long been a steady stream of violent attacks by the far right against ethnic minorities in general and Muslims in particular, and some countries, especially Germany, have seen a dramatic rise in such attacks in the past year.[75] So far, however, the far right and the jihadis have not entered into a conflict dynamic comparable to that between the European far right and the far left.[76] We have not seen clear examples of jihadi cells being motivated primarily by the actions of the far right, and the far right has thus far responded to jihadi terrorist attacks with relatively low-level violence.[77] The dynamic could change, however, in the event of mass-casualty attacks by the far right against Muslim targets.[78]

Conclusion

I have discussed four macro-trends which, if extrapolated some ten years into the future, would appear to create favourable circumstances for somewhat increased levels of jihadi activism in Europe compared with current levels. Of course, nobody can know what the future will bring, and for this particular phenomenon, a large number of intervening factors can change the outcome. The prediction presented here should be considered a "likely worst-case scenario" for jihadism in Europe. There are worse scenarios that involve more violence, but they are unlikely because they presuppose that European security services do not adapt to the threat along the way.

Drawing up a likely worst-case scenario has several benefits. For one, it may preempt complacency among policymakers by showing that, even if the situation improves in the short run, there are good reasons why it might deteriorate in the longer term. We should not, in other words, take a decline of European jihadism for granted, however much we all wish for it. Furthermore, laying down some assumptions – in this case, the four macro-trends – gives us something specific to discuss. The ensuing debate will hopefully bring objections and new arguments to the table and produce a more refined understanding of European jihadism.

This exercise in forecasting has some social scientific value in that it implicitly challenges some common assumptions about rebel movement lifecycles. Several scholars have suggested that rebellions have expiry dates. For example, terrorism scholar David Rapoport's famous article "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism" suggests that successive ideological paradigms replaced one another as major inspirations for terrorism.[79] Audrey Cronin's book *How Terrorism Ends* departs from the premise that all terrorism campaigns do end, and Brian Price has measured the average terrorist group life at about 14 years.[80] Sociologists such as Charles Tilly have suggested social movement go through successive stages from emergence to decline.[81] While all these observations pertain to slightly different units of analysis than that represented by jihadism, they have arguably contributed to an expectation that jihadism will end in the not too distant future. This expectation was probably behind the view among some commentators in mid-2011

that the Arab spring and the killing of Osama bin Ladin would finally bring about the decline of jihadism. [82] For the record, I too was influenced by the lifecycle hypothesis when I wrote, in a Congressional testimony in mid-2013, that "I see […] the macro-trend for the jihadi movement as downward-pointing. However, I also see the decline as a long and slow one with plenty of opportunities for temporary surges in activity."[83] I have since changed my views and become agnostic on the issue of jihadism's decline. This article reflects my current position that the end of jihadism is by no means imminent, and that it may continue to exist for many decades. By staking out a prediction for the evolution of jihadism in Europe, I am putting forth a hypothesis that only time can test.

One should be careful about proposing specific policy recommendation based on speculation about the future. Still, the analytical framework used here can at least be used as a heuristic tool for thinking about countermeasures in the event that things move in the direction outlined in this article. More specifically, policymakers might then want to think creatively about ways in which each of the four macro-trends might be broken. Is there not more that the EU can do to promote social mobility among immigrants? Are there ways to prevent imprisoned jihadis from becoming network-builders upon their release? Could we find other approaches to conflict resolution in the Muslim world than we have pursued throughout the War on Terror? And how can governments regain some of the digital policing capability they had in the late 2000s?

If the jihadi radicalization problem in Europe does indeed get worse, it may be worth considering radical new approaches, both of the soft and the hard kind. Perhaps Europe needs to spend significantly more to improve education in immigrant-heavy areas. Perhaps we must consider longer prison sentences for terrorism offences. I do not purport to know exactly what might work. However, continuing as we do today, with small, incremental policy adjustments, arguably has a predictable outcome. It is a Europe with much larger intelligence services, an entrenched Muslim economic underclass, and more anti-Muslim sentiment.

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Notes

[1] Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. The term "well-documented attack plots" refers to plots for which there is good open-source information about perpetrators, target, and method. Such plots are only a subset of the total number of alleged plots. See Petter Nesser, "Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994–2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (October 2008), pp. 924–946.

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[5] "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq" (New York: The Soufan Group, December 2015); URL: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf; Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013), pp. 1–15.

[6] See Europol's yearly TE-SAT reports, available at URL: https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report#fndtn-tabs-0-bottom-2 .

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II. Resources

Bibliography: Islamist Terrorism in Europe

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism - BSPT-JT-2016-6]

Abstract

This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on Islamist terrorism in Europe. Though focusing on recent literature, the bibliography is not restricted to a particular time period and covers publications up to November 2016. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing more than 200 core and periphery sources in the field of Terrorism Studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to expand the search.

Keywords: bibliography; resources; literature; Islamist terrorism; Jihadism; Europe; radicalisation; deradicalisation

NB: All websites were last visited on 26.11.2016.–See also Note for the Reader at the end of this literature list.

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Note

Whenever retrievable, URLs for freely available versions of subscription-based publications have been provided. Thanks to the Open Access movement, self-archiving of publications in institutional repositories or on author homepages for free public use (so-called Green Open Access) has become more common. Please note, that the content of Green Open Access documents is not necessarily identical to the officially published versions (e.g., in case of pre-prints); it might therefore not have passed through all editorial stages publishers employ to ensure quality control (peer review, copy and layout editing etc.). In some cases, articles may only be cited after getting consent by the author(s).

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Counterterrorism Bookshelf:
12 Books on Al-Qaida and ISIS-related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 304 pp., US $ 74.00 [Hardcover], US $ 16.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-19-021726-6.

This is a concise, authoritative, and useful primer on the origins, evolution, ideology, objectives, tactics and operations of al Qaida, the Islamic State, and their jihadist affiliates. The volume's nine substantive chapters cover topics such as, in the case of al Qaida, its history, key attacks and plots, strategy and tactics, ideology, organization and recruitment, relations and conflicts with states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, the impact of the Arab Spring on the organization, the nature of its affiliation with like-minded groups such as al Shabaab and al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. The Islamic State is discussed in a separate chapter, including how it differs from al Qaida in terms of its approach to governing territories and warfare. The final substantive chapter discusses the components of counterterrorism against al Qaida, the Islamic State and their affiliates, such as the use of measures that are military (including drones), intelligence, diplomatic, legal, financial, countering radicalization and 'winning the war of ideas.' A concluding short chapter suggests books and articles for further reading on these topics. The author is a Professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a Senior Fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, in Washington, DC.

Brian H. Fishman, *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory* (New Have, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 376 pp., US $ 30.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-300-22149-7.

This is an account, as described by the author, of the "history of people and the strategic and operational decisions they made to create the Islamic State." (p. x). A way to understand the ideological principals that formed the basis for the Islamic State's jihadi strategy, the author explains, is found in the master plan, produced in 2005 in Iraq, "that predicted the caliphate would be reestablished in Syria between 2013 and 2016," and served "to identify critical decision points, risks, and benchmarks." (pp. x-xi). The critical decision points that led to the master plan's formulation are discussed in chapters that cover its origins in the activities of Jordanian-born Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, who had trained at al Qaida's camps in Afghanistan and eventually made his way to Iraq. In the second chapter, "The Eye-Opening Stage (2003-2006)," Fishman outlines the master plan's seven stages, which also form the book's seven chapters, as (1), "The Awakening Stage (2000-2003), (2) "The Eye-Opening Stage (2003-2006), (3) "The Stage of Standing Upright (2007-2010), (4), "The Stage of Recuperation (2010-2013), (5), "The Stage of Declaring the State (2013-2016), (6) "The Stage of Absolute Confrontation (2016-2018), and (7) "The Stage of Final Victory (2018) – 2020). (pp. 34-35). Regarding the Islamic State's primary jihadi competitor, al Qaida, the author observes that its "geographic reach and continued assertions that it leads all Muslims everywhere means that it is likely to continue to clash with al-Qaeda." (p. 255). At the same time, he notes that "Neither al-Qaeda nor the Islamic State are likely to attract the mass movement they would like." (p. 258). While much of the author's analysis is sound and well-informed, one may disagree with his blanket assertion that "prejudicial policies directed at refugees and Muslims in Western countries are counterproductive," (p. 258) particularly when such policies are not explained by the author, and that a "massive, semi-permanent American intervention in the Middle East" is necessary to "truly defeat" the Islamic State – given the fact that it is really up to the local Middle Eastern states to defeat it, and, in the case of Syria, the U.S. would have to cooperate with Russia in defeating IS (and al Qaida's affiliate, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as the al Nusra Front) in that country. (pp. 258-

259). The author is a counterterrorism Research Fellow with the International Security Program at New America Foundation, Washington, DC.

Michael T. Flynn and Michael Ledeen, *The Field of Fight: How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 208 pages, US $ 26.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-25010-622-3.

With this book's primary author, Lt. General, U.S. Army (Retired) Michael Flynn appointed by President-Elect Donald Trump as the President's National Security Adviser, and head of the National Security Council, this is an important account of his approach to countering radical Islam, its primary organizations, the Islamic State and al Qaida, and their affiliates and adherents worldwide, including in America. Although Michael Ledeen, the book's co-author, is also listed in the title, as a veteran author and expert on this subject, his role was to amplify General Flynn's thinking and approach to these issues, so General Flynn will be referred to as the primary author. As explained by the author, the book's title and overall theme are derived from Homer's *Iliad*, in which an epic battle is being fought "involving both men and gods." (p. 3). As the author explains, "Our most fanatical contemporary enemies think they are in a similar battle with us. Most of them believe their cause is blessed and supported by the Almighty. We must prove them wrong." (p. 3). This book, accordingly, was written to explain the full magnitude of the war being waged by the jihadists, which the Obama Administration "has forbidden us to describe our enemies properly and clearly: they are Radical Islamists." (p. 3) The book's second purpose was "To lay out a winning strategy," (p. 3), which the author outlines as two-pronged: (1) organizing "all our national power, from military and economic to intelligence and tough-minded diplomacy," and, (2) "They must be denied safe havens, and countries that shelter them have to be issued a brutal choice: either eliminate the Radical Islamists or you risk direct attack yourselves." (p. 8). Applying his extensive experience in military intelligence, including as a former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the author concludes that a "winning strategy" consists of the following elements, which are to be fought in the physical and digital environments: "1. Properly assess your environment and clearly define your enemy; 2. Face reality – for politicians, this is never an easy thing to do; 3. Understand the social context and fabric of the operational environment; 4. Recognize who's in charge of the enemy's forces." (p. 169). Such a "winning strategy," according to the author, also involves the inclusion of America's close military allies in the Middle East: Israel, Jordan, and Egypt.

Sebastian Gorka, *Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2016), 256 pp., US $ 27.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-62157-457-6.

In this short book (144 pages of text and 84 pages of appendices), the author's objective is to propose a framework for understanding global jihadism and formulate a "winnable" strategy to defeat it. This is a noble ambition, but the author spends too much time at the book's beginning to compare the Western world's war against global jihad with its Cold War's counter-Communism campaign – when Soviet-style (post-Stalinist) Communism bore little resemblance to the religiously fundamentalist jihadists, even devoting (as a 'space filler,' one might presume) 74 pages in the appendix to reproducing George Kennan's historic "Long Telegram on the Soviet Threat to America". After a cursory overview of the origins of jihadism's ideologues (e.g., Abdullah Azzam, Sayyid Qutb, Ayman al-Zawahiri, etc.), the readers' expectations of a new "winnable" strategy to defeat global jihad are quickly disappointed. What is the author's strategy to defeat the "totalitarian" global jihadism, which he terms "a direct existential threat to America and the whole of Western civilization"? (p. 120). They must be attacked on three fronts: first, "Deploy the truth: you cannot win a war if you cannot talk honestly about the enemy"; second, "Take a step back: help others fight their own wars"; and third, "Winning the war at home: education and human intelligence." (pp. 129-133). A pretty weak strategy, considering what other military strategists are proposing and the U.S. military and intelligence agencies are

already doing in Syria and Iraq and the FBI is doing domestically. The author is Vice President and Professor of Strategy and Irregular Warfare at the Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC.

William Kilpatrick, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Jihad* Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2016), 256 pp., US $ 21.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-62157-577-1.

The "Politically Incorrect Guides," in words of the publisher, are intended to "provide an unvarnished, unapologetic overview of the topics every American needs to know." As such, they are likely to appeal to some, while infuriating others. Given these ground rules, like other publishers' best-selling *The Complete Idiot's Guides* or the *For Dummies* books series, this volume is well-organized and cleverly illustrated, with every chapter including whimsical 'politically incorrect' section headings and call-out boxes on topics such as "Did You Know?", "Back-to-the-Past Alerts," "Advice We're Ignoring," and "A Book You're Not Supposed to Read." Beginning with an introductory overview entitled "The Untold Story of Our Time," the volume is divided into three parts: Part I, "Jihad is Back" ("The Resurgence of Jihad," "Are ISIS and Boko Haram Un-Islamic?," "The Roots of Jihad," and "What's in a Name? What Jihad Really Means"); Part II, "Jihad Without Bombs" ("The Quiet Kind of Jihad," "Immigration and the 'Baby Jihad'," "Western Enablers of Jihad," "Information Wars," and "Christian Enablers of Jihad"), and Part III, "Defeating Jihad" ("Strategies for Victory" and "Psychological, Spiritual, and Ideological Warfare"). In the chapter on "Strategies for Victory," after discussing how to win the propaganda war by winning "the shooting war" and undermining jihadist recruiting, the author proposes nine general measures, including these: "Build our military back up – or at least quit gutting it," "Ground our counterterrorism strategy in reality, not fantasy," "Take the threat of nuclear jihad seriously," "Bring down the price of oil with fracking and nuclear power," "Use foreign aid as leverage," "Wage cyberwar," "Educate for victory,"and "Discredit political correctness." (pp. 217-225). The author, who had taught at Boston College, is the author of numerous books and articles.

Sami Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 256 pp., US $ 18.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-78453-308-3.

This is a well-informed account of the ideological foundations of the Islamic State (IS) from its beginning to the present time, with its claim to lead a newly reconstituted caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Also discussed are IS's leaders, particularly Iraqi-born Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (real name – Ibrahim Awward Ibrahim al-Badri), who, at the age of 39 became the IS's emir in May 2010, the organization's other leaders, the establishment of its capital in al-Raqqa, in Syria; and, in the areas under its control, the formation of its police, civil service, schools, funding mechanisms, and media of communications. Other chapters discuss the role of foreign fighters and women in IS, as well as its affiliates in Egypt, Libya and Nigeria. Also discussed are IS's primary rival, the Syrian-based al Qaida-affiliate Jabhat Al-Nusra, and its leader, Abu Mohammad al-Golani. In the conclusion, the author observes that al-Baghdadi "wants recognition as an official head of state – a de factor 'president' of all true Sunni Muslims." (p. 212). The author observes, nevertheless, that al-Baghdadi is not likely to succeed because "If the conditions were ripe and the caliph were a capable and same leader, many would not be complaining about him." (p. 212). The author, a Beirut-based journalist and historian, was Research Fellow at the Centre for Syrian Studies at St Andrews University.

Robert G. Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon: From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihadism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 304 pp., US $ 49.95 [Hardcover], US $ 29.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-62616-117-7.

This is a detailed and authoritative account of the evolution of Salafism as an important player in Lebanon's Sunni confessional community in terms of its "theology, religio-political ideologies, political programs, visions, and outreach initiatives (*infitah*)…" (p. 4). Three schools of Salafism in Lebanon are identified:

the "quietest Salafists, *haraki* (activist) Salafists, and Salafi jihadists. Also examined is the impact of the interaction between Salafists and the overall Sunni community on one hand, as well as the conflict between the Salafists and the multi-confessional state (including the Shi'ite Hizballah), and their implications for regional and international security on the other hand The impact of these interactions is examined through the author's hypothesis that "Hezbollah's ascendency in Lebanon, coupled with the Syrian rebellion, has generated new sociopolitical dynamics in both Lebanon and Syria, creating immediate and long-term political uncertainties and challenge to Salafists. In response, Salafists, gripped by feelings of discontent and revanchist impulses, have been compelled to address political matters that go beyond their theology and religio-political ideologies, forcing them to consider rationales for political strategies." (p. 14). The factors underlying these rationales are then examined "in relation to (1) the different schools of Salafism and the emergence of charismatic preachers, (2) the Sunni community and transnational networks of Salafists, (3) the intracommunal and intercommunal relations in Lebanon, and (4) the Syrian conflict." (p. 14). The author concludes that "Salafism, as a fundamentalist ideology separating the believers from unbelievers, poses an ideological and practical threat to Lebanon's plural society and to the region," (p. 244) and that it has "emerged as a prominent ideological and political driver of the Sunni community…" (p. 245). By addressing these important issues, this book is invaluable in explaining some of the drivers that are crucial to address in attempts to understand Lebanon's current political turmoil, particularly the Sunni-Hizballah conflict. The author is professor, Department of Political Science, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida.

Paul Rogers, *Irregular War: ISIS and the New Threat From the Margins* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 224 pp., US $ 29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-78453-488-2.

In this account, the author advances the thesis that "ISIS and related movements are part of a much wider phenomenon: what might loosely be called 'revolts from the margins.' It does not regard Islam as the fundamental issue for the coming decades and is more concerned with the risk that we are moving into an 'age of insurgencies' – rather than one of a 'clash of civilisations' between the West and the Islamic world – and towards a global environment of fragility, instability, increasing violence and irregular war." (p. 4). He adds that "although ISIS is certainly a major security problem, the real drivers of current and global insecurity are quite different: deepening socio-economic divisions, which lead to the relative marginalization of most people across the world, and the prospect of profound and lasting environmental constraints, caused by climate change. ISIS, in short, should be seen as a warning of what could be to come, not as a fundamental trend in its own right." (p. 5). Although one may agree with the author's thesis that the global environment is heading towards greater fragility and instability due to various fault lines, his downplaying of the greater focus by jihadist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and other affiliates in implementing a totalitarian and brutal Islamist regime at the expense of improving the lives of the populations under their control through economic development, human rights, and, particularly the advancement of women's rights (among other issues), stands in opposition to his thesis about the origins and objectives of such insurgencies. The author is Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies at University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, England.

Mark Silinksy, *Jihad and the West: Black Flag Over Babylon* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 264 pages, US $50.00 [Hardcover], US $ 22.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-253-02712-2.

This is an interesting and well-written comprehensive primer of the full magnitude of the Islamic State's jihadi war against the West, the extremist religious ideology that animates it, Western Muslim individuals who have been radicalized, indoctrinated, and mobilized to fight on its behalf, and their terrorist operations against the West. Also discussed are the responses by Westerners to this threat, ranging from appeasement to denunciation, such as Michel Houllebecq, the French writer's controversial novel *Submission*, which imagined France in 2022 to be ruled by a partnership of French Socialists and Islamists. (p. 37). Following the author's introductory overview, each of the volume's nine chapters are organized into short sections, with each chapter

beginning with a short introduction, a discussion of the chapter's topic, and a total of 37 relevant profiles of individuals, whether as terrorists or Western intellectuals who criticize them, as well as significant events that illustrate those topics. The author's analysis is well-organized, with topical themes explained on what he terms several levels. For example, in explaining the role of families in influencing Westerners to become foreign fighters in Syria, the author usefully breaks it down into three levels: family as primary drivers, family as unaware of radicalization, and family as active dissuaders (pp. 103-107). In another example, in explaining three reasons some Westerners decide to leave the Caliphate, he posits them as "disappointment and discomfort," "fear," and "cruelty was not in their nature." (pp. 110-115). The concluding chapter presents the author's "musings" on the Islamic Caliphate on topics such as is the Caliphate Islamic? (yes), can the West negotiate with IS? (probably not), and can IS be "completely defeated"? ("not in the near term"). The author is a veteran analyst in the U.S. Department of Defense.

Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate* (McLean, VA: Advances Press, LLC, 2016), pp., US $ 24.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-935866-71-8.

This is a highly interesting and important, field research-based account, which reads like a dramatic television documentary, of the stories and reflections of 38 individuals who joined the ISIS jihad in Syria, but became so disillusioned that they defected, ending up across the border in Turkey, or, in some instances, back in their Western home countries, where the authors conducted in-depth interviews with them about their experiences. These interviews, which included videos and photos of the sessions, were conducted from September 2015 to May 2016, as part of the authors' *ISIS Defectors Interview Project*. As described by the authors, the interviews provided "a window into ISIS reality in full-living horror. From motivations to joining; the manipulation of children and their use as suicide bombers; the treatment of women; ISIS' sex trade; finances through seizures, taxation, oil sales and sex slaves; unexpected allegiances among political enemies; the killing of Sunni Muslims; mental health consequences, and more…" (p. 15). It is crucial to explain and publicize these issues, the authors argue, because "disillusioned ISIS defectors who tell their authentic stories about life inside the Islamic State are *the* most influential tool to counter ISIS' robust propaganda and prevent others from joining." (p. 16). In a follow-on to these transcribed and filmed interviews, they are being packaged by the authors and their team "into short video clips, memes, written and audio stories to feed onto the Internet and social media, to counter and compete head-on with ISIS's successful (as of yet) unchallenged online campaign." (p. 17). These interviews were made possible by Dr. Yayla's previous service as Chief of Counter-terrorism and Operations Division for the Turkish National Police in charge of administrative oversight of counter-terrorism actions along the Turkish-Syria border from 2010 to 2015, and Dr. Speckhard's extensive experience in conducting research interviews worldwide with former terrorists, their family members, and associates. Both authors are associated with the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ITCSVE), in McLean, Virginia, where Dr. Speckhard is the Director and Dr. Yayla is the Deputy Director.

Robert Spencer, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to ISIS* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 384 pp., US $ 19.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-62157-453-8.

The "Politically Incorrect Guides," in words of the publisher, are intended to "provide an unvarnished, unapologetic overview of the topics every American needs to know." As such, they are likely to appeal to some, while infuriating others. Given these ground rules, each chapter in this well-informed, well-organized and cleverly illustrated volume includes whimsical 'politically incorrect' section headings and call-out boxes on topics such as "Did You Know?", "Not that This Has Anything To Do With Islam," and "Ostrich Alert." Following an introductory overview, the book's ten chapters discuss topics such as inside the Islamic State, what the Caliphate means and its violent history, "Is the Islamic State Islamic?," the Islamic State's "To-Do-List," and ISIS in America. In the concluding chapter, entitled how to defeat ISIS, the author recommends

"utterly defeating it and destroying the wellsprings of its ideological indoctrination." (p. 289). The author is the director of *Jihad Watch*, and the author of numerous books attacking not just jihadists but being critical towards Islam in general.

Erick Stakelbeck, *ISIS Exposed: Beheadings, Slavery, and the Hellish Reality of Radical Islam* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 288 pp., US $ 29.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-62157-377-7.

This is a well-written account by a veteran investigative television reporter of the origins and operations of ISIS in the Middle East, as well as the types of adherents in Western Europe and the United States who are being radicalized and mobilized into terrorism by ISIS and its allies. What makes this account especially interesting is the author's travels to hot spots such as Minneapolis-St. Paul, Denver, London, Amsterdam, as well as Israel, to interview local officials about the local Muslims who became ISIS adherents, and the nature of the threats facing them. Some of the book's insights concern the characteristics of the types of individuals who join ISIS. Quoting Patrick Skinner, a former CIA case officer, ISIS fighters in Iraq can be categorized as the pious, or true believers; the Sunni pragmatists, such as Iraqi tribal sheikhs; and the psychopaths, who have "more taste for grindhouse than Islamic jurisprudence," and include several notorious foreign fighters. (pp. 92-93). With regard to the Westerners who join ISIS, the author describes them as "The vulnerable, the impressionable, the lonely, the desperate, the troubled, the sinister, the violent, and the psychotic [who] are leaving the comfort of Western societies behind to join the Islamic State." (p. 93). In another interesting insight, the author cites a *New Republic* article that compared the online magazines of ISIS and al Qaida as "Al Qaeda is like AOL – outdated, unhip – while "The Islamic State is Google," replacing al Qaida as "the go-to-organization for young jihadists." (p. 123). The author is the host of *The Watchman with Erick Stakelbeck* on CBN News.

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About *Perspectives on Terrorism*

Perspectives on Terrorism (PT) is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna, Austria, and the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies (CTSS), headquartered at the Lowell Campus of the University of Massachusetts, United States of America.

PT is published six times per year as a free peer-reviewed online journal available at www.terrorismanalysts.com. It seeks to provide a platform for established scholars as well as academics and professionals entering the interdisciplinary fields of Terrorism, Political Violence and Conflict Studies. The editors invite readers to:

- present their perspectives on the prevention of, and response to, terrorism and related forms of violent conflict;

- submit to the journal accounts of evidence-based, empirical scientific research and analyses;

- use the journal as a forum for debate and commentary on issues related to the above.

Perspectives on Terrorism has sometimes been characterised as 'nontraditional' in that it dispenses with some of the traditional rigidities associated with commercial print journals. Topical articles can be published at short notice and reach, through the Internet, a much larger audience than subscription-fee based paper journals. Our free on-line journal also offers contributors a higher degree of flexibility in terms of content, style and length of articles – but without compromising professional scholarly standards.

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