

TERRORIST THREAT IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

A. Mukhtar (Ed.), F. Ammor, D. Ghanem-Yazbeck, P. Sasnal



EUROMESCO
JOINT POLICY STUDY

3


EuroMeSCO

مركز الأبحاث للدراسات السياسية والاستراتيجية



IEMed. -





European Institute of the Mediterranean

Consortium formed by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Government of Catalonia

Barcelona City Council

Executive President:

Senén Florensa

Board of Trustees - Business Council:

Corporate Sponsors

Fundació Abertis
Banc Sabadell
Caixa Bank
Gas Natural Fenosa
Iberia
Manubens
OHL
Port de Barcelona
Port de Tarragona
Repsol

Partner Institutions

Cambra de Comerç de Barcelona
ESADE
Foment de Treball Nacional
IESE Business School
Pimec
Amics de País

JOINT POLICY STUDY

Published by the European Institute of the Mediterranean

Proof-reading: Neil Charlton

Layout: Núria Esparza

ISSN: 2462-4500

Legal deposit: B 8397-2016

April 2016



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the European Institute of the Mediterranean.

We would like to thank the reviewer and the participants of the Dialogue Workshop on “Terrorist Threat in the Euro-Mediterranean Region” held in Cairo on 5 November 2015 for discussion of an earlier draft of this Joint Policy Study and their insightful comments.

CONTENTS

Terrorist Threat in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

THE REASONS FOR RADICAL GROUPS' APPEAL AMONG EUROPEAN AND ARAB CITIZENS: THE CASE OF ISIS.	7
<i>Patrycja Sasnal</i>	
<hr/>	
TACTICS OF RECRUITMENT. <i>Amal Mukhtar</i>	23
<hr/>	
THE FEMALE FACE OF JIHADISM. <i>Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck</i>	43
<hr/>	
THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTORS TOWARD RADICAL GROUPS. <i>Fouad M. Ammor</i>	69
<hr/>	

The Reasons for Radical Groups' Appeal among European and Arab Citizens: The Case of ISIS**

*Patrycja Sasnal**

*Head of Middle East and North Africa Project, Polish Institute of International Affairs.

**The alternative use of ISIS, Daesh or IS in the various chapters reflects the individual preferences of the authors.

Radical comes from “root” (*radix* in Latin) and could mean going back to the roots or a change starting from the roots. In the political context major dictionaries focus on the latter, defining a radical as someone who desires extreme change of part or all of the social order.¹ Groups or movements that have such an extreme change as their goal abound² but none is as international, potent and conspicuous as the Jihadists.

The plethora of reasons for Jihadist groups' local and global appeal, the lack of any one single set of political, cultural or economic push factors, the diversity of backgrounds of supporters of radicalism, the multitude of languages and skin colours of foreign fighters, within ISIS ranks in particular, corroborate the thesis that Islamic radicalism or Jihadism is becoming a general, global, radical anti-systemic movement³, in which ideology per se is secondary to the rejection of the outside world. Among the radical groups that draw young Arabs and Europeans alike, ISIS (the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” or the so-called “Islamic State”) stands out as the most successful radical group globally. There are two major reasons for this: it has created a territorial entity (the caliphate) and a global imagined community by emphasising that its call is addressed to every Muslim and – as will be shown – to anyone prone to such a call:

O Muslims everywhere (...). Raise your head high, for today – by Allah's grace – you have a state and khilafah, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership. It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. It is a khilafah that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi (North African), American, French, German, and Australian. Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, (...) defending and guarding each other (...) Their blood mixed and became one (Dabiq, 2014a).

In that, ISIS is specifically different from its predecessor, Al-Qaeda, which focused on fighting the enemies without building a community or institutions. ISIS, however, directly stems from Al-Qaeda in Iraq and both share similarities in their stages of development. Al-Qaeda had once been confined to the Af-Pak region but in 2006 and 2007 entered its mushrooming stage attracting affiliates outside of its core territory of conduct (i.e. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or Al-Shabaab in Somalia). Having established its base in Syria and Iraq, ISIS has now entered its mushrooming stage. It has attracted many local Jihadist groups in the Muslim world outside of the core territory (i.e. Boko Haram in

1 Or “believing or expressing the belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change.” See Cambridge Dictionary (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/radical>) and Encyclopaedia Britannica (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/radical-ideologist>).

2 Radical groups differ: they can be violent or peaceful, have a leftist or a far-right ideology, or position themselves on the extreme to any other axis (i.e. radical ecologists).

3 Olivier Roy discusses this thesis in his recent papers. See Roy, O. (2006). *Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*. Columbia University Press; Roy, O. (2016, January 8). *Le djihadisme est une révolte générationnelle et nihiliste*. Retrieved from http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/24/le-djihadisme-une-revolte-generationnelle-et-nihiliste_4815992_3232.html; Roy, O. & Seniguer, H. (2015, July 4). *Comment l'islam est devenu la nouvelle idéologie des damnés de la planète*. *Atlántico*. Retrieved from <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/comment-islam-est-devenu-nouvelle-ideologie-damnes-planete-olivier-roy-haoues-seniguer-2221200.html>.

Nigeria, Wilayat Barqa in Libya, Jund al-Khilafa in Algeria or Wilayat Sinai in Egypt). They plead allegiance to ISIS, because they too want to wield sovereignty over their lands against local enemies. ISIS also serves as a flag and logo, a well-known brand that adds prestige and strength. Even though ISIS and Al-Qaeda compete with each other, it is debatable whether the apparent stronger appeal of ISIS has weakened its competitor.⁴ However, ISIS enjoys greater global attention today than Al-Qaeda and the reasons for its attractiveness go beyond the lure of any other Jihadist organisation, making it an apt case to study the reasons for radical groups' appeal comprehensively.

ISIS and other Jihadists fill the vacuum left by other radical revolutionary movements, which gradually lost their popularity after the end of the cold war. There have always been individuals alienated in the systems they lived in, and their radicalisation has always been a result of an amalgam of reasons: personal, sociological, political and economic. Looking at ISIS today as a cultural concept limited to one religion or background misses its gradual but advancing transformation into a global anti-systemic movement that can attract anyone:⁵ a member of a family of a former Jihadist in Libya, a British teenage woman, a Chechen opposition activist from Grozny, a former Baath party official in Iraq, a WASP student from California or a French convert from the countryside. Reports show that Jihadism attracts more and more people, particularly more women, who are young and active online. Only one in ten Western fighters joins a group other than ISIS (Bergen, Schuster & Sterman, 2015).

How Big is the Appeal of Radical Groups

By December 2015 there were some 30,000 foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq who came from 86 countries. Most of them hail from the Middle East and the Maghreb (more than 16,000). An estimated 5,000 nationals from Western Europe had joined the ranks of extremists in Syria and Iraq, which marks a 100% increase from 2,500 in June 2014, while 4,700 come from former Soviet republics – an increase of more than 300% (Foreign Fighters, 2015). Top nationalities among the fighters include: Tunisians (6,000), Saudis (2,500), Russians (2,400), Turks (2,100) and Jordanians (2,000). While the majority of European fighters come from four countries: France (1,700), United Kingdom (760), Belgium (470) and Germany (470).⁶

4 Compare Heistein A. (2015, December 28). Daesh/ ISIL Hasn't Weakened al-Qaeda – Its Affiliates are Stronger than Ever. *Informed Comment*. Retrieved from <http://www.juancole.com/2015/12/daesh-isil-hasnt-weakened-al-qaeda-its-affiliates-are-stronger-than-ever.html> and Malik A., Younes, A., Ackerman, S., & Khalili, M. (2015, June 10). How Isis Crippled Al-Qaeda. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/10/how-isis-crippled-al-qaeda>

5 "This case [of an ISIS supporter], like others in communities across the United States and around the world, is an example of how a young person from any place and any background might make the terrible decision to try and become part of a terrorist organization," U.S. Attorney Office (2015, December 1). *The FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation*. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/sacramento/press-releases/2015/san-joaquin-county-man-pleads-guilty-to-attempting-to-provide-material-support-to-isil>

6 Foreign Fighters (2015). Other nationalities notably represented: Austria (300), Bosnia (330), China (300), Egypt (1000), Indonesia (700), Kazakhstan (300), Kosovo (230), Lebanon (900), Morocco (1200), Netherlands (220), Sweden (300), Tajikistan (386).

Any quantification of the appeal of ISIS or other Islamist radical groups, meaning any kind of support for or attraction to ISIS, not necessarily expressed by taking up arms and going to Syria, cannot be precise. Only an approximated conclusion can be drawn from available data.

In relative terms, Islamic State may enjoy greater popularity in Europe than in the Middle East: the highest number of sympathisers can be found in France (about 16%), the UK (about 7%) and in Germany (3%) (Grant, 2014; Elgot, 2014). In France the support is rising with age: 4% of 18-24-year-olds sympathises with ISIS, compared to 6% of 24-35-year-olds and 11% of 35-44-year-olds. Just 3% of Egyptians expressed a positive opinion of the organisation, 5% of Saudis, and under 1% of Lebanese (Pollock, 2014). The popularity of ISIS may also be growing in Israel (ISIS Popularity Growing, 2014). A "VOICES" (run by Italian academics) study of 2 million posts shows that support for ISIS is stronger in Arab social media in Europe than in Syria for example (Views of Isis, 2014). "Outside Syria, support for ISIS, always a minority among online communities, rises significantly. Forty-seven per cent of studied tweets and posts from Qatar, 35% from Pakistan, 31% from Belgium and almost 24% of posts from UK and 21% from the US were classified as being supportive of the Jihadist organisation compared with just under 20% in Jordan, Saudi Arabia (19.7%) and Iraq (19.8%)." (Malik, 2014). However, Al Jazeera Arabic ran an online poll a year after ISIS captured Mosul in 2014, which showed that 81% (more than 46,000) of the voters supported the organisation's advances in Syria and Iraq versus 19% (AlJazeera, n.d.). If there can be any concrete conclusion drawn from these polls it is that ISIS does have an unusually large following for a terrorist organisation.

There is a rich literature about radicalisation and its reasons,⁷ which in the case of ISIS' popularity in Europe and the Middle East can be grouped in four categories: ideological and political, sociological and psychological, economic, technical and practical. In each of the categories a distinction between Arab and European citizenry needs to be made as the two national groups more often than not are drawn to ISIS by different factors. Overall, the reasons, even though categorised and ordered, are not disconnected from one another, they merge into one push and pull factor, sometimes conditioning one another. By weighing the four categories of reasons behind today's ISIS appeal in order to find the most universal ones, a conclusion can be drawn that some of these reasons may be growing despite political efforts of many governments to the contrary.

7 For publications specifically interesting in the context of this article's title see i.e.: Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009, October). Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model. *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*. Retrieved from http://subweb.diis.dk/graphics/_IO_indsatsomraader/Religion_og_social_konflikt_og_Mellemosten/Islamist%20Radicalisation.Veldhuis%20and%20Staun.pdf; Olesen, T., & Khosrokhavar F. (2009, May). Islamism as Social Movement. *Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation* (CIR), Aarhus University. Retrieved from http://www.ps.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/pdf-filer/Hæfte2final.pdf; Ottaway, M. (2015). ISIS – Many Faces, Different Battles. Wilson Center, *Middle East Program*; Venhaus J. M. "Matt" (2010). Why Youth Join al-Qaeda, *Special Report 236*, USIP. Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR236Venhaus.pdf>; and Khosrokhavar F. (2008). *Inside Jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*. London: Routledge.

Plastic Islam and Utopia: Ideological and Political Reasons Behind ISIS' Attractiveness

There is no one Islam. As a religion Islam is simple: following the five pillars is enough to be a good Muslim. Without a complex and dogmatic process it makes excommunication virtually impossible. Islam is also ideologically flexible, more than other monotheistic religions. One of the most acclaimed sociologists and political scientists, Ernest Gellner, claims that Islam is “the most protestant of the great monotheisms, it is ever Reformation-prone (Islam could indeed be described as Permanent Reformation)” (Gellner, 2006, p. 77). It has undergone many successive self-reformations – Gellner (2006) calls it Islamic Protestantism (p. 40) – the urge to reform has always been present in Islam (Gellner, 1992, p. 19). Jihadism and ISIS are therefore not unexpected – historically they were preceded by other revolutionary intra-religious movements. The ability to revolt within comes, among other reasons, from the dogmatic absence of clergy, meaning any intermediary between man and God, and from the multitude of possible interpretations of the scripture. The egalitarian, direct relations to God is attractive as a concept but it also allows self-proclaimed, uncontrollable imams or those from outside of the mainstream official Islam to be seen by the believers as just as righteous as anyone. It weakens any religious oversight and facilitates revolt and recruitment. So does the easiness of being a good Muslim: just follow the five pillars of Islam and you'll go to heaven, without having to confess to anyone in between. The universal features of Islam – simplicity, combined with the freedom to judge for oneself and the “ambiguity of concrete moral and political precepts” (Geller, 2006, p. 69) – makes for a religion one can mould into anything that fits their needs. Jihad, too, even if the word itself is Arabic, has a universal meaning as a revolution, fight against the oppressor or internal, personal effort to be good.

Jihad per se is no longer restricted to Muslims. Factually becoming Muslim is of secondary importance; it is a formal and last step to be included in the community – a symbolic ceremony present in many brotherhood-like systems: like a scout oath, or swearing allegiance to any leader or law in the army. In France Jihadist recruits for twenty years have hailed either from second-generation migrants or organically (“de souche”) French converts (Roy, 2016). American recruits, many of them converts, are Caucasian, Somali-American, Vietnamese-American, Bosnian-American, Arab-American, among other ethnicities and nationalities” (Bergen, Shuster & Sterman, 2015).

The anti-systemic nature of ISIS is corroborated in its opposition to the international system and to the traditional Westphalian state system in the Middle East, an order that is thought un-Muslim, created and oriented by the West. The Middle Eastern state has been additionally oppressive toward Islamists and impotent in providing services to the people in

general. Today, ISIS is strongest in those provinces in Syria and Iraq where the central government had been the weakest.

The vast majority of resistance movements since the 1970s in the Middle East have been religious in nature. Jihadists can be against state institutions but in their ideology Islam plays a similar role to that of nationalisms in the West – the caliphate as an alternative, moral, responsible state. As in the Middle East, in the West personal grievances can also be easily directed against the state or system. The more secular it is, the greater sense it makes to become religious in opposition to it. In France, young Muslims, disconnected from the culture of the Middle East, often without knowledge of Arabic,⁸ can shape their believers practically at will thanks to the malleability of Islam.⁹

For Muslims, the ideological strength of ISIS also comes from the fact that Jihadists play on the analogies between today and the time of early Islam in the Middle Ages. Back in the 7th century it was created among Christians, Jews and other denominations, it found its way – the “right one” – also by converting those around to the “righteous”, final religion (Muhammad is the “seal” of prophecies). And so today, like Mohammad in the 7th century, Muslims need to perform a hijra (emigration) from the land of the disbelievers to the land of Islam.¹⁰ Historical narrative is also important because it epitomises the longing for a great victorious past, when civilisational achievements of the Middle East exceeded those of Europe.

On top of that, recent policy failures have also contributed to the appeal of ISIS today. The past four decades form a series of mistakes in foreign policy by the United States, and recently by Europe as well. In the 1980s, the United States helped Jihadists in Afghanistan and pitted the regime of Saddam Husain against the Iranians; in the 1990s they intervened twice in Kuwait and Iraq (though wisely stopped short of deposing Husain); in the 2000s they invaded Afghanistan and Iraq again, destroying the social and political fabric of both, and in 2011 together with the UK and France they helped to decompose Libya. Those mistakes empowered both radicals and authoritarian governments, and they also remain a potential radicalisation factor for the future. Political consciousness of the 15-30-year-olds in the Middle East and, to a large extent in Europe as well, consists of these events and, hence, is shaped by anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism in general.¹¹

8 For an account of young Muslim civic leader's remarks about the older generation's Muslim leaders, see American diplomatic cable 06PARIS6995: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06PARIS6995_a.html

9 For example British Muslim radicals have a very basic or distorted understanding of Islam. See Temple-Raston, D. (2011, January 24). New Terrorism Adviser Takes A 'Broad Tent' Approach. *NPR*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/24/133125267/new-terrorism-adviser-takes-a-broad-tent-approach>.

10 *Lift your heads up high. You now have a state and a caliphate that restores your honor, your might, your rights and your sovereignty. The state forms a tie of brotherhood between Arab and non-Arab, white and black, Easterner and Westerner. The caliphate brings together the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, North African, American, French, German and Australian... They are all in the same trench, defending each other, protecting each other and sacrificing for one another. Their blood mingles together under one flag [with] one goal and in one camp... perform hijra from darul-kufr to darul-Islam. There are homes here for you and your families.* Retrieved from http://www.memri.org/report/en/print8147.htm#_ednref14

11 Anti-Americanism also characterised the leftist radicals of the 70s in Germany and Italy, and can usually be found in the writings of mainstream leftist intellectuals. See Judt, T. (2010, p. 471). *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*. London: Vintage Books.

The caliphate and ISIS are supposed to have a higher moral ground that counters the “immorality” of the West (Dabiq, 2014b). The new moral system is combined with a state-like structure (caliphate ministries, passports and money), culture and art (papers, movies, and an Orwellian-like newspeak) to form a complete utopia. In total systems and radicalisation, it is irrelevant or secondary who is from the right and who is from the left. Muslim fundamentalists should be in European political terms considered as pertaining to the ultra-right wing with their cultivation of tradition, submission to one religion, social rigorism and disdain of minorities. But they attract right-wingers¹² and left-wingers with anti-imperialist rhetoric alike (Arasli, 2011).

Cross-Cultural Anti-Systemism and Exclusion: Sociological and Psychological Reasons for ISIS’ Appeal

There are striking ideological and background similarities between ISIS today and radical leftist utopias that emerged among the first post-Second World War generation in Western Europe. Both movements had a revolution for their goal: the leftist radicals wanted to end labour alienation, while the Islamic radicals want to end Muslim alienation – both hated their own governments and the US. Like ISIS today, the Baader-Meinhoff group was also a symptom of a crisis of ideologies and clashing values: back then it was socialism/ communism and capitalism that divided Europe in two, with Germany at the heart of the division. Today, more in Western Europe than in the Middle East, ISIS breeds on the crisis of European culture and on the paradoxes of ultra-liberal social order that allows almost any form of individualisation but fails to understand religiosity.

Analogies between European utopian radicals and Jihadism today extend to social conditions and psychological disposition. Violent extremism in the 1970s raised its head when the first economic and value crisis struck Europe after the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s. “The urge to bring the architecture of security and stability crashing down on the heads of their parents’ generation was the extreme expression of a more widespread scepticism, in the light of the recent past, about the local credibility of pluralist democracy” (Judt, 2010, p. 470). Today, after the golden age of the 1990s, an economic and perhaps a social crisis is biting Europe again. It consists of a cultural crisis that has dissolved the values of Europe and a social backlash against the liberalism of the parents’ generation. That crisis today also debilitates non-religious peoples’ understanding of religion and its “ultimate concern” (Tillich, 2001) function – how a set of beliefs becomes an internal imperative above worldly life.

12 Nicolas Michael Teasant, from Christian family with military traditions.

The ultra-libertarian society and its liberties may have cut the branch they had been built on – religion, spirituality etc. – ridding individuals of a foundation that shaky souls need.¹³ This drive of many Europeans toward ISIS resembles what renowned psychologist and sociologist Erich Fromm called “escape from freedom”. According to Fromm, freedom is so alienating and demanding that people would rather escape into authoritarian, totalitarian systems just to feel safe again. Undoubtedly, crisis of personality and frustration (including sexual frustration of young males in MENA)¹⁴ are primary psychological reasons that push Europeans and Middle Easterners alike into the arms of ISIS.¹⁵ It has been proven that second-generation immigrants may have identity issues,¹⁶ feel rejected by societies they live in and are attracted to brutality and power.¹⁷ Caliphate caters to the need of belonging, meaning and security, albeit pathologically. Another social and psychological reason that most probably binds the two sides of the Mediterranean in making ISIS attractive is that it revolts against the older generation.

The generational gap always makes youth rebel but in recent decades the gap may have become deeper and broader, primarily owing to the change in communications. Most foreign fighters from Europe are in their 20s (Foreign Fighters, 2015), while in general 70% of the Arab world is less than 30 years old. In its global aspect it is a revolution of the young. The generational gap came into the limelight in the revolts of 2011. With the crackdown both on religious and civil activism in many Arab countries today and a deep generational gap in place there are simply more young people (in absolute numbers and proportionally) today that are prone to ISIS propaganda than in the past. This is less obvious in Europe but seems equally possible.

Relative Deprivation and Economic Reasons for ISIS’ Popularity

The caliphate attracts people who are economically deprived but not exclusively. To understand why and before absolute economic deprivation can be analysed, it is important to see the reasons behind the appeal of radicals such as ISIS that can be located on the overpass between society and economy, namely relative deprivation (RD). The concept is defined as a person’s perceived disparity between their capabilities and expectations (Gurr, 1970). In other words, one expects more than one can achieve, regardless of the objective status of the person in question. The expectations today, built up by globalised mass media, greater inequalities, a perception that so many people have

13 For the elaboration on religious aspects of Europe in crisis see Grey, J. (2015, March 3). What Scares The New Atheists. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/03/what-scares-the-new-atheists>.

14 For more on the topic, see Kneissl, K. (2012). *Testosteron macht Politik*. Vienna: Braumüller Verlag.

15 Personality crisis and frustration are possibly the most frequent global common denominators between ISIS supporters: see examples of Sally-Anne Jones, a 46-year old former punk musician from Chatham (UK) married a computer hacker and went to Syria with him and second-generation children of immigrants from lower social strata, often involved in petty crime.

16 “Strikingly frequent stories about the corpses of British jihadis bearing tattoos of English football clubs suggest unsuccessful attempts to resolve these [identity] issues.” Bennett-Jones, O. (2015, August 27). ‘We’ and ‘You’. *London Review of Books*, p. 10.

17 The usual psychological reasons for ISIS appeal have already been analysed elsewhere; see footnotes 3, 6, 7.

so much more and their lives are presumably so much better, make societies prone to political disruptions or even violence.

Deprivation is relevant to the disposition to collective violence to the extent that many people feel discontented about the same things. Unexpected personal deprivations, such as a failure to obtain an expected promotion or the infidelity of a spouse, affect few people at any given time and are therefore narrow in scope. Events and patterns of conditions like the suppression of a political party, a drastic inflation, or the decline of a group's status relative to its reference group are likely to precipitate feelings of RD among whole groups or categories of people and are wide in scope (Gurr, 1970).

With regard to societies today, it seems that both personal RD and group RD can be causes of ISIS' appeal among individuals who experienced unexpected personal deprivation (job loss, heartbreak, etc.) and those who feel it collectively (glass ceiling for migrant descendants in France, crackdown on Islamist parties in the Middle East, etc.) thanks to the specific communal characteristic of ISIS. Violence committed outside of the land of this imagined community (ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq) acquires features of collective violence.

When looking at the causes of ISIS' appeal the category of absolute economic deprivation may still be valid (although in a different sense) in some cases with reference to the conquered population in Syria and Iraq, as well as recruits from the Middle East and the Caucasus. According to press reports, recruits to ISIS from the region and abroad earn between \$200 and \$1500 a month, additional benefits such as more than \$1000 for marriage notwithstanding (Baker, 2015; Islamic State to Halve, 2016). These sums cannot be insignificant in societies where a quarter of the population lives under the national poverty lines. In Europe this reason may play a comparatively lesser role, although undoubtedly European recruits come from lower social strata, often with a criminal record. Arab states are petrified class societies with a long history of Westernised elite rule, meagre social mobility, and a large portion of Arab societies living under the national poverty levels. The UNDP Arab Human Development Report acutely enumerated the economic shortcomings of the Arab world in subsequent reports, finding that the percentage of population living under the national poverty line reached 30% in Syria and Lebanon, 41% in Egypt, 59.5% in Yemen, with a total of around 40% for the whole region in 2009, which equalled 65 million people (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2009, p. 11). The same report warned about the rising inequalities, insecurity of disadvantaged individuals and joblessness with a potential to grow into a genuine regional plague if 51 million jobs were not created by 2020 (UNDP, 2009, p. 10). The same applies to youth in Europe, where inequalities and unemployment frustrate as many as half of all the young population of Spain, for example

(Buck, 2014). Additionally, the past couple of years saw wars in Libya, Yemen, Syria and Iraq, which put many more people at risk.

The Middle Eastern region is particularly prone to climate change that results in droughts, water shortage, desertification and urban pressure as masses move from rural to urban areas. ISIS capital – Raqqa – was one of the provinces of Syria worst hit by drought between 2007 and 2011. The drought caused water shortages, agricultural failures, livestock mortality and, hence, pushed 1.5 million people to migrate to the peripheries of urban centres (Kelley, Mohtadi, Cane, Seager & Kushnir, 2015). In Europe, these reasons will likely produce more migration from the Middle East, greater competition for the job market that is available to migrants and greater hostility towards them.

Multilingual and Hi-Tech Skilfulness: Practical and Technical Reasons for ISIS Outreach

ISIS benefits immensely from the coincidence of young people (revolting youth) using new technological tools to communicate and entertain themselves. They are the most skilful group online – from traditional operating systems, through social media, smartphone apps to dark web. Groups like ISIS are also prolific, with thousands of Twitter and Facebook accounts that constantly recruit and target disaffected youth in the West. They use apps and other programs in recruitment and dissemination of propaganda. In doing so, they particularly innovate in bypassing intelligence. For example, the Russian equivalent of Facebook (VK, previously VKontakte) is particularly popular when regular FB accounts are being shut down (Banerjee, 2015). Apps give them greater mobility (Zello allows to communicate at short distance outside of radar), constant multi-level connectivity (WhatsApp) and anonymity (Twitter).

Hailing from more than 80 countries, they have multi-linguistic and wide-outreach dissemination resources at their disposal. Many statements are translated into more than five languages and disseminated on the most popular internet platforms, multiplying the factual impact of ISIS. Its multi-lingual and hyper-modern production of clips and magazines “employs the aesthetic of contemporary Hollywood films, video games and TV shows” (Parkin, 2016) built on action and brutality. The focus on the Hollywood-like style of these clips may either imply that they are targeting people in the West in particular or that this cultural style would simply be most effective since global mass culture is dominated by it. By mimicking a multiplayer role playing game experience like Call of Duty they also target the young.

But this outreach would be much less effective if it was not for a personal bond that a recruiter develops with a potential recruit. Experts at the counter-radicalisation department (UCLAT) at the French Ministry of the Interior have concluded that the true primary tool in recruitment is a personal relationship formed online. Such online bonds in turn naturally develop between younger people who spend more time online and are susceptible to taking online relations as more genuine or valuable than real life bonds.

If Europe is in Crisis then More Caution is Needed: Conclusions and Recommendations

Jihadism may be exclusively associated with the Muslim culture as a term and concept but failing to see its universal, cross-cultural dimension impairs internal and international policy considerations. This radical utopia serves as a global magnet for anti-systemism rather than just attracting religious locals in the Middle East. European countries need to carefully structure their policy toward ISIS so that they do not become the prime soldier in the fight against this utopia and, hence, tie the rope around their necks at home. Globally, over a longer period, the number of such movements' potential supporters will most likely grow.

Even if the greatest numbers of foreign Jihadist fighters come from the Middle East, Europe and Russia, no single country can consider itself safe. There are slightly more than a hundred fighters from the US and yet the San Bernardino shooting in December 2015 is an example of how different and more deadly the acts of terror perpetrated by a global radical terrorist organisation can be. Unlike Al-Qaeda, which would pick and choose an assailant and its target, ISIS is anarchistic in this sense. It is enough to pledge allegiance to ISIS immediately before the attack, as was the case in San Bernardino (Jakes & De Luce, 2015), and it does not matter who you are or who you are targeting – the act of terror in the name of ISIS is what counts. Being part of the caliphate has become a convenient excuse for a radicalisation process already in place and a horrific idea already in the making.

The selection of universal reasons for ISIS' appeal demonstrates that there is no single reason, nor a type of reason, that explains the popularity of ISIS in its entirety. Many of the reasons for its appeal will remain for years (economic problems, authoritarianism in the Middle East) and some, particularly in the West (such as the crisis of values) may grow. Perhaps the key to seeing an upward trend in the attractiveness of Jihad as a global utopia is understanding that Western culture is in crisis and Europe is in political crisis.

Therefore, the proportion of new foreign recruits from the Middle East to those from Europe may numerically favour the latter. This greater radicalisation potential is present at both political extremes, the right and the left, as well as among second-generation immigrants in Europe. The terrorist attacks in Paris and the rise of the right-wing parties make anti-immigrant rhetoric more prevalent. In turn, a xenophobic narrative leads to more radicalisation.

The diversity of the reasons behind ISIS' appeal makes it resilient and ensures a constant inflow of fresh blood. Affinity need not be physical in Syria or Iraq – its imaginary version is just as valid and strong. This kind of radical affiliation is just as dangerous for European countries. Also, even if in the coming months the territory under ISIS control shrinks physically, the ideal of anti-systemic movement will remain attractive to a growing number of people.

However, in policy terms, understanding the global strength of ISIS, particularly its universal attractiveness, allows for a better-tailored policy in fighting this organisation. European joint response in the Middle East needs to avoid several mistakes, which it may be close to making today. When ISIS is perceived as a new universal utopia it becomes clear that any campaign against it in Syria or Iraq is linked to internal European issues at home. In other words, the foreign policy of European governments in the Middle East is also directed at the European citizenry.

Firstly, therefore, neither Europe as a whole (European Union), not any of the member states alone, can be seen as the vanguard in the fight against ISIS in Syria or Iraq as it will only speed up the radicalisation in Europe and push more Europeans (and others) to ISIS. It does not mean that ISIS should not be fought but the military part of European involvement needs to be confined to air support and special operations while Iraqis and Syrians combat the Jihadists themselves directly.

Secondly, the worst-case scenario is a European military campaign combined with anti-Muslim rhetoric on the social level at home. In multicultural societies it would radicalise both parts of the immigrant populations and, in turn, the far right, while in more homogenous European societies it would at least energise the far right. The country that seems to be using ISIS' global appeal in Europe this way is Russia. In the Russian media, Muslims in Western Europe are vilified, documentaries are produced that purport the inability of France or Germany to integrate the Muslim population.¹⁸ Producing religion and race-based xenophobia in Europe serves three major policy purposes: it increases social tensions in countries that may hurt the Russian economy the most, weakens

¹⁸ Even though the Russian Muslim population is the largest in Europe, at 14 million (10% of the whole population). In France it is 4.7 million (7.5%) and in Germany 4.8 million (5.8%). Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>

European solidarity and the clout of any one current political leader, rallies Russian minorities in Europe (more than a million in Germany alone) behind the Russian policy, while in the Middle East it pushes Europe into a problematic focus on ISIS in Syria.

Finally, the best scenario for Europe is that Sunni Muslim countries are made responsible for the defeat of ISIS and play the biggest role in this effort. Two of them – Saudi Arabia and Egypt – should lead the regional military and ideological coalition against ISIS. Both countries are natural religious leaders for many Muslims. Mecca and Madina are in Saudi Arabia, while the main religious university, Al-Azhar, is in Egypt. Also, the creation of the caliphate poses a much greater direct danger to Sunni regimes in the Arab world than it does to Europe. The unwillingness of these two countries to become more involved in combating ISIS both ideologically and militarily should be seen as being against the vital interests of Europe.

Bibliography

ALJAZEERA (n.d.). هل تعتبر تقدم تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية في العراق وسوريا لصالح المنطقة؟ Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.net/votes/pages?voteid=5270>

ARASLI, J. E. (2011). Violent Converts to Islam: Growing Cluster and Rising Trend. *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://globalecco.org/ctx-v1n1/violent-converts-to-islam>

BAKER, K. (2015, May 26). ISIS Offers Fighters Up to £1,000 Starter Home Bonus and Honeymoon in Their Stronghold Syrian City of Raqqa. *The Daily Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3098235/ISIS-offers-fighters-1-500-starter-home-bonus-free-honeymoon.html>

BANERJEE, S. (2015, May 31). Jihadists Social-Media Recruitment Sparks Online Battle. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/jihadists-social-media-recruitment-sparks-online-battle-1.3094600>

BERGEN, P., SCHUSTER, C., & STERMAN, D. (2015, November). ISIS in the West. The New Faces of Extremism. *New America*. Retrieved from <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/11813-isis-in-the-west-2/ISP-Isis-In-The-West-v2.b4f2e9e3a7c94b9e9bd2a293bae2e759.pdf>

BUCK, T. (2014, May 23). Spanish Youth in Crisis. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/5908da36-db09-11e3-8273-00144feabdc0.html#slide0>

DABIQ ISSUE 1 (2014a). The Return of Khilafah. Retrieved from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

DABIQ ISSUE 7 (2014b). From Hypocrisy to Apostasy – The Extinction of the Grayzone. Retrieved from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf>

ELGOT, J. (2014, October 16). Islamic State Actually Has More Support In Britain Than In Arab Nations. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/10/16/islamic-state-arab-nations-britain-support_n_5995548.html

FOREIGN FIGHTERS: AN UPDATED ASSESSMENT OF THE FLOW OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS TO SYRIA AND IRAQ (2015, December). *The Soufan Group*. Retrieved from http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL.pdf

GELLNER, E. (1992). *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London, New York: Routledge.

GELLNER, E. (2006). *Nations and Nationalisms*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

GRANT, M. (2014, August 26). 16% of French Citizens Support ISIS, Poll Finds. *Newseek*. Retrieved from <http://europe.newsweek.com/16-french-citizens-support-isis-poll-finds-266795?rm=eu>

GURR, T. R. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*. London: Routledge. Retrieved from <https://books.google.pl/books?id=ngHvCgAAQBAJ&q=relative#v=snippet&q=relative&f=false>

ISIS POPULARITY GROWING IN ISRAEL (2014, September 11). *Israel Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/24920/Default.aspx>

ISLAMIC STATE TO HALVE FIGHTERS' SALARIES AS COST OF WAGING TERROR STARTS TO BITE (2016, January 20). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/20/islamic-state-to-halve-fighters-salaries-as-cost-of-waging-terror-starts-to-bite>

JAKES, L., & DE LUCE, D. (2015, December 3). Is the San Bernardino Attack the Latest in 'Crowdsourcing' Terrorism? *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/03/is-the-san-bernardino-attack-the-latest-in-crowdsourcing-terrorism/>

JUDT, T. (2010). *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*. London: Vintage Books.

KELLEY, C. P., MOHTADI, S., CANE, M. A., SEAGER, R., & KUSHNIR, Y. (2015). Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought. *PNAS*, 112(11) 3241-3246.

MALIK, S. (2014, November 28). Support for Isis Stronger in Arab Social Media in Europe than in Syria. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/28/support-isis-stronger-arabic-social-media-europe-us-than-syria>



PARKIN, S. (2016, January 29). How Isis Hijacked Pop Culture, from Hollywood to Video Games. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/29/how-isis-hijacked-pop-culture-from-hollywood-to-video-games>

POLLOCK, D. (2014, October 14). ISIS Has Almost No Popular Support in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Lebanon. *The Washington Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/isis-has-almost-no-popular-support-in-egypt-saudi-arabia-or-lebanon>

ROY, O. (2006). *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York City: Columbia University Press.

ROY, O. (2016, January 8). Le djihadisme est une révolte générationnelle et nihiliste. *Le Monde*. Retrieved from http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/24/le-djihadisme-une-revolte-generationnelle-et-nihiliste_4815992_3232.html

ROY, O., & SENIGUER, H. (2015, July 4). Comment l'islam est devenu la nouvelle idéologie des damnés de la planète. *Atlántico*. Retrieved from <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/comment-islam-est-devenu-nouvelle-ideologie-damnes-planete-olivier-roy-haoues-seniguer-2221200.html>

TILICH, P. (2001). *Dynamics of Faith*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

UNDP (2009). *The Report in Brief. Arab Human Development Report 2009. Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries*. Retrieved from <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/contents/2009/execsummary-e.pdf>

VIEWS OF ISIS IN ARABIC LANGUAGE SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEWS ARTICLES (2014, November 28). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2014/nov/28/views-of-isis-in-arabic-language-social-media-and-news-articles>

Tactics of Recruitment

*Amal Mukhtar**

* Researcher, Al Ahran Center for Political & Strategic Studies

After the protests in Syria began in August 2011, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi – the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) – sent the head of his operation in Nineveh, Abu Mohamed al-Julani, to Syria with the main objective of establishing a front in support of the people of Syria, which later became “Jabhat al-Nusra” or “al-Nusra Front” (Lister, 2014).

Between August 2011 and April 2013, the performance of ISI evolved significantly, while Jabhat al-Nusra made significant military successes against the Syrian regime and was capable of widening its areas of control. On 9 April 2013, al-Baghdadi declared that Jabhat al-Nusra was the Syrian branch of a larger organisation, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or Daesh. The following day, al-Julani rejected al-Baghdadi’s declaration, claiming that Jabhat al-Nusra was al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria, and adding that his allegiance or *ba’ya* was only owed to al-Zawahiri and no one else.¹

The religious and political debate among Jihadist leaders became obvious, and led to the intervention of al-Qaeda’s leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri on 8 November 2013. Al-Zawahiri emphasised that Jabhat al-Nusra was the only al-Qaeda branch or affiliate in Syria, and that al-Baghdadi should stay in Iraq as the Emir (leader) of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Al-Zawahiri declared that fighters were free to join the group of their choice, provided that each Emir and each group would practise the Jihad in their own territory.²

Al-Zawahiri’s statement was directly rejected by al-Baghdadi, who replied that the Islamic State would remain in Syria and would further expand. His words became the slogan of Daesh and most of its followers: “Remaining and expanding”.

Although Jabhat al-Nusra emerged from the Islamic State in Iraq, al-Nusra is the current franchise of al-Qaeda in Syria, while Daesh represents only itself, although it insists on being an extension of the “authentic” al-Qaeda.

In addition, there are other Jihadist groups in Syria formed by Syrians expressing a radical Islamic political ideology like Ahrar al-Sham, Al-Jabha al-Shamiya and others. However, these groups are in a coalition with Jabhat al-Nusra, known as Jaysh al-Fateh or the Army of the Conquest. Therefore, in order to simplify the division of the armed Islamic Salafist militias in Syria, we will divide them into two groups: Jabhat al-Nusra and Daesh.

According to an estimate by the CIA, in September 2014 Daesh had between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters in Iraq and Syria (Spencer, 2014). The Syrian Observatory for

1 Raqqa U.M.C. (2013, April 10) *الظواهري مبايعة و النصره جبهة أمير الجولاني الفاتح كلمة*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FdTjm4-6Lo>

2 *فيها دمشق مداخلات* 2 (2013, November 8).

والشام العراق في الاسلامية الدولة الغاء فيها أعلن والتي الظواهري أيمن الشيخ كلمة : الجزيرة قناة [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A182rGoC_GE

Human Rights estimates the force numbers around 80,000-100,000 (with approximately 50,000 in Syria and 30,000 in Iraq) (Islamic State, 2014).

A recent report by the Soufan Group, an intelligence consultancy, indicates that the number of foreign fighters in Syria has increased from 12,000 to at least 27,000 since June 2014. The greatest contingent of recruits comes from Arab countries. Outside the region, recruitment has risen significantly in Western Europe, Russia and Central Asia (Syria conflict, 2015)³.

Although it is very difficult to determine the exact number of fighters involved in the Syrian civil war, it is undeniable that their number is increasing. Thus, while the previous chapter of this Joint Policy Study analysed the reasons that drive the European and Arab citizens to join the radical groups, this contribution will examine the ways and means used by the terrorist groups, with a major focus on al-Qaeda, Jabhat al Nusra and Daesh, in order to attract new recruits. The chapter will first examine what kind of tactics are deployed towards different profiles and categories of people. It will then focus on the methods and major places of recruitment. Subsequently, it will analyse the different kind of messages disseminated in order to mobilise new recruits. The chapter will conclude with some recommendations on how to counter the recruitment practices used by the terrorist groups.

Tactics of Recruitment according to Different Categories of Recruits

Origin: Local vs. Foreign Fighters

The three organisations mentioned above (al-Qaeda in Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusra and Daesh) are established and operate in Iraq and Syria. The recruitment process targeting the residents of these two countries greatly differs from recruitment techniques applied towards Muslims from other countries, whether Arab or European countries.

The majority of fighters affiliated to these groups are either Syrian or Iraqi citizens. An automatic and almost inevitable supply of force is provided on a daily basis by the civilians in areas under the control of these armed groups in Syria and Iraq. Most of the civilians join the terrorist groups either out of fear for themselves and for their families or/and in order to get a number of social and security benefits.

For example, in Mosul (Iraq), Daesh opened a hospital providing free medical services to local people, just one day before it occupied this city. In Raqqa (Syria), Daesh provides free transportation services, has reduced the price of bread and even runs restaurants providing free food to the poor.

³ For more detailed numbers on the foreign fighters, see chapter "The Reasons for Radical Groups' Appeal among European and Arab Citizens: The Case of ISIS" in the same volume.

Financial benefits are one of the main pillars of the strategy used to secure the support of local citizens. When Daesh attacked Deir al-Zor (Syria) in May/June 2014, it distributed one million dollars among tribal leaders to avoid any military confrontation with them (Lister, 2014).

Jabhat al-Nusra provides similar services to the inhabitants of the regions under its control. The leader of al-Nusra, Abu Mohamed al-Julani, said in an interview with Al Jazeera that electricity and water are provided for free to the people in the areas under their control.⁴ Providing services and security to local inhabitants is a crucial tactic that explains the attractiveness of the organisation and the success of its recruitment campaigns.

The second type of recruits are the foreign fighters, who come either from other Arab or non-Arab countries. The main source of foreign fighters is other Arab countries, with Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Morocco considered as the main providers of foreign fighters. Out of the three organisations previously mentioned, Daesh has distinguished itself and managed to attract most of the foreigners, with the message that they would contribute to increasing the number of citizens in its new state. Europeans are considered especially important targets, as their different languages and skills have helped Daesh to disseminate its message worldwide. Their professional background is also much better than that of their Arab counterparts. Therefore, Europeans are offered higher salaries than the locals or other Arabs. European recruits receive 1,200 USD/month, while Arabs reportedly receive 400 USD/month (Khatib, 2015).

Skills and Knowledge: Specialists vs. Regular Civilians

The choice of recruitment tools also differs according to the skills and knowledge of the recruitment target. Highly skilled recruits with experience in the battlefield are the prime target of recruitment.

For example, the expansion of the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda cannot be understood without analysing the skills and specialisations of the first-generation recruits. The dissolution of the Iraqi army, police, intelligence and the Ba'ath party after the American invasion led many executive figures of these bodies to join the resistance groups. This also happened to some extent with defecting Syrian army officers, who joined different armed groups in Syria. In addition, a great number of Chechen Jihadists with field experience have joined both Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra. This explains the larger organisational, military and intelligence capacities that characterise Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra in comparison to al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

4 moester101. (2015, June 12). Without Borders Interview with Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYY6pRqRmyI>

In a report following a short stay in Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)-controlled territories in 2006, an investigative journalist describes the meeting of the ISI field commanders, held in a room equipped with the most modern technological equipment. The participants in the meeting were using military language such as “time zero 100”, “battalion” and “the enemy’s sectors”, which suggests that they must have been experienced military staff and not simple Jihadists from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Fouda, 2015).

Besides the military and intelligence expertise, the groups also seek to attract experts in communication, including photographers, cameramen, directors and IT experts. According to al-Zawahiri’s famous quote “we are in a battlefield, and more than half of this battle is happening in the media.”⁵

On the other hand, a large number of inexperienced civilians are mostly recruited to serve as first-line fighters or “cannon fodder”, most likely to be killed on the battleground or in suicide operations.

In order to attract the experienced recruits considerable financial incentives are offered. With regard to regular civilians, they are mobilised not only by financial, but also by considerable social benefits, such as easier access to social infrastructure, protection or promise of social upgrading.

Age: Mature vs. Children⁶

The available data indicates that foreign fighters in Syria mostly belong to the 18-29 age group (Global Recruitment, 2014). However, there are also children among the fighters.

Financial incentives are usually aimed at fighters over 18, while the tactics applied to recruit the children include exploiting their immaturity, naivety and impulsiveness, providing incentives, and using coercion (kidnapping and brainwashing them). Children are brainwashed through the indoctrination received in schools funded by Daesh (Sommerfelt & Taylor, 2015). These schools are considered as manufacturers of new generations of terrorists, teaching the children Daesh’s interpretation of Jihad, Sharia and takfeer (the practice of excommunication).

Part 2 of the series about the Islamic State on Vice News,⁷ entitled Grooming Children for Jihad, shows one of the religious leaders or sheikhs training children in camps. Asked about what he wanted to be in the future, whether a combatant or a martyr, a 7-year-old child answers “a fighter.”⁸ This illustrates the fact that the children are used as cannon fodder as the group needs more and more recruits to maintain its territory.

⁵ Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi. (2005, July 9). *Global Security*. Retrieved from http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm

⁶ Children means people under 18 years old.

⁷ A TV news channel.

⁸ The Islamic State (Part 2). (2014, August 13). *Vice News*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/video/the-islamic-state-part-2>

Transfer Recruits vs. New Recruits

Vertical Transfer

The term vertical transfer means Jihadist transfer from one generation to another. It should be noted that the recruitment process and joining Jihad did not start with the outbreak of the war in Syria. In fact, the recruitment process on a large scale started in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s. After the end of the war, most of the fighters did not return to their civilian lives, but joined other Jihadist groups.

While the Afghani war brought up combatants ready for Jihad anywhere, the Chechnya and Balkan wars also brought other Mujahideen in the 1990s. This generation and maybe some of their sons constitute today the largest part of the older recruits in the terrorist groups in Syria.

Horizontal Transfer

Horizontal transfer is defined as “intra-recruitment”, meaning a local member of one Jihadist group joining another, as happens every day between the armed groups in Syria and Iraq. “Inter-recruitment” may also refer to someone from an armed group abroad joining *by bay’ah* (allegiance) one of the terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq (mostly al-Qaeda or Daesh).

According to the testimony of Najeh Ibrahim (a co-founder of al-Jam’a al-Islamiyya in Egypt), a significant number of Taliban contributed to shaping al-Qaeda, while al-Qaeda in turn is largely responsible for ISI, from where most of Daesh’s fighters come.

In addition, Daesh is also joined by Jihadists from other armed groups in Syria, willing to become members of the so-called caliphate. Many of Jabhat al-Nusra’s members have left to join Daesh, and many of al-Zawahiri’s followers are asking him to join Daesh. Similarly, the terrorist group *al-Tawheed w-al-Jihad* in Sinai has declared its *bay’ah* to Daesh.⁹

Recruiting members from other groups requires tactics to persuade them to leave their groups. The tactics used include the Islamic fiqh (jurisprudence) and fatwa (legal opinion), to prove to the fighters that they are fighting on the wrong side and convince them to shift to the real Jihad side.

The media is one of the most popular channels of intra-recruitment, to the extent that it could be argued that there is a sort of “war of words” among the armed groups. For

⁹ From Najeh Ibrahim contribution’s in the Dialogue Workshop of the project in Cairo, November 2015.

example, Al-Jabha al-Shamiyya (the Levant Front), one of the factions of the Al-Fatih Army (cooperating with Jabhat al-Nusra), shared a video mocking Daesh's technique of slaughtering the captives. In this video, right before the slaughtering begins, a preacher appears to talk about the decency and kindness of the Islamic religion and says that Islam forbids the crime of killing the captives in such ways. Then he elaborates on the differences between them and Daesh, saying that they are truthful fighters, who defend the oppressed and fight with the objective of installing justice without using brutal means.¹⁰

Daesh uses the word *sahwat*¹¹ to negatively refer to other Sunni armed groups in Syria (including Jabhat al-Nusra) in its magazine *Dabiq*¹² and in videos released on YouTube.

Moreover, a new phenomenon, the so-called Mubahala (cursing each other) appeared recently between the sheiks from Jabhat al-Nusra and Daesh. In March 2014, Abu Mohamed al-Adnani, the official speaker of Daesh, tweeted "Pray for Allah to curse the liars": "الكاذبين على الله لعنة لنجعل نبتهل", for performing Mubahala¹³ with one of al-Nusra's leaders. Then Abu Abdullah al-Shami, the mufti of al-Nusra, accused Daesh of lying, fraud, treachery, treason, extremism and killing Muslim people and civilians, concluding with "Oh Allah, curse the liars among us": "منا الكاذبين على لعنتك اجعل اللهم". The following month, al-Adnani responded in Mubahala asking Allah to curse the liars, whether them or al-Nusra.

New Recruits

On the other hand, the recruitment also targets fighters, mostly youth, who do not have any previous experience in combat.

Recruiting new members consists of persuading them that they are going astray and that they are living in a primitive community under an infidel regime. Therefore, they should fulfil their obligation of emigration (Hijrah) and religious combat (Jihad).

For instance, the young Egyptian Islam Yaken, a university law graduate brought up in a wealthy family in Cairo, who joined Daesh, used to attend private religious lessons and then started to get involved with radical religious tutors and friends, who made him re-evaluate Egyptian society as the home of the infidels (Dar Kufr). He came to the conclusion that he should emigrate (Hijrah) and join the war in Syria (Jihad) to support vulnerable people there.

10 أسراهم عن ب الع فوي نهى «جماعي ذبح» ب ف يديو «داعش» ت حارب ال شامة الة الج بية. (2015, December 8). سوريو اب حب و مصرى [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXghMAbYV14>

11 Sahwat were coalitions between tribal Sheikhs in a particular province in Iraq sponsored by the US military, created from 2005 to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq.

12 Dabiq is the title of the online magazine used by Daesh for propaganda and recruitment. It was first published in July 2014 in a number of different languages including English.

13 Mubahala: المباحلة: is derived from the Arabic word *Bahlah* (pray for Allah to curse someone), so the term Mubahala means cursing each other. It is happening between two parties in conflict, which call God's curse down upon whichever of the two parties was not speaking truthfully.

Recruitment Methods: Direct and Indirect

Direct Recruitment

Influencing individuals and convincing them to join terrorist groups through direct contact are considered the most important and effective recruitment methods. It has been the norm since the first appearance of the Salafist Jihadist movements.

Historically, the first phase of Salafist Jihadist direct recruitment took place in the Egyptian prisons during the 1960s, when prisoners became attracted to the thoughts of Sayyid Qutb.¹⁴ Most of the prisoners were later released by President Al-Sadat, which led to the formation in the 1970s of many new Islamist movements, such as *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, *al-Tawhid-w-al-Jihad*, *al-Takfir-w-al-Hijra* and others. Prisons continue to be fertile ground for recruitment as radicalised Islamist militants mix with other inmates and may influence and recruit vulnerable, impressionable and alienated detainees seeking spiritual fulfilment or protection. Apart from prisons, mosques, universities and cafes have also become fertile grounds for recruitment, especially of youths. In the 1970s, the universities gained ground as the best places for radical preachers to attract vulnerable, isolated and disoriented young people to those groups, following the same pattern as in prisons.

The Afghan/Soviet war marked a new phase, as recruitment started openly in many mosques in Arab and some Muslim countries, which supported the Afghan resistance and provided the Mujahideen with financial and military aid. As part of this support, the Arab and Muslim countries did not prevent their citizens from participating in the war in Afghanistan. That was the period when Osama bin Laden moved from Saudi Arabia and Ayman al-Zawahiri from Egypt to Afghanistan.

Currently, direct recruitment continues to be the most effective practice in prisons, universities and mosques, not only in Arab/Muslim countries, but also European countries.

Previously, the radical imams spread their ideas within the big mosques, such as Masjid al-Quds in Hamburg, the Islamic Culture Centre in Milan, or the Edinburgh Park Mosque in London. However, after the terrorist attacks in Europe, those mosques, if not closed,¹⁵ are closely watched by the police, or have carried out zero tolerance policies against extremist preachers. Therefore, most of the radical imams have adapted themselves to the situation by keeping a low profile and transmitting their messages in smaller mosques or prayer halls called *zawiya* (corner), which are usually more difficult to supervise.

¹⁴ Leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1966, he was convicted of plotting the assassination of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and was executed by hanging. He has been described by followers as a great thinker and martyr for Islam. While many observers see him as a key originator of Islamist ideology, others believe Qutb is an inspiration for violent groups such as al-Qaeda.

¹⁵ The Masjid al-Quds mosque was closed in 2010, following suspicion that it continued to recruit Jihadists.

These radical preachers may also communicate with their followers outside the mosques, during religious lessons taught inside homes, during which different issues are discussed, including the fiqh, the creed, *fiqh Mo'malat* transactions,¹⁶ the Hadith and the Quran. The preachers might encourage the audience to fulfil the obligation of Jihad and Hijrah. It is difficult to trace these activities or stop them, due to the nature of these gatherings, held mostly among friends, colleagues and relatives in private houses.



Islam Yaken's tweet and his photo with his friend al-Ghandour

Relatives who have emigrated to perform the Jihad in Syria also play a role in recruitment processes. For instance, Islam Yken surprised many observers among Egyptian media and public opinion when he declared that he had joined Daesh in Syria. Shortly after him, one of his closest friends, Mahmoud al-Ghandour, also joined Daesh, probably persuaded by Yaken. As the media were trying to reach al-Ghandour to discover the reasons behind the unexpected radicalisation of his friend, Islam Yaken signalled on Twitter: "I'd like to send a message to all the journalists and others who were trying to reach my closest friend in Egypt, Mahmoud al-Ghandour, that he is with me now," while publishing a photo of them together in Syria as evidence.

Indirect recruitment

Indirect recruitment is performed by radical groups through the dissemination of propaganda in the public domain, inciting individuals to start searching for means to reach these groups and join them.

The messages usually start with the presentation of the radical group. Then more detailed information follows, such as the nature of its work, indications of how to join the group, the branding of its military achievements and some examples of rewards that could be obtained for being a member of the group. Sometimes additional information is included, such as specific details concerning the recruitment of women or of certain professions.

¹⁶ Branch of fiqh, which discusses issues such as the relation between people, the relation between the ruler and ruled, and Hudud, etc.

These messages are either spread via the traditional media channels (radio, TV, press) or via internet (YouTube, social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, electronic magazines, etc.).

The Messages of the Radical Groups

As previously mentioned, media and internet are considered the most important means through which the radical groups spread their messages and convince individuals to join them. These messages could be classified into more general ones, containing information about the group and its goals and more specific ones, enumerating the main motivations behind the group's actions.

Presentation

Jabhat al-Nusra presented itself for the first time in a video declaration by its leader al-Julani, published by *al-Manara al-Bayda* on 23 January 2012. The 16-minute video starts with an image of al-Aqsa Mosque. In the video, al-Julani explains that the main goal of al-Nusra, originally from Iraq, is to help the people of Syria win the war against the oppression of al-Assad's army. This objective is reflected in Jabhat al-Nusra's frequent reference to the "liberated land", meaning that it would fall under its control after expelling the Syrian Army. Jabhat al-Nusra insists on presenting itself as a branch of the Central al-Qaeda, as in the video al-Julani declares that he takes orders directly from al-Zawahiri.¹⁷ The group accepts the participation of Muslim fighters from different countries, but its major focus is local, i.e. confronting al-Assad's army and bringing victory to the Syrian Sunni. Its rule is based on the Sharia but the group does not seek to establish a state.

Since the transformation in 2006 by al-Zarqawi of al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq into the Islamic State in Iraq, the organisation has adopted different tactics, in comparison to its mother organisation. The exchange of messages between al-Zarqawi and the deputy leader of the Central al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2004-2005 shows the difference between them when it comes to identifying the enemies. While al-Zarqawi emphasises the importance of fighting the Shiites in Iraq, al-Zawahiri stresses the necessity to fight the American occupation forces. In addition, he rejects the use of extreme violence.¹⁸ Consequently, most Daesh propaganda focuses on the near enemy, especially targeting Shia Muslims, Iran, the Iraqi government, Assad, the Yemeni regime and Saudi Arabia (El-Badawy, Comerford, M. & Welby. P., 2015).

Al-Zarqawi's principles have become clearer after the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, which was later simply called the Islamic State (i.e. without a reference

17 moester101. (2015, June 12). Without Borders Interview with Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYY6pRqRmyI>

18 The message from Al-Zarkawi to Bin Laden in 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-336756.html>; Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi. (2005, July 9). *Global Security*. Retrieved from http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm

to the territory). The lack of reference to a specific territory has to be read as the ambition to expand to other regions, which also comes across clearly in the slogan “staying and expanding”. In one of the messages of Daesh, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, a Daesh spokesperson, addresses al-Zawahiri by saying: “You are an organisation and we are a state, you should pledge allegiance to us and not the other way round” (Khatib, 2015).

The self-identification of Daesh as “the Islamic State” means that they consider themselves as the one and only Khilafah and not just one of the Islamic States. Consequently, all Jihadist groups and movements should join it. Daesh declares that every Muslim, whatever his/her nationality, has to pledge allegiance to it, which is manifested in al-Adnani’s words: “Now we broke the idol, the idol of nationality.”

Helping the Vulnerable and Fighting the Oppressors

Similarly to what happened during the war in Afghanistan, when individuals travelled there to help the Afghani people suffering from the oppression of Soviet troops, many Muslims were seeking to fight side-by-side with the Iraqi people against American troops following the American invasion of Iraq. In the TV programme entitled *al-Ubur ila-l-majhool* (Crossing into the Unknown, Part 1), produced by Al Jazeera in 2006, the interviewer Yosry Fuda met Syrian fighters, who had just returned from Iraq. Among the main reasons for their trip to Iraq they cited messages they heard about injustice and abuses committed under the American occupation and the new Iraqi government towards the Sunnis.¹⁹

Following the Syrian protests in 2011, similar messages about violence committed by the Assad regime were conveyed in a number of media. Photos and videos illustrating the abuses were disseminated by the Syrian Sunni militants, mainly through the internet, and then by regional and international press and TV channels. Messages showing the repressed people and violent regime continue to be the most commonly used by Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra to attract new fighters.

Rejecting the Borders

Most of the Islamist movements, whether intellectual parties, military or terrorist groups, denounce the borders defined by the Sykes-Picot Agreement, advocating the idea of being unified by religion and not by nationality.

However, in comparison to Daesh, which strongly rejects the idea of borders, Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda prefer not to demonstrate too explicitly their hostile stance

19 Al Jazeera Arabic . الأول الجزء - المجهول إلى الع بور - ل لغاية سري . (2008, August 28). الجزيرة قناة [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmN63NRVRdM>

towards the existence of national borders, in an attempt to keep gaining popularity. Al-Zawahiri's message to al-Zarqawi from 2005 shows that al-Qaeda's tactic respects the feeling and beliefs of the majority of Muslims who believe in the principle of nationalism, claiming that Muslim nations or people still need time and doctrinal help in order to be able to recognise the right path, which is destroying borders and creating Khilafah.²⁰ According to the statistics, rejection of nationalism is mentioned only in 11% of Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda's propaganda, and in 78% of the propaganda broadcast by Daesh (El-Badawy, Comerford, M. & Welby, P., 2015).

Most of Daesh's messages on social media, YouTube and in the Dabiq magazine encourage Muslims to participate in the removal of borders and to abolish the heritage of European colonialism through migrating to the land of the Khilafah, as "Syria is not just for Syrians, and Iraq is not just for Iraqis" (Baghdadi: Syria, 2014).

An example of such messages is illustrated in the fifth part of the documentary film *The Islamic State*.²¹ The video shows Daesh fighters removing the borders between Iraq and Syria and the other ones praying, chanting *Allah Akbar and La-ilaha ill-Allah*, and praising removal of the borders and being able to move without regulations or procedures.

Another video *Salil al-Swarem-4*²² shows a group of Daesh fighters from the Gulf region. A fighter from Bahrain is sending a message to his government replying to its threat of withdrawing the citizenship of those who migrate to join Daesh. "Didn't you realize that, since we came to the Khilafah, we stepped on your nationality with our shoes, and that we learnt here to reject the Sykes-Picot borders, and that if we want to move, we will not use your passports, but we will expand." After that, the fighters cut their passports into pieces and burn them, while praising Allah.²³

Performing the *Fardh* (Duty) of Jihad and Hijrah

Radical Islamist groups build their legitimacy on the principle that Jihad is a *fardh ain*,²⁴ an individual duty for each Muslim. In addition, they emphasise that Hijrah – emigration to the land of the Khilafah – is not just a phase in the life of the Prophet Mohamed but a standing obligation for all.

20 Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi. (2005, July 9). *Global Security*. Retrieved from http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm

21 *The Islamic State* (Part 5). (2014, August 13). *Vice News*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/video/the-islamic-state-part-5>

22 Produced in December 2015.

23 Pieter vanostaeyen. *Salil as-Sawarim* (The Clanking of the Swords) Part IV. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/al-furqan-media-salil-as-sawarim-part-iv/>

24 Individual duty or *fardh Ain* (عين فرض) relates to tasks every Muslim is required to perform, such as daily prayer (*salat*). Sufficiency duty or *fardh kifaya* (كفائية فرض) is a duty imposed on the whole community of believers (*ummah*). If some Muslims do so it is not obligatory for all Muslims.

The Hijrah call reflects the division between the *Dar al-Kufr*, the home of the infidels, and the *Dar al-Islam*, the home of the faith.²⁵ While the Khilafah, with its territory extending between Iraq and Syria, is considered *Dar al-Islam*, the rest of the Arab and European countries fighting the Khilafah are considered *Dar al-Kufr*. Therefore the Jihad and Hijrah to Khilafa is an obligation. This message is especially powerful among Muslims wanting to meet their religious obligations and fearing to be considered sinners.

The Al-Hayah channel, which belongs to Daesh, produced a high quality movie entitled *There is No Life without Jihad*,²⁶ promoting Hijrah and Jihad in a very emotional way. In very good English, one of the foreign fighters says: “The cure of depression is Jihad (*fi sabil-allah*). Our brothers coming to Jihad feel the happiness that we feel.” The movie links Jihad with psychological peace, showing heavenly and relaxing scenes, smiling fighters, with a clear fraternity feeling between them. The movie creates imagery similar to that of *al-Sahaba*, the companions of the Prophet.

In the video produced by the al-E'tisam channel, a Canadian fighter, Abu Anwar al-Canadi, addresses the Canadian people, saying “I was one of you skating on ice and playing the guitar. Ask yourselves why I joined Daesh. It is because I fight to establish the Sharia of Allah on Earth, as legislation is the right of the creator.” Then he induces the Muslims in Canada and the United States either to emigrate to the land of the Khilafah or to do the Jihad against the *Dar al-Kufr*, saying “pack your things or prepare your bomb.”²⁷

In addition to the message of calling for the Hijrah and participating in the Jihad, there is also another message in the same context: joining the Mujahedeen is considered as joining the victorious party in the prophecy of “the battle of Dabiq”,²⁸ whose early phases, according to the interpretation of some groups, have just started.

In the programme *al-Ubur ila-l-majhool* from 2006, Syrian Jihadists returning from Afghanistan and Iraq say that they were waiting for the start of their Jihad in Syria. In the same programme, a sheikh says that they were waiting to move to Syria and to defeat

25 The Arabic word “dar: دار”, means “land” or “country”. The notions of “divisions” of the world of Islam into *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Kufr* does not appear in the Quran or the Hadith. However, early Islamic jurists devised these terms to denote legal rulings for ongoing Muslim conquests almost a century after the Prophet Muhammad. Ibn Taymyah was an important jurist; many experts believe that his fatwas are the main source of Islamic terrorists in the world. Especially his famous Mardin fatwa, which included more and new details about *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Kufr* and the Hijrah and Jihad, while many of the terrorist groups now depend on the Mardin fatwa. But in fact this fatwa was written in a very critical time in the 13th century during the struggle against the Tatars.

26 Aaron Y. Zelin. (2014, June 19). *There Is No Life Without Jihad*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://jihadology.net/2014/06/19/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-there-is-no-life-without-jihad/>

27 الأصدلية الجودة الكندي أنور أبو 5 مجاهد رسالة تقدم الإء تصام مؤسسة المصري محمد [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/etesam.resalt.mojahd.5.original.quality>

28 Dabiq is a town in northern Syria. In some interpretations, it is believed that Dabiq is one of two possible locations for an epic battle between invading Christians and the defending Muslims which will result in a Muslim victory and mark the beginning of the end of the world.



A tweet by one of the Daesh fighters saying "The call to Hijrah led to Jihad led to martyrdom led to Jannah (paradise)."

the enemy in the battle of *Marj Dabiq*,²⁹ which explains the name of the Daesh magazine Dabiq. On the reverse side of the cover of all issues of the magazine, there is a quote from al-Zarqawi: "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq."

Seduction Messages

In addition to the previously mentioned types of messages, referring to the ideology, messages based on physical or material benefits are also present in the terrorist groups' media.

An example of such a message is the third part of the documentary movie *The Islamic State: Enforcing Sharia in Raqqa*. The video shows scenes of

normal life, with men walking on the streets, in the company of their wives, merchants managing their shops, and the Hisbah, the religious police ensuring implementation of Sharia law, kindly advising people and monitoring that the vendors stick to the prices set. For many citizens of the Arab countries, suffering from corruption and inflation, this kind of image could be very seductive and encourage them to join Daesh.

Another example of seductive messages is an interview with the Emir of Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Mohamed al-Julani, conducted by Al Jazeera in 2015.³⁰ At the beginning and end of the interview, vivid scenes from the streets and the battles are shown. The interview promotes a positive image of the group, with the interviewer calling Jabhat al-Nusra fighters Syrian Revolutionaries, naming the land under al-Nusra's control the "liberated territories", and denouncing accusations of terrorism against Jabhat al-Nusra. The interview shows Jabhat al-Nusra as an organisation rejecting the idea of killing captives, under the control of which people live in security and stability.

The Movement (Nafir) to the Land of Combat

Once the messages disseminated by the radical groups have managed to convince the recipients to join the terrorist groups, the movement to Khilafah begins.

29 Al Jazeera Arabic. *الجزيرة قناة*. (2008, August 28). *الأول الجزء - المجهول إلى العيون - لا لغاية سري*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmN63NRVRdM>

30 moester101. (2015, June 12). *Without Borders Interview with Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYY6pRqRmyl>

At the beginning of the war in Syria, joining terrorist groups was much easier than it is now. The usual route to enter Syria was through Turkey. In addition, the countries of origin did not restrict the movement of the youth to Turkey, despite the fact that it was relatively well-known that Turkey is a transit country to Syria. Turkey's role, as an open gate for foreign fighters' movement, cannot be ignored. Although the role of the countries of origin and their intelligence bodies in easing the process of movement remain clandestine, its features can be traced but are hard to confirm.

Besides, a profitable human trafficking trade across borders emerged on the margins of the wars in the Middle East. A network of people have been involved in this trade, following a variety of occupations, including desert guides or drivers, those hiding the crossers in their homes, or coordinating the details of the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The recruitment of individuals by armed groups in Syria, either fighters or residents (in the case of Daesh), poses a huge security threat. On the one hand, it leads to further deterioration of the situation in Syria and Iraq. On the other, it is threatening the security of the international community by producing new terrorist elements. The security and stability of the countries of origin of foreign Jihadists may also be threatened by their potential return.

Different tools are employed to reach these different targets, and different messages disseminated to attract them. Consequently, counter-recruitment strategies should include different tactics based on a deep understanding and analysis of their messages, and on the recognition of the mistakes which led to this phenomenon.

- a. Recognising and correcting the errors committed by the Arab and Western countries allowing the transit of foreign fighters

The role of certain countries is evident in facilitating the transit of Jihadists to battlefields, either by permitting them to travel formally or by turning a blind eye to their movements. The countries of origin may differ in defining the armed groups as terrorist or resistance movements according to their interests. However, due to the current situation in the Middle East, supporting the local (resistance/terrorist) movements by allowing civilian citizens to join the war abroad will most probably generate terrorists who will remain beyond the control of any state. This will represent a threat to the national security of those countries in the very short term.

b. Confronting the reasons behind the adherence of ex-officials of the old regimes to Jihadist groups

The dissolution of armies or state institutions under the pretext of reform or democratisation is a risky path. It suddenly leaves a large number of outraged qualified cadres outside the state's control as in Iraq after the American invasion. As a result, these military, political and intelligence cadres joined al-Qaeda in Iraq, and drew the group away from the direction imposed by the Central al-Qaeda to become more brutal and violent.

Libya is facing the same consequence: many military officials who served under the Gaddafi regime joined Daesh, especially in Site, the hometown of the former Libyan leader. In order to avoid the repetition of this scenario in the future, the reasons behind the adherence of these former officials to Jihadist groups must be confronted and conclusions drawn.

c. Countering the recruitment propaganda

To counter the ideological propaganda and refute the radical religious discourse, the discussions among the youth on the social media or their commentaries on videos should be followed and analysed. It seems that there is an ideological disorientation, resulting from the flood of propaganda on the internet. Accordingly, every different type of message issued by the Jihadist groups should be addressed by a different tailor-made counter-propaganda.

We should not continue to label the terrorist groups as “non-Muslims” and their acts as “un-Islamic”. Instead, we should send specific, doctrinally correct and convincing messages to refute claims such as that Hijrah (migration) is obligatory nowadays, to denounce the murders of adherents of other faiths, or the illegitimate establishment of the Caliphate, instead of mocking it in general.

d. Developing the counter-propaganda capacity of the mass media

The counter-propaganda message should be broadcast by powerful modern mass media with the capacity to reach out to the youth. Thus, it would be beneficial to produce movies; maybe documentaries about the stories of those who escaped from these groups, who could tell what life under Daesh is really like. It would also be very beneficial to produce a short multilingual movie about life inside these areas, especially in the territory under Daesh's control, which can be revealing, but the film must be of a very high technical quality.

On the other hand, these radical organisations have very active “on-line groups”. It is hard to find a video about these organisations on YouTube without finding tens of comments in their favour (in Arabic), and if someone replies calling them terrorists he will be flooded with negative comments. Despite the support gained by these groups among the Arab youth, they cannot be considered as popular, despite the work of their on-line support committees to make them appear so. Therefore, they can be confronted online by counter-propaganda groups.

e. Developing the tools of security confrontation

Joining a terrorist group without moving to Syria is considered even more dangerous because the individual becomes a potential local terrorist at the moment when he/she is recruited and by staying in his/her own country. Thus, he can be assigned or can volunteer to carry out a terrorist attack. Therefore, it is not enough to monitor the movement of transit to Syria but the early stages of recruitment should be monitored as well.

That is why radical imams or influential leaders, as well as the recruitment in the prisons, should be supervised as a preventive measure to avoid subsequent security threats.

However, these measures require experience and comprehension. The security tool should not be misused either, to avoid turning it into a tool of suppression or restriction of freedoms. In that case, instead of being a tool to confront terrorism, it will turn out to be a very important reason for the radicalisation of the youth and will encourage them to join terrorist groups.

Bibliography

BAGHDADI: SYRIA NOT FOR SYRIANS AND IRAQ NOT FOR IRAQIS:

للعراقيين ليس والعراق للسوريين ليست سوريا": البغدادي

(2014, July 1). *BBC Arabic*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/07/140701_isis_leader_call

EL-BADAWY, E., COMERFORD, M. & WELBY, P. (2015, October). *Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding Ideology and Propaganda*. London: Centre on Religion & Geopolitics. Retrieved from <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Inside%20the%20Jihadi%20Mind.pdf>

FOUDA, Y. (2015). In Harm's Way: From Al Qaeda Safe Houses to ISIS Incubators: "داعش حواضن الى القاعدة معاقل من الأذى، طريق في". Cairo: Dar el Shourok.

GLOBAL RECRUITMENT. (2014, 8 September). *RCSS*. Retrieved from <http://www.rcssmiddleeast.org/Article/2564#.VwJsQqiPncQ>

ISLAMIC STATE 'HAS 50,000 FIGHTERS IN SYRIA' (2014, August 19). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved August 19, 2014, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/islamic-state-50000-fighters-syria-2014819184258421392.html>.

KHATIB, L. (2015, JUNE 29). *The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding*. Carnegie Middle East Center. Retrieved from <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/06/29/islamic-state-s-strategy-lasting-and-expanding/ib5x>

LISTER, CH. (2014). *Profiling the Islamic State*. Brookings Doha Center. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling-islamic-state-lister/en_web_lister.pdf?la=en

SOMMERFELT, T., & TAYLOR, M. (2015, February 16). *The Big Dilemma of Small Soldiers: Recruiting Children to the War in Syria*. Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. Retrieved from http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/f2c1eef2efb2c782b9a9dab621ceaf75.pdf

SPENCER, R. (2014, September 12). CIA: Islamic State Has 2 to 3 Times More Jihadis Than Previous Estimate. *Jihad Watch*. Retrieved from <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2014/09/cia-islamic-state-has-2-to-3-times-more-jihadis-than-previous-estimate>

SYRIA CONFLICT: NUMBER OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS 'DOUBLED IN 16 MONTHS'. (2015, December 8). *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35043939>

The Female Face of Jihadism

*Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck**

*Researcher, Carnegie Middle East Center

Since June 2013, many cases have emerged about women joining extremist groups such as the Islamic State organisation (IS)¹ or Jabhat Al Nusra. Both groups opened female brigades called, respectively, *Al Khansa* active in Raqqa, Syria (Al Bawaba, 2014), and *Oumana Aicha* and *Banat al Walid*, active in Homs and Aleppo (Al Najjar, 2013). In addition, several hundred Western women from Austria, Britain, France, Germany and even New Zealand have joined IS. It is difficult to give the exact number; however, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) reported around 550 cases (Saltman & Smith, 2015).

News of these Western women and their Arab counterparts made headlines, as if violence by women was new and unprecedented. The shocked public reaction lies in society's perception of women as innocent victims. The word "executioner", for example, is generally never associated with females. Violence by women is not a new phenomenon as they have been active in logistical missions as well as in combat roles and suicide bombing attacks in numerous conflicts. Women were active during the conflict in Southern Lebanon against the eighteen year Israeli occupation, in Palestinian territories as well as in Iraq with Al Qaida. Chechen women, called the "black widows", have carried out several attacks against Russian government forces; the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) also used women to attack the central Turkish government. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka also used females for attacks. More recently, Boko Haram in Nigeria used females to commit attacks against civilians and the central government forces (NY Daily News, 2015).

As more and more cases emerge of Western and Arab women joining the ranks of IS and actively taking part in their security apparatus, more attention ought to be given to the increasingly significant role of women in Jihadist movements in general and in IS in particular. Policy makers often do not pay enough attention to the politicised role these women hold, often using the expression "female migrants" to refer to them on the grounds that they are not on the battlefield; hence do not constitute a real threat. The recent flow of female recruits to IS and the use of female suicide bombers in recent attacks in Paris make the study of this phenomenon crucial, especially since there are genuine misunderstandings concerning their role and its potential to evolve. The better our understanding of this phenomenon, the better our response will be to violent extremism and our capacity to shape viable preventative measures.

Why do Women Join a Jihadist Group?

The drivers that entice both men and women into Jihadism are multi-dimensional and entangled. Indeed, they can be political, social, economic, psychological or philosophical. Women do not join IS only to become "Jihadi brides", as claimed by several media outlets

1 Although the shortened acronym "IS" is used throughout the paper to refer to the Islamic State organisation, the author wishes to emphasise the significance of its label as an "organisation" rather than relying on its self-styled nature, which is neither "Islamic" nor a "state".

and analysts. In addition, they are not passive agents and victims of males who convinced them to take up a violent career. Women are political and rational actors who have different and complex reasons to join an extremist group such as the IS organisation.

This study examines some of the main motives for women to join extremist terrorist organisations. In doing so, it rejects the assumptions about these women that focus simply on their level of education, or mental health status. As seen from the massive movement of women into Syria and Iraq to join IS, these factors do not apply to them in the least. In fact, studies show that the prevalence of mental illness among incarcerated terrorists is lower than in the general population. Despite the horrible acts that IS followers commit, it is rare for a terrorist to match the profile of a psychopath. In addition, their level of education is not necessarily lower than that of their peers. One thing is certain, any “normal” individual (if normality exists!), under certain conditions, with the exposure to certain triggers, can become radicalised and act upon it. It is complicated to draw a profile of at-risk individuals as every life story is unique and the motives can vary greatly from one person to another.

Western and Arab women share common drivers; however, Arab women are subject to additional drivers when considering the local context.

Religious Motivations

In their very powerful and highly sophisticated propaganda, IS does not overlook women. On the contrary, women, “the sisters”, are told that they have a religious duty to make Hijra and participate in the state-building activities. Umm Sumayyah Al Muhajirah explains in the eighth issue of *Dabiq*, the official magazine of IS: “This ruling is an obligation upon women just as it is upon men, for Allah (ta’ālā), when excluding those incapable of making Hijrah, He excluded the incapable women just as He excluded the incapable men,” adding, “If speaking about the muhājirīn is amazing, then speaking about their twin halves the muhājirāt is even more amazing! How many stories have I heard which I would not have believed if not for hearing them directly from the mouths of those sisters involved or seeing these sisters with my own eyes; otherwise, I would have thought them the product of imagination or something impossible!” (Dabiq issue 8, 2015a).

Embrace Islam and Live under Sharia Law

A large number of both Western and local women express their desire to “glorify the word of God on Earth” or to demonstrate their love for God and the desire to raise the banner of Islam. However, for Westerners in particular, feelings of exclusion and an inability to practise

their religion freely in the secular Western societies seem to be the most cited reasons. These women perceive IS-held territories, especially *Al Sham* [Syria] where IS controls several cities and has its capital in the city of Raqqa, as places where they will feel no social and cultural exclusion and where they can practise and embrace Islam fully and share its values with the whole of society. Umm Haritha, a 20-year-old Canadian student who joined IS in Syria in December 2014, describes the difficulties she encountered in Canada when she decided to put on a veil: "I would get mocked in public, people shoved me and told me to go back to my country and spoke to me like I was mentally ill or didn't understand English." She continues: "Life was degrading and an embarrassment and nothing like the multicultural freedom of expression and religion they make it out to be, and when I heard that the Islamic State had Sharia in some cities in Syria, it became an automatic obligation upon me since I was able to come here" (Roberts, 2014).

Many women in IS explain that their decision to leave their countries was motivated by the desire to live in a community where they can practise their religion without any constraint and play a key role in the establishment of the Caliphate, a place where everyone else shares and honours their values. Umm Khattab explains in a tweet: "[...] we were not stupid young brainwashed females weve come here to syria for ALLAH alone [...] I might be only 18 but I know coming to shaam the best decision staying in the UK completely diminishes your islam" [sic] (Umm Khattab). Another female who goes by the name of Al Jazraweeya explains: "Best thing ive done in my 18 years in this world is come to the blessed land of shaam and leave Britain the land of kuffar" [sic] (Al Jazraweeya).

IS is perceived by these women as a fair state ruled by the divine law of Sharia, a notion that many women express specifically and seek to fulfil, believing that their *deen* [religion] is not complete until they make *Hijrah* [migration] to the land where Islamic Sharia is implemented. They use this religious and spiritual notion to actively recruit other women who share this inclination to make *Hijrah*, believing that they are helping other women to fulfil their religious obligation, and also believing that they will receive the reward for their efforts to spread the word of Allah. The recruitment efforts are reinforced by making direct comparisons to the unjust and anti-Islamic nature of laws in Western countries. Umm Haritha, for example, said that her decision to join Islamic State in Syria was motivated by a desire to "live a life of honour" under Islamic law rather than the laws of the "kuffar," or unbelievers in a Western society (Roberts, 2014). Another woman, Aqsa Mahmood, called Umm Layth, a 20-year-old Scottish university student who joined IS in Syria in November 2013 and became an active recruiter, explained to the "sisters" via twitter that by performing the *Hijra* they will "gain true honour by living under the law of Shariah" (Dettmer, 2014).

The women praise at length the fairness and advantages of life under Sharia law where, for instance, polygamy is not forbidden: “Being in a place where my 22-year-old brother casually has three wives and not having to worry is beautiful.” Another advantage of living under Sharia law, Umm Obaida explains, is that it provides a place where civil and religious crimes are fairly punished despite their ultraviolent nature: “Drove passed the body of the man who was crucified in manbij for raping a 70 year old. Perks of living under the shade of Shariah.” Another IS female declared: “Alhumdulillah there were 4 hand cuttings in Mimbej yesterday. And one was a man who was nearly a part of Doula (he was doing a Shareeah course).” Umm Anwar, wrote: “We worship Allah and we do what is best for our deen [religion] even if that means beheading a kaffir. Fear Allah and strike fear in the kuffar’s heart” (Hall, 2014).

The Desire to Live in a Perfect Community

Women who join IS are attracted by the idea of the “pure” society that IS depicts through its powerful media communication strategy. Joining IS is a way of acting out against their respective societies that they deem imperfect and impious.

Fraternity and Sisterhood

Both men and women in IS are attracted to the image of a state where Sharia rules and where there is social justice, a distribution of *zakat* [almsgiving], and there is no corruption, inequality, racism or discrimination. As described in *Dabiq*, it is a state where “[...] the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. [...] Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another” (Dabiq issue 1, 2014a). Shams, a 26-year-old Malaysian doctor who joined IS-held territories, for instance, continuously praises this fraternity and sisterhood: “the number of mix-marriages and mix-race children are so high. It’s beautiful to witness brotherhood with no racism,” she tweeted.

The IS organisation and its members use the words *ukht* [sister] and *akh* [brother] when describing or referring to the supporters and followers of the IS. The use of these terms reflects an understanding of Islam as an *umma* [community] of believers, signifying that each Muslim shares a “brotherly” or “sisterly” relation with all other Muslims, a substitute family that transcends blood. Using this notion, IS is able to categorise social relations and create a societal structure that resembles that of a family. Once inside IS-held territories, the greater the integration of both men and women within the group, the greater their dissociation becomes from other relationships. The “sisters and brothers of the Islamic State” replace

biological family ties and the new relationships become an emotional sustainer. Aqsa Mahmood explains in a Facebook post: “All of us disassociated ourselves from our families, friends and societies” (Hall, 2014). The “sisters” provide physical, emotional and social support to one another that leads to a shared communal sentiment among the women who constitute a community of IS wives, mothers and widows. Mahmood explains: “Once you arrive in the land of Jihad [it] is your family. [...] Rejecting your family is a religious duty if they makes allies with the kuffar and reject Jihad. [...] Blood ties are nothing compared to living a truly Islamic life” (Petrou, 2015).

This fake familiarity and fictitious sisterhood encourages women to take actions, make the Hijra and sacrifice in the name of the cause. An IS woman explains in front of a camera: “These are your brothers and sisters as well and they need our help, so instead of sitting down and focusing on your families or focusing on your studies you need to stop being selfish because the time is ticking” (White Pebble, 2014).

Having the group of sisters helps the women endure the difficulties of life in a war zone and its hazards such as becoming a widow. After losing her husband, Zehra, a 21-year-old woman from Melbourne, Australia, who announced her arrival in Syria in December 2014, explains on her Ask.fm page that she is not lonely because “alhamdulillah I have my sisters whom I love for the sake of Allah always at my house” (Bloom & Winter, 2015).



Sisterhood in the Caliphate

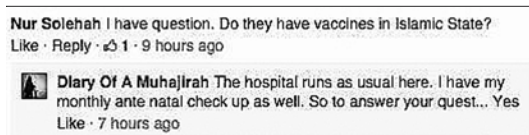


Female Comradery in the Caliphate:
'Sisters' posing with guns and the IS flag

Even those remote women (who are not living under IS-held territories) can connect to the group of sisters through social media and feel supported. The women also play the role of virtual guides for those who want to make the Hijra. They answer all kind of questions through ask.fm and disseminate step-by-step information and a “how-to” manual. For instance, Zehra answered an anonymous sender that she would be “more then [sic] happy to” help her marry a Jihadist husband in Syria and that she can advise on a private communication platform (Saltman & Smith, 2015).

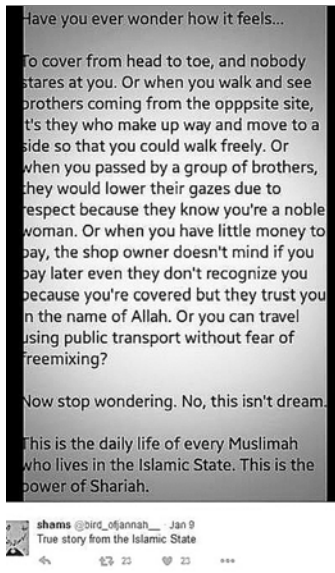
Governance and Social Welfare

One of the elements that can explain this attraction for the perfect community is that IS markets itself as a state and not an organisation. Not only do they have their own flag, anthem, identification documents and currency, but a territory under their administration. The narrative is that IS is a state that can, like any other state, provide its “citizens” with infrastructure, social welfare and even professional opportunities. Women are attracted by this idyllic image and play an important role in maintaining and disseminating a good image of life under IS. They are active marketers of IS’s branding campaign. For instance, Shams, a 26- year-old Malaysian doctor who joined IS-held territories, serves as doctor and blogger as she operates the blog “Diary of a Muhajirah”, would answer several questions about life and medical treatment (Shams):



Example of IS governance: Islamic Blogger Shams detailing life in Raqqa through her blog

IS-held territories are perceived and publicised as a state where you neither pay taxes (if you are a Muslim) nor electricity and water bills. Houses are given for free, a monthly allowance for every couple and each of their children, free medication and education.



The Caliphate as a safe haven for Muslim women

Umm Haritha, who posts photos of Raqqa regularly, explains that there are traffic police, courthouses, orphanages, and that Raqqa is “the most organized city” she has ever seen (Roberts, 2014). IS-held territories are constantly presented as safe and trustful environments where, for instance, you can leave your shop open and go to pray. A place where women are respected and do not feel in danger (Shams).

There are hundreds of pictures demonstrating the abundance of products in IS-held territories or representing daily life in a very positive way. The narrative is that despite the war, IS is the land of prosperity and wealth. Umm Haritha explains for instance that there are even “Islamic clothing stores” and that “it looked so beautiful the sisters and I joked around and called it the New York City of Syria” (Roberts, 2014).

This glamorisation of Islamic State territories helps to brand its image, especially among Westerners who might be hesitant to leave their comfortable life in the West and suffer from shortages. This is also very appealing for other Arabs who have difficult lives in other parts of Syria and Iraq or who are abroad.



Normal life resumes in the Caliphate: Despite being in a war torn country, IS advertises abundance in Raqqa



Signs of a fruitful life in the Caliphate

Numerous images of the beauty of nature are also present. This is a way to show that despite the war and its ugliness, IS-held territories remain bucolic and beautiful. Life goes on in the perfect community.



A beautiful life in the Caliphate



A prosperous life in the Caliphate

Psychological and Philosophical Motivations

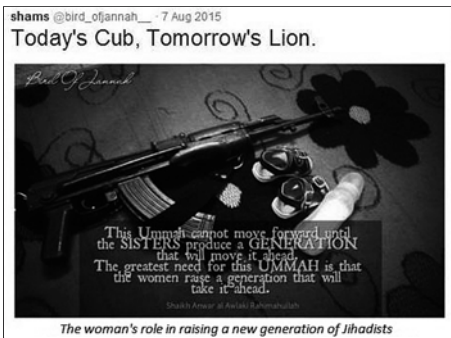
Self-Seeking

Self-seeking, or the search for an identity, is one of the motives that can explain why women join the Islamic State organisation. Usually, their desired status within their Western or local societies was hindered or could not be achieved. Joining IS – a feared and prized Jihadist group – became the means by which they intend to acquire “status” and transformed what they perceived as “purposeless” or “corrupted” in an “impious

society” to a life of devotion for Allah and the establishment of His Caliphate. The IS organisation gives the women a good image of themselves and a “positive” identity with a meaningful role to play in society. In that regard, the kunya (a new name that is adopted with the use of “Umm” for female and “Abu” for male) is very enlightening. The kunya is a symbolic rebirth: the woman leaves her birth name for a new name; it is a disavowal of one’s old self and of a previous life considered “impious”. The women reject who they used to be as Aqsa, Hayat and Sally to become Umm Layth, Umm Basir Al-Muhajirah and Umm Hussain al-Britani. They have a new name, a new identity and new family: they are born again.

The organisation becomes a sort of surrogate family that gives them an emotional comfort, a sense of security and a purpose in life. Indeed, IS propaganda makes them believe that their roles will be essential to state-building activities. IS propaganda encourages them to contribute in different roles as recruiters and facilitators, but especially as wives and mothers. They are first called to be supportive of the “mujahidin brothers”. For instance, Hayat Boumedienne, called Umm Basir Al-Muhajirah (the French widow of Amedy Coulibaly who was responsible for the 7th January 2015 attacks on the Jewish supermarket in France), stated in an interview with *Dabiq*: “My sisters, be bases of support and safety for your husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. Be advisors to them. They should find comfort and peace with you. Do not make things difficult for them. Facilitate all matters for them. Be strong and brave. It is essential that you make all your deeds sincerely for Allah’s face and hope for His reward” (*Dabiq* issue 7, 2014b).

Women are also told that they are the mothers of “today’s cub, tomorrow’s lion” (Shams). Their role as mothers is crucial, as they will raise and educate the next generation of IS fighters in the Salafist-Jihadist ideology and culture of martyrdom and help in its



The woman’s role in raising a new generation of fighters: IS propaganda targeting women’s role in developing the “cubs” of today into the “lions” of tomorrow.



The crucial role of women in the Caliphate: raising Muslim children

legitimation and transmission. As explained in a tweet by Mahmood, who was threatening Cameron and Obama: “[...] But worry not, somewhere along the line your blood will be spilled by our cubs in Dawlah,” explains Umm Layth (Rahman, 2014).

Mothers are called to praise martyrdom and push their children towards it. In the eighth issue of *Dabiq*, Umm Sumayyah Al Muhajirah recalls several “sisters” who supported their sons in their martyrdom and she takes them as an example to follow and imitate:

I saw sisters on a night enflamed by battle send their fifteen year old sons outside the home saying, ‘Allah is the greatest! Go to Jannah whose width is that of the Heavens and the Earth!’ O Lord, it is their sons! Their own flesh and blood! But they are not more valuable than the religion nor this Ummah! Yes, they are muhājirāt who came to the Islamic State! I say it without pride.
(*Dabiq* issue 8, 2015a).

To convince them, IS creates an emotional connection with the glorious past of the Caliphate:

They [the sisters] understood that Hārithah is in Firdaws in accordance with the testimony of mankind’s leader – may my father and mother be sacrificed for him. For, “Hārithah was injured on the day of Badr while he was a young lad, so his mother came to the Prophet (sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) and said, ‘O Rasūlullāh, you know Hārithah’s place in my heart. If he is in Jannah, I will be patient and await reward, but if it is the other... what do you advise I do?’ So he (sallall hu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, ‘Woe unto you, have you lost your mind? Is it just one Jannah? There are many levels in Jannah and he is in al-Firdaws’” [Sahīh al-Bukhārī] (*Dabiq* issue 8, 2015a).

The Suffering of the Ummah as an Emotional Push

Since its inception in June 2014, IS has been calling for “[...] the Ummah of Muhammad to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonour, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace [...] The sun of jihad has risen” (*Dabiq* issue 1, 2014a). IS Salafist-Jihadist ideology is based on a binary polarisation and this is neither new nor specific to IS. IS offers its followers simple answers to complex problems by proposing a Manichean view that helps its supporters make sense of their complicated world: “O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present. The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr [disbelief] and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and

the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, the allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews”. (Dabiq issue 1, 2014a).



The 'Us' vs 'Them'



The binary polarization 'Us' vs 'Them'

This othering process of “us vs them” helps to define the group, its enemies, how to behave in the favour of the in-group and fight the out-group. The “other” is an enemy because it is “impious”, a “hypocrite”, an “apostate”, an “infidel” and a “supporter of infidels”.

Salma and Zahra Halane, the 16-year-old twins from the UK who joined IS-held territories in July 2014, tweeted: “Allah, the merciful, placed something in mine and Salma’s hearts that we came to hate the infidels [in Britain] – to such a degree we could not even bear to look at them. [...] My best advice to you is to get the whole family to make hijrah to the Islamic State” (Calderwood, 2015).

The different conflicts in the world are presented by IS propaganda as examples of oppression of the Muslim *ummah* [community] by the *kuffar* [non-believers]. This propaganda – constantly displayed on social media through several mediums (videos, posts, magazines, pamphlets and so on) – played and will continue to play a very important role in mobilising both men and women by provoking anger, hate and fear. The trauma of others in the Muslim world is used to indoctrinate young men and women who will eventually identify themselves with the victims and try to change the situation by making Hijra to the Caliphate in order to help Muslims. Shannon Conley, a 19-year-old American girl caught attempting to fly from Colorado to join IS, explained: “Even though I was committed to the idea of jihad, I didn’t want to hurt anyone [...] It was all about defending Muslims” (CBS News, 2015).

To encourage violence against the out-group, Jihadist ideology often uses revenge imagery such as the one below:



The case of Moaz al-Kasasbeh: The use of revenge imagery to incite hate amongst its recruits



Use of Revenge Imagery by IS to exacerbate the dichotomy mindset amongst its recruits

The rhetoric is “if we do not kill them first, they will kill us all.” This creates cohesion in the group that sees the threat everywhere and is trying to protect the “we” against the “them”, or “Islam against impiety”. Umm Layth said in a tweet: “This is a war against Islam and it shall be known that you’re with them or with us. So pick a side” (Styles, 2015). Khans writes, “Under guise of ‘fighting terror’ this bastard goes into our countries to kill more Muslims. Ya Allah! Send your wrath upon him & those with him” (Hall, 2014).

The eradication of the “other” is not only considered perfectly right and necessary, but it is the only way of “rescuing His religion, His Prophet and his allies.” IS and its fighters are presented as “brave knights of the Caliphate” who act in the name of God who has sent them “to wage war in the homelands of the wicked crusaders” (Dabiq issue 12, 2015b).

Of Romance and Adventure

Many individuals are attracted by the organic fusion between Muslims of the entire world for the splendour of the Prophet Mohammad and the Ummah. In some cases, joining IS offers an opportunity for many Westerners to break the boredom of modern democracies (Berlin, 1990). Adhering to an organisation with such an aura and supposed strike force provides a chance to find a meaning in life and live a great and unique adventure that is changing the face of countries (Syria and Iraq) and the world. Joining IS brings “marvel” to a life perceived as purposeless and tedious. Joining IS and living a “romantic adventure” with a mujahid is a way out of an insipid life. There is no social infringement, as the engagement is understood as epic, a moral obligation for a divine cause and a heavenly conquest.

In addition, there is a much-romanticised idea of the so-called “mujahideen”, who are portrayed as courageous, fearless and committed to the cause of Allah and His prophet. War is glamorised and violence is legitimised and normalised. There is an idealisation of the *shaheed* [martyr] who is also called “green bird” who “seek[s] the gardens of eternity” (Hall, 2014).



The virtuous life of Jihad

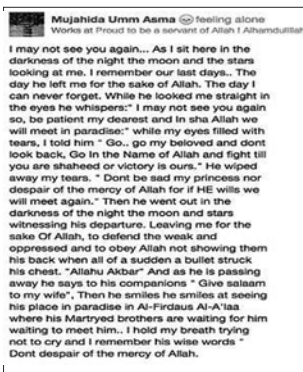


The righteous life of Jihad



The honorable life of Jihad

Several cases showed that many Western women hold a highly romanticised image of *jihad*, and they travelled to become the wives of the *mujahideen*, the potential “green birds” [martyrs] and the mothers of fighters-to-be. Single female are encouraged to marry upon their arrival to IS-held territories and boost the martyrdom of their husbands, as they will be reunited in *jannah* [paradise]. Their glory as martyrs will reflect on their wives because the martyr will ensure a place for his wife in paradise. Not to mention the special status that the widows of martyrs receive within the community as a “chosen one” (screenshots of various Twitter accounts).



The Virtues of being a martyr's wife



The Romanticization of being the wife of a Mujahid

Of romance and jihad

Shams, who calls herself the “bird of Jannah,” presents a highly romanticised image of IS, of what it means to marry a *mujahid*, and eventually raise children in the Caliphate. She explains: “What does actually matter is – heart. When you love someone for the sake of Allah, He will ‘tie’ a knot between our hearts and make the attachment strong, regardless of

the difference between two of you.” Umm Layth explained in a tweet: “Only after becoming the wife of a Mujahid do you realize why there is so much reward in this action” (Hall, 2014).



The great privilege of being women in the Caliphate

The chance to be the wife of a Mujahid

Many IS females explain how martyrs are celebrated and how their widows do not cry but smile and are exultant about their death. Attaining martyrdom is seen as the highest honour one could achieve for himself and his family. Umm El Baraa, whose best friend lost her husband after 7 years of marriage and two daughters, explains the joy and happiness of the sisters the day of his death, especially his wife:

“We entered the house, I saw there was almost 20 sisters. No body cried. Everyone was smiling. The house smells good. The kids seemed happy, and there were foods on the floor. I was astonished, puzzled. [...] I heard Umm Habiba approached me joyfully. She looked pretty as always, she wore a nice cloth, with make-up on her face, jewelries and she smelled good. Umm Habiba. I hugged her. The tears began to flow on my cheeks. I cried like a baby. She took her hand and wiped my tears and hold my cheeks. She said something that amazed me. ‘Umm al Baraa ya Habibty. My husband is a shaheed. He is In sha Allāh in the garden of Jannah, married to Hoor-al Ayn. Today is the day of celebration. Today is the day of joy. No one shall cry! [...]’. I never thought someone can be this strong. I looked at her kids, two beautiful girls. I don’t know if they understand that their father is no more alive. I pulled Habiba closer to me and asked her how she’s doing. She said she’s happy because her mother told her that the father has bought a house in paradise and waiting for them” (Hall, 2014).

A 45-year-old British woman, Sally Jones, nicknamed Umm Hussain al-Britani, who travelled to Syria and married a 21-year-old Jihadist called Junaid Hussain, explained in a tweet after the death of her husband: “proud my husband was killed by the biggest

enemy of Allah, May Allah be pleased with him, and I will beaver every love anyone but him." Talking to a sister who lost her husband, Jones explained "May Allah accept your husband too into the highest ranks of jannah" (Virtue, 2015).

In addition, marriage is also a practical step as a woman in IS-held territories cannot live by herself or go out without a *mahram* [allowable escorts]. Mahmood explains in a post:

"I have stressed this before on twitter but I really need sisters to stop dreaming about coming to Shaam and not getting married. Wallahi life here is very difficult for the Muhajirat and we depend heavily on the brothers for a lot of support. [...] Unless of course if you have family here, if your father or brother is here then it is a different situation. Regardless, it's most appropriate and better for the sisters to get married sooner" (Hall, 2014).

Social Connections as Sponsors' Integrator

Another motive that entices women into extremist groups such as the IS organisation is social connections. Being related in one way or another to a person engaged in IS can indeed boost one's predispositions for joining the group and turn them into action. Several cases show the importance of family, friends, and mentors as integrators to the group and its ideology for both locals and Westerners. As explicitly explained by a former Syrian IS female working for the Al-Khansa brigade: "Since my relatives had all joined, it didn't change a great deal to join" (Moaveni, 2015).

The identical twins Salma and Zahra Halane were introduced to IS ideology and influenced by their older brother Ahmed Ibrahim Mohammed, a 21-year-old who left the UK in 2013 to join IS in Syria. The Saudi woman Nada Mouid Al Kahtani was also influenced by her brother whom she decided to follow into Syria (Assawsana, 2013). There is also the case of the friends Amira Abase, Shamima Begum and Khadiza Sultana who decided to travel together to IS-held territories (Smith-Spark, 2015). Or the case of "Jihadi Jane" who travelled to Syria with her friend called Umm Layth. Several cases showed that family ties play an important role in the mobilisation: there is for instance the case of Khaled Sharrouf, who went from southwest Sydney to the capital of the Islamic State organisation in Syria (Raqqa) with his wife, his two daughters and three young sons. A close friend of the family, called Zehra Duman, a 21-year-old, followed the steps of the Sharrouf family who she joined in Raqqa in December 2014 (Saltman & Smith, 2015).

Forced or consensual marriage additionally helps in consolidating alliances, ensuring allegiances and making defection more difficult. For instance, Khaled Sharrouf gave one of his daughters, a 14-year-old, in marriage to one of his friends, an IS fighter called Mohammed Elomar.

These social networks also act as counter-measures to defection. Indeed, it is more difficult for a woman who joined IS to leave the organisation in which her brother, sister, father, husband, friend or cousin (and sometimes children) are engaged.

Additional Motivations for Local Women

As mentioned above, Western and local women share common drivers. However, Arabs are subject to additional drivers because of the local context.

Economic Motivations

According to a recent report released by The Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR), 3.1 million Syrians became poor in 2012, 1.5 million of whom became extremely poor (Nasser, Mehchi & Isma, 2013). Poverty is due to several factors, among them the high price of goods and services, a reduction in incomes, unemployment and lack of professional opportunities and damage of physical assets. People in Syria, especially displaced individuals and rural populations, suffer from several forms of deprivation, such as lack of housing and basic services (fuel, electricity, water and even food). Working for a group such as IS and being under its umbrella becomes a source of income; a way to secure a livelihood and to live in better conditions. According to Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), a local NGO, an IS female Jihadist earns between \$700 and \$1500 per month, depending on her status, the number of children and her nationality (Al-Raqawi, 2015). Other sources cite this figure as \$200 to \$300 (TRAC), which, despite this discrepancy, remains a substantial sum under the current conditions in Syria.

Dua, a former member of Al-Khansa Brigade, the all-female IS morality enforcement apparatus in Raqqa, explained that money was her first motivation for supporting and joining the group. From a modest background with a father who was a farmer heavily taxed by the IS organisation, the young woman married a wealthy IS fighter called Abu Soheil Jizrawi, who offered Dua's family \$2,500 for her dowry. In addition to the monthly income and the facilities that the organisation provides its followers and fighters, joining IS allowed Dua to live in a spacious apartment with a servant who would leave bags of meat and food every morning at her door (Moaveni, 2015). According to RBSS, there are 278 cases of local women who got married to IS fighters because their families were

in need of the dowry money that, in some cases, would reach \$4000 (Al-Raqawi, 2015). IS provides financial ease as a way to attract fighters and maintain their loyalty. A local woman who fled IS-held territories explains: “If you are a member of IS they give you gas, petrol and bread [...] Better to take the things they offer than die of hunger, this is how they force people to support them” (Waterlow, 2015).

Engagement by Involvement

The current difficult economic conditions and high rates of poverty are factors that lead locals, both men and women, to engage with the Islamic State organisation, essentially becoming a part of it, without actively seeking to do so. They join IS gradually and, without noticing, their level of engagement deepens within the organisation. Usually, this process starts with “small favours” that IS asks from these individuals, who would carry them out as a way to earn some money. These favours do not usually involve big risks (the danger lies in the illegality of the act). This process is gradual and usually slow. It begins with several small “tests” that eventually lead to a more important mission. These steps are usually non-violent. For instance, the women are asked to cook food for the fighters, to sew their clothes, to nurse them, to keep an eye on the security forces’ activities, to spy on the non-Islamic behaviour of the other women and neighbours, to deliver a package, and so on. Gradually, these small favours turn these women into accomplices of the Jihadist group. The more the person performs deeds for the group, the more she is involved, compromised and cannot refuse to perform a bigger task. Eventually, the pressure to join mounts, defection becomes too risky and too costly (death or retaliation against her family), and the circle is complete: no possibility for withdrawing and a single choice that is explicitly joining the organisation. As explained by Aws, a defector from the Al Khansa Brigade in Raqqa, the first concession that she made was to agree to marry a Jihadist from the organisation in order to protect her family and avoid retaliation against them for not accepting the proposal. Soon after her marriage, she joined the brigade responsible for morality enforcement, recruiting women foreigners and picking up the muhajirat from the borders and making sure their transition went smoothly (Abed Sherad, 2015).

Indiscriminate Violence and Thirst for Protection and Revenge

When Islamic State takes the control of a region, its tactics of indiscriminate violence against anyone who opposes it do not leave many options to the locals. They leave if they have the chance to do so, but many join either as a passive response when they see that many other people have also joined, either because they believe that joining is the right thing to do, or they join IS as a survival tactic out of fear for their lives. As explained by two women defectors of Al Khansa Brigade in Raqqa Dua and Aws, when Islamic State took full control of Raqqa, the organisation incarcerated the recalcitrant,

tortured them or killed them. For people to survive, they either had to flee or to support the organisation and get involved (Moaveni, 2015). The case of Hanan is an example. Hanan had to marry the head of the IS Sharia police, a so-called Abu Mohammed Al-Iraqi in exchange for her father's life. She describes her visit to the headquarters: "After a bit my mother came and said to me, they will release him if you marry the head of the Sharia police. His name is Abu Mohammed al-Iraqi. My father's life for his hand in marriage. We have no one but him; I had to accept" (Damon & Tuysuz, 2015).

In addition, the fact that the local authorities and international actors consider Raqqa and its population as a terrorist zone does not allow the population to distance itself from the IS organisation, especially when these actors resort to indiscriminate aerial bombardment of the city, killing many civilians and dismissing them as collateral damage in the larger fight against IS. This mechanical inscription and dismissal of the population will lead to a self-reinforcing mechanism. The indiscriminate violence against entire villages by the Syrian regime is counter-productive because it removes any allegiances, or trust, in the authorities, and instead creates an aspiration for protection and a thirst for revenge. Many women joined Islamic State or other groups such as Jabhat Al Nusra because they considered them their protectors and the remedy for the injustice and humiliation they faced from the security forces. Even if these women do not agree with the ideology of the group, they will align with the group with the aim of rectifying a grievance of which they have been a victim or of which one of their siblings or loved ones was a victim. Carrying weapons enables them to act, get revenge and, most importantly, protect themselves and their families and avoid being subject to potential or proven aggressions such as rape. A combatant from the *Banat Al Walid* Brigade in Homs stated: "Our main goal is to protect ourselves against the fierceness of Assad groups" (Al-Khateeb, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the number of foreign fighters (both Arabs and non-Arabs) and their female counterparts – whose role will evolve within the organisation – the danger for the West and the MENA region is great. IS will use women in more active roles when it begins to fear for its defence and survival because of a perceived or confirmed weakness; or when the organisation would like to hit hard targets (highly guarded with a considerable security). An IS article online entitled "A Sister's Role in Jihad" clearly illustrates this point (Sister Al):

"While Jihad (or Qital) is generally waged by men, there is clear evidence of women's participation in Jihad – both during the times of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and throughout Islamic history, up until this day. [...]"

However, when the need arose, our brave sisters never held back from fighting, and neither should they now! [...] By the Grace of Allah, The Most High, the situation in the Ummah is not that desperate yet [...] However, sisters should definitely be prepared!"

Women in IS pose a real threat for several reasons: on the one hand, they will continue to participate in IS propaganda via social media and try to indoctrinate and recruit "at-risk" individuals and disseminate the Salafist-Jihadist ideology. Not to mention that their support to the Jihadist cause and to the fight is contributing to the success of the organisation. They will continue to recruit those who are already convinced, and lift their predispositions. On the other hand, some of these women (and men) may return to their respective countries and perpetrate terrorist attacks there. For these reasons, it is crucial to adopt some policy approaches that will successfully deter and prevent "at-risk" individuals from joining IS by countering their ideology and presenting them with a better alternative:

- a. Counter-ideological effort: fighting the ideas. Develop both offline and online alternative narratives to the Jihadist ideology, by giving these young women and men better tools to be able to tackle extremist propaganda. These narratives should comprise social media campaigns, educational campaigns for young people in schools, places of worship, and civil associations, and bringing together religious and community leaders, activists, and academics to define a cohesive strategy to combat extremism in the society. States and ministries should fund initiatives to train Muslim activists, media (local and Western), NGOs, religious organisations, preachers and imams to be voices of an alternative narrative and to advocate against extremism. In addition, marketing and advertising professionals should be mobilised to develop sophisticated and glossy campaigns for every targeted audience. These initiatives should take the form of educating and training young people on the dangers of extremist propaganda, and how to correctly assess and process the extremist content they come across; hence they would be able to differentiate between Islam and Islamism, Jihad and Jihadism and so on. These initiatives will also expose the flawed logic of the organisation and the reality of the dire situations in the areas which it controls. This counter-narrative had to be qualitatively and quantitatively coherent to match and exceed the capabilities of IS in disseminating propaganda. As shown by a recent report, the IS organisation disseminates "an average of 38.2 unique propaganda events a day from all corners of the Islamic State 'Caliphate'" (Winter, 2015). What some state actors are doing, such as France, Britain and the US, to develop this counter-narrative is not even close to enough. Countering the Jihadist narrative and presenting an alternative to it should be

scaled up in scope and inclusiveness; it must be a constant 24/7 stream of positive information and media, and must be diversified in content and approach, as everyone is attracted by a distinct message. In that regard, the digital advocacy hub KNOW is a very good initiative, which encourages individuals to actively participate in disseminating messages to counter violent extremism. Initiatives such as the 77th Brigade's "Facebook warriors" created by the British Army to counter extremism on social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and other platforms is a good start provided that those recruited to the Brigade have a good understanding of IS, its ideology and how and why people join (MacAskill, 2015). The counter-narrative needs to be able to counter each and every aspect of IS propaganda (including victimhood, depicting the perfect community, the dichotomous rhetoric of "us vs them", and so on), and respond to each of those angles in a logical manner that refutes its argument and diminishes its appeal to at-risk individuals. In addition to simply "countering" the IS narrative, presenting an alternative narrative is that has a more powerful appeal than that of Salafist-Jihadist arguments is just as crucial. In addition, these alternative narratives should be presented in several languages (Arabic, French, English, German, Urdu, etc.) to capture a wider audience, using the same multi-lingual method that IS adopts for its own propaganda. The choice of wording is also very important and professionals such as academics, Muslim clerics, psychologists, and local community leaders should help in the translation, and become active members of these initiatives.

- b. Give returnees a voice. The counter-narrative needs to be delivered by an appropriate and "legitimate" source. The example of the American Think Again Turn Away campaign is enlightening (Katz, 2014). The fact that the campaign was created by the US Department of State destroyed its credibility. Indeed, an at-risk individual who thinks that the State Department is the "enemy to be destroyed" would never listen to its counter-narrative. Instead, former extremists, returnees, defectors and incarcerated extremists should be given the chance to discuss their experience and tell their stories in public because they have an authenticity that allows them to gain the trust of the returnees or at-risk individuals. As explained by a former Indonesian Jihadist of the Jemaah Islamiyah who benefitted from a de-radicalisation initiative and now is the head of a local non-governmental organisation: "I used to be like them before. I used to be in their world, so I know how to talk to them in their language" (Lamb, 2011). Due to this approach, the Indonesian government succeeded in persuading 680 extremist militants to change sides. Former fighters can also be a real asset and help in raising awareness, as shown by the former Malaysian extremist Nasir Abbas, who became a writer and turned his experience of Jihadism into a comic book. His book was handed

- out in schools and libraries in order to raise awareness and help change the mindset of people toward Jihad (McDowell, 2011).
- c. Engage families of victims of Jihadist violence and associations but also the families of those who left for Syria and Iraq in the counter-narrative. Because of their victim status, they have more legitimacy and weight. Sharing their pain and experience can contribute in creating an awareness of the calamitous effects of extremism and reduce popular support for it. Victims talking about the hefty price of terrorism will have a personal emotional impact on their audience. The Indonesian experience, for instance, that involved the Survivor Foundation, the Association of Victims of Terrorism Bombings in Indonesia and the Alliance for a Peaceful Indonesia was a real success (IPAC, 2014).
 - d. Multi-agency approach. Follow a multi-agency approach in which civil society groups, specialists, teachers, educators, police officers and other stakeholders work together to identify at-risk individuals and provide them with the tools to exit the spiral of violence.
 - e. Rehabilitation and empowering through entrepreneurial trainings. Avoid dealing with returnees by confiscating their citizenship. On the contrary, this policy only feeds IS propaganda and leaves no alternative to the returnee. Government policies need to be more flexible with returnees and offer them rehabilitation procedures to reintegrate them into society and the community. Social enterprises and industries should help in their rehabilitation (Ramakrishna, 2014). It will give them meaning in life and a sense of pride. In Indonesia, initiatives like these proved positive. Former extremist detainees were rehabilitated and have been offered jobs in fish farms, restaurants or literary cafés (Cassrels, 2011).
-

Bibliography

- ABED SHERAD, S.** (2015). منشقة من قيادي نساء داعش تكشف اسرار خطيرة. YouTube video. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mHzRYLO6Wc>
- AL BAWABA** (2014). أم ريان “التونسية تقود كتيبة الخنساء التابعة لتنظيم داعش”. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from www.albawaba.com
- AL JAZRAWEEYA.** Twitter screenshot.
- AL-KHATEEB, A.** (2012, June 19). تشكيل كتيبة بنات الوليد حرائر (مدينة حمص). YouTube video. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCF_dD5n93U
- AL NAJJAR, M.** (2013). أمنا عائشة.. كتيبة نسائية تواجه النظام السوري. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from www.aljazeera.net
- AL RAQAWI, A.** (2015). كتيبة الخنساء من الألف إلى اليا. / Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently. Retrieved January 29, 2016, from <http://www.raqqa-sl.com/?p=1117>
- ASSAWSANA** (2013). ندى القحطاني أول انتحارية سعودية تلتحق بداعش. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <https://www.assawsana.com/portal/pages.php?newsid=161424>
- CASSRELS, D.** (2011). How Kebabs and Coffee Help Turn Inmates From the Path of Terror. *The Australian*. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/how-kebabs-and-coffee-help-turn-inmates-from-the-path-of-terror/story-e6frg6so-1226060651749>
- BERLIN, I.** (1990). *Le bois tordu de l'humanité. Romantisme, nationalisme et totalitarisme*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- BLOOM, M., & WINTER, C.** (2015). How a Woman Joins ISIS. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved January 29, 2016, from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/12/06/how-a-woman-joins-isis.html>
- CALDERWOOD, I.** (2015). Teenage ‘Terror Twins’ Who Fled Britain to Join ISIS Tried to Recruit Their Whole Family Telling Brothers: ‘We Might Seem Evil to You, but We Will All Be Happy in the Afterlife’. *Mail Online. The Daily Mail*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3259363/Teenage-terror-twins-fled->

Britain-join-ISIS-tried-recruit-family-telling-brothers-evil-happy-afterlife.html#ixzz3xgsXiZcV

CBS NEWS (2015). Denver Woman Who Tried to Join ISIS Sentenced to Prison. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/denver-woman-who-joined-isis-sentenced-to-prison/>

DABIQ ISSUE 1 (2014a). The Return of the Khilafah. Retrieved January 25, 2016, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

DABIQ ISSUE 7 (2014b). From Hypocrisy to Apostasy – The Extinction of the Grayzone. Retrieved January 25, 2016, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf>

DABIQ ISSUE 8 (2015a). Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa. Retrieved January 25, 2016, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue+8-sharia-alone-will-rule-africa.pdf>

DABIQ ISSUE 12 (2015b). Just Terror. Retrieved January 25, 2016, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-isil-dabiq-magazine-issue-12-just-terror.pdf>

DAMON, A., & TUYSUZ, G. (2015). Syrian Woman: I Had to Marry an ISIS Police Chief to Save My Father's Life. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/04/middleeast/syria-isis-bride/>

DETTMER, J. (2014). The Bride of ISIS Revealed. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/09/03/the-bride-of-isis-revealed.html>

HALL, E. (2014). Inside The Chilling Online World of the Women of ISIS. *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/inside-the-online-world-of-the-women-of-isis#.gmVg6oGEa>

IPAC (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict) (2014). Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Need for a Rethink. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/711/countering-violent-extremism-in-indonesia-need-for-a-rethink>

KATZ, R. (2014). The State Department's Twitter War With ISIS Is Embarrassing. *TIME*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://time.com/3387065/isis-twitter-war-state-department/>

KNOW CAMPAIGN. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <http://knowcampaign.org/>

LAMB, K. (2011). In Indonesia, Former Terrorists Swap Firearms for Fried Duck. *Global Post*. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/indonesia/110627/indonesia-terrorism-jemaah-islamiyah>

MACASKILL, E. (2015). British Army Creates Team of Facebook Warriors. *The Guardian*. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jan/31/british-army-facebook-warriors-77th-brigade>

MCDOWELL, R. (2011). Captain Jihad: Ex-Terrorist is Now Comic Book Hero. *The Jakarta Post*. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/09/09/captain-jihad-ex-terrorist-now-comic-book-hero.html>

MOAVENI, A. (2015). ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/world/middleeast/isis-wives-and-enforcers-in-syria-recount-collaboration-anguish-and-escape.html?_r=0

NASSER, R., MEHCHI, Z., & ISMA, K. A. (2013). Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis. *Syrian Center for Policy Research*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from http://scpr-syria.org/att/1360464324_Tf75J.pdf

NY DAILY NEWS (2015). Female Suicide Bomber in Paris is Latest Woman Used in Attacks by Radical Groups Over the Years. Retrieved February 27, 2016, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/female-suicide-bombers-years-article-1.2440357>

PETROU, M. (2015). What's Driving Teen Girls to Jihad?. *Maclean's*. Retrieved February 27, 2016, from <http://www.macleans.ca/society/teen-girl-jihadists/>

RAHMAN, K. (2014). 'I Will Only Come Back to Britain to Raise the Black Flag': Scottish 'Private School Jihadist' in Warning to West's Muslims as She Rejects Appeal to Return. *The Daily Mail*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk>

/news/article-2752957/I-come-Britain-raise-black-flag-Jihadist-warning-Wests-Muslims-rejects-appeal-return.html

RAMAKRISHNA, K. (2014). The Role of Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia. *Middle East Institute*. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from http://www.mei.edu/content/map/role-civil-society-countering-violent-extremism-efforts-indonesia#_ftnref

ROBERTS, N. (2014). The Life of a Jihadi Wife: Why One Canadian Woman Joined ISIS's Islamic State. *CBC News*. Retrieved January 29, 2016, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/the-life-of-a-jihadi-wife-why-one-canadian-woman-joined-isis-s-islamic-state-1.2696385>

SALTMAN, E., & SMITH, M. (2015). 'Til Martyrdom Do Us Part'. Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Retrieved January 27, 2016, from http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf

SHAMS. Twitter screenshots.

SISTER AL. A Sister's Role in Jihad. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from https://archive.org/stream/SistersRoleInJihad/78644461-Sister-s-Role-in-Jihad_djvu.txt

SMITH-SPARK, L. (2015). UK Girls' List for Syria Trip: Makeup, Bras, Epilator. *CNN*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/10/europe/uk-missing-girls-syria/index.html>

STYLES, R. (2015). 'The Devil Took Her Away': Heartbroken Mother of British Jihadi Bride Khadijah Dare Uses First Ever TV Interview to Beg Her Daughter to Come Home. *Mail Online*. *The Daily Mail*. Retrieved January 29, 2016, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3030324/The-devil-took-away-Heartbroken-mother-British-jihadi-bride-Khadijah-Dare-uses-TV-interview-beg-daughter-come-home.html#ixzz3xchVpRP>

TRAC (Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium). Al-Khansaa Brigade (Islamic State / IS - Female Unit / ISISF). Retrieved January 29, 2016, from <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/al-khansaa-brigade>.

UMM KHATTAB. Twitter screenshot.

VIRTUE, R. (2015). British Wife of ISIS Jihadi Killed in Drone Strike Says 'I Will Never Love Anyone But Him'. *Express*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/605358/Sally-Jones-wife-of-ISIS-jihadi-Junaid-Hussain-killed-in-drone-strike-speaks?_ga=1.182076769.7141716.1452594197

WATERLOW, L. (2015). 'Stripped of Our Freedoms, Banned from Working and Ordered to Cover Up From Head to Toe': Woman Reveals What Life is REALLY Under the Islamic State Regime. *Daily Mail*. Retrieved January 29, 2016, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3050182/Woman-reveals-life-REALLY-Islamic-State-regime.html>

WINTER, C. (2015). Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'. *Quilliam Foundation*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf>

WHITE PEBBLE (2014). Answering the Call - Foreign Fighters (Mujahideen) in Syria [Video file]. *Tune.pk*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://tune.pk/video/3062105/answering-the-call-foreign-fighters-mujahideen-in-syria>

The Role of International and Regional Actors toward Radical Groups

*Fouad M. Ammor**

* Researcher, Groupement d'Etudes et de Recherches sur la Méditerranée

The use of terror and illegitimate exercise of violence to reach some ends is not a new phenomenon (Chaliand & Blin, 2007). However, it has become more transnational as a great number of countries have become potential targets.

In recent history, a number of events contributed to the surge of transnational terrorism. 9/11 was undoubtedly a turning point. In Iraq, the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 was followed by instability and terrorist violence in spite of the intensive efforts carried out by the international community, including the EU, to support Iraq's transition. Daesh¹ has thus built on and exploited the discontent of the Sunni population in Iraq (and later Syria) to further its objectives. The insecurity and sectarian conflict following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime proved a fertile ground for the emergence of Daesh² boosted by the important number of Iraqi officers that have been ousted from the former Iraqi Army and the policy of Nouri al-Maliki (European Commission [EC], 2015a), which was far from being inclusive towards the Iraqi Sunni community.

Daesh has grown from what used to be al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a Sunni insurgent group that fought against US and Iraqi government forces and carried out attacks against Shiite targets after the downfall of Saddam Hussein. Its leader at that time was Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who had originally set up a group called Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ). He moved to Iraq after the US invasion and pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2004, when his group came to be known as AQI.³

The emergence of Daesh in Iraq in 2006 signalled a shift from the more or less classical form of terrorism to a new one with the ambition to set up a state underpinned by a new ideology. It is a transnational organisation across two sovereign states; it acts as a state (control of territory, organisation of revenues to finance a central budget, imposition of taxes, provision of basic services, etc.) (EC, 2015a). It has received pledges of loyalty and support from some organisations in several Arab, African and Asian countries. Nevertheless, the overall perception of Daesh in the Arab world remains very negative, with very few exceptions.⁴

While other chapters of this study mainly focus on reasons behind joining the terrorist groups and the recruitment tactics of Daesh, this chapter focuses on the geopolitical environment in which Daesh has been able to flourish. Unlike what is officially stated by the spokespersons of some governments, some regional State actors have not necessarily and consistently considered Daesh as their main enemy. Some may have

1 In this essay we use Daesh (ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi 'Iraq wa-sh-Sham) to name the phenomenon instead of Islamic State, or ISIS.

2 Daesh, endowed with a territorial organisation ignoring political boundaries between two decaying states, Iraq and Syria, has an expansionist strategy and great tactical mobility.

3 AQI is designated as an entity associated with al-Qaeda by the UN. Al-Zarqawi was killed in 2006 by a US air strike.

4 "One in five Syrians thinks that Islamic terrorist group Daesh has a positive influence in their country. Twenty-two per cent of the populations, around 4.5 million people, believe that the terrorist group is a good thing. A stunning 82 per cent said that they subscribe to the conspiracy theory belief that Daesh was created by the US and its allies". Retrieved from <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/09/16/poll-one-in-five-syrians-think-Daesh-are-good-82-per-cent-think-america-created-it/>

rather considered Daesh as a “secondary enemy” or/and a “bargaining chip” in their relations with global powers.

In Iraq, some Sunni tribes have used Daesh to protect themselves against Shiite militia abuses. Some Shiite groups from Iraq do not want to take Fallujah or Mosul as this would empower Sunni-dominated regions.

As far as Turkey is concerned, President Erdogan is rather clear in identifying the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) as the enemy. Turkish authorities fear that Kurdish victories over Daesh could materialise in increasing power for the PKK. There are also strategic considerations on the side of the Kurds. Some analysts claim that Barzani let Mosul fall into the hands of Daesh as regaining Mosul would have led to renewed authority for the central Iraqi government that would not have benefitted the PKK (Charbel, 2015).

Similarly, there are some academic debates regarding the balance that Saudi Arabia strikes between the fight against Daesh, on the one hand, and Iran, on the other, and the possible Saudi support Daesh may have received through individual channels.

In Syria, Bashar al-Assad, who was at some point interested in promoting the emergence of Daesh according to some analysts, may now have an interest in posing as the ultimate barricade against Islamic terrorism, and thereby regain some credibility in the international community.

As far as Iran is concerned, one could argue that the existence of Daesh has given Iran an opportunity to regain a major role on the international stage.

For Israelis, Daesh does not necessarily represent a direct and tangible threat. It could even be argued that the Israeli interests are indirectly well served by some of the secondary effects of the current situation, i.e. the weakening of Hezbollah, the Palestinian issue becoming a secondary issue on the agenda and Iran being entangled in war.

The Difference between Al-Qaeda and Daesh

Although Daesh is an extension of the global Jihadist movement in its ideology and worldview, its social origins are rooted in a specific Iraqi context (with origins in the Sunni rebellion against the US-led occupation after the 2003 invasion) and, to a lesser extent, in the Syrian civil war that has raged for almost five years bringing about more than 250,000 casualties.

Comparison between Al-Qaeda and Daesh

	Al-Qaeda	Daesh
Enemies	Few identified Mainly US, Israel	Near enemies Shias, Christians, rival Sunnis, despotic Arab and Islamic regimes
Setting up a state	Not a priority	A priority (territorial objective)
Style of militancy	Guerrilla, terrorism	Terrorism, guerrilla, conventional warfare (Meso-power: both hard and soft)
Islam	Applying it in the mid and long run	Immediate Islamic government (Caliphate)
Territory	Means (attacks on Western interests)	Ends Progressing in controlling territory

It is worth noting that with Daesh compared to Al-Qaeda the focus is on “near enemies” (such as Shias, Christians, rival Sunnis, despotic Arab and Islamic regimes) to fight instead of “far enemies” (like US, Israel). Daesh aims to set up a “state”. However, the final goal of both al-Qaeda and Daesh is the same: “replacing the pervert regimes in the Middle East and replace them by Islamist governments” (Nair, 2015).

Daesh’s strategy of controlling territory is different from that of the al-Qaeda network, which is a transnational organisation that has focused on attacks on Western interests. Daesh is concentrating on controlling territory, holding the allegiance of the Sunni Muslims in that territory and ending the rule of governments which it sees as apostates, such as those in Baghdad and Damascus.

The Caliphate is presented as the personification of Daesh’s aspirations for political and cultural unity. It has declared ambitions to widen its territory to bordering countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf countries.

AQI’s centre of gravity was in the Sunni-majority areas of Iraq, particularly the Anbar province. “During the peak of the previous Sunni insurgency, from 2006 to 2010, Daesh’s policy was to overthrow the Iraqi government and establish an Islamic State” (House of Commons, 2015), but it was apparently undone when Iraqi and US military attacks led to the killing or capture of some 80% of Daesh’s leaders.

In 2014, Daesh in particular managed to extend its control over oil and gas-rich areas in eastern Syria, western Iraq and border crossings along the Syria-Turkey border that it previously disputed with other armed groups.

Daesh's rise in Syria has been helped by the lack of sufficient international support for the moderate opposition for more than four years. This has allowed Daesh to feed off local resentment and build itself up as a military force.

However, Daesh is characterised by a set of weaknesses such as: its feeble financial means,⁵ its small populations (30,000 reliable troops⁶), its underdeveloped economy and its weak ideology.⁷ Daesh is unlikely to conquer a substantial portion of the Middle East. For all those reasons, Daesh is not able to trigger a "revolutionary tidal wave."

The Three Main External Actors: the USA, Russia and the EU

The USA: The War on Terror, First and Foremost

In its recent history, the United States of America has faced terrorism in ways that made it the prism through which US foreign policy has perceived the world: the hostage-taking at the American embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (which gave Washington the chance to take revenge for its failure in Vietnam by supporting Afghan resistance movements, which, however, helped Osama bin Laden to create al-Qaeda), and the most decisive and symbolic event, 11 September 2001, which has brought the United States of America into the epicentre of international counterterrorism.

The "war on terror" was developed as a comprehensive and pragmatic new strategy and in tune with the American missionary political culture. By putting it in a binary framework – "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" – the White House managed to convince the public that overthrowing the Iraqi regime was an "indispensable part of the war on terror." Linking the problem of terrorism to that of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction suggested that Iraq's clandestine production of such weapons was tantamount to terrorist activity.⁸ The resulting concept of the pre-emptive war was a way to establish American supremacy and to transform the United States into an uncontested hegemonic power for decades to come. Barack Obama offered a different direction⁹ regarding the engagement of the US in the region, which could be called "the ideological preference for diminished global engagement" (Simon & Stevenson, 2015), which could last as long as no significant threat happens to core US interests. The US administration, nowadays, wants to limit its role to counterterrorism. In this regard, its purpose is to avoid costly involvement in the region and mainly to engage fighting on the ground, thus relying on local actors and the neighbouring states is of strategic importance.

5 Its annual revenues amount to a mere \$500 million or so – about 1/10 the annual budget of Harvard University – and they are shrinking. Cf. Walt, S. M. (2015, November/December). Daesh as Revolutionary State (p.47). *Foreign Affairs*.

6 Even 100,000 foreign recruits would not be enough to shift the balance of power in favour of DAESH, Ibid., p. 48.

7 The weakest link of Daesh as a social movement is its poverty of ideas," in Gerges, F. A. (2014, December). Daesh and the Third Wave of Jihadism. Retrieved from http://currenthistory.com/Gerges_Current_History.pdf

8 In reality, the twofold threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction was nothing more than a pretext to get rid of an enemy who had long been in the Americans' sights. The strategic head of the Bush administration's neoconservative camp, Paul Wolfowitz, had put forward the idea of regime change in Iraq as early as 1992.

9 Speech in Cairo in 2009.

US President Barack Obama has appointed Gen. John Allen to lead a coalition of some sixty countries against Daesh, relying on air strikes and training missions.¹⁰ This implies that the Daesh phenomenon has forced the US to change its mind regarding Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime and, especially after the intervention in Libya, Obama is reluctant to overthrow the Syrian President immediately. This, paradoxically, could strengthen Daesh's power in the region, while the US has to persuade Assad's supporters, Russia and Iran, to remove him without dismantling the remains of the Syrian state structure.¹¹

The US strategy to counter Daesh is based on the following criteria (The White House, 2014): remaining the main actor in the region with the minimum of loss; maintaining a certain level of petroleum production and consequently avoiding a possible shortage; defending the State of Israel and trying to integrate it in the region; showing reluctance to get involved in new "land" wars;¹² avoiding getting drawn into the Syrian theatre, particularly when the aftermath of the eventual fall of Bashar al-Assad is not clear; and, finally, conducting air strikes in the framework of a coalition of states against Daesh in Iraq and against Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria.

In fact, left unimpeded, Daesh could pose a growing threat beyond the region, including the US homeland. Along with dozens of international partners, the US has provided material support for the Iraqi forces to back their fight against Daesh. Its goal is to degrade and ultimately destroy Daesh through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy.

Russia: Unconditionally Supporting its Unique Regional Ally

The Russian position vis-à-vis Daesh is determined by two factors: the possible spillover of terrorism to the Muslim populated territories of Russia and to its "near abroad" and its alliance with the Assad regime.¹³ In spite of the fact that Russia has traditionally supported the West's campaigns against Islamist extremist groups, and has designated Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra as terrorist organisations, Russian officials have often blamed Western and particularly US intervention for the instability in the Middle East and warned the US not to play into the hands of Daesh propaganda. Russian leaders also criticise alleged breaches of the rule of international law and the Russian government argues that any air strikes in Syria should only have taken place with the approval of Damascus or the Security Council. The Russian military operations were based on the authorisation of the

10 Some candidates for the US presidential campaign are calling for "boots on the ground." Not necessarily Americans but Sunni Arabs and Turks.

11 At the moment it seems that the idea of Assad staying in power at least for a transitory period is gaining ground.

12 Simultaneously, maintaining a certain level of tension in the region so that it is possible to assure a certain proportion of the weaponry market in the region.

13 Various factors have influenced Russia's strategy towards the Syrian crisis. Among them is concern over strategic and economic interests in Syria as the last symbolic outpost of Russian influence in the Middle East, as well as a fear of the consequences of a regional imbalance, involving the spread of Islamic radicalism, spilling over to Russia itself. Obviously, the Western military engagement in Libya strongly influenced Russian behaviour, providing Moscow with a negative reference point," in Menkiszak, M. (2013, May). Responsibility to Protect... Itself? Russia's Strategy towards the Crisis in Syria. FIIA Briefing Paper 131.

Assad regime and were directed – according to the regime’s rhetoric – at any “terrorist group”, meaning that not only Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra are targeted but other opposition forces as well. Moreover, Russian interests are boosted by the desire to keep the Russian naval base at Tartous, which is under expansion, as well as the military base near Latakia.

Despite Russian military involvement in the Syrian civil war in terms of air strikes, started in 2015, the Russian-brokered deal with Syria regarding the decommissioning of chemical weapons and Syria’s joining the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013 signals a much earlier Russian interest. Yet Russian influence in the region should not be overestimated, nor is it without limits. Russia’s support for the Damascus government is likely to reduce its influence further among the many Sunni-majority Arab states.

EU External Policy: between Rhetoric and Facts

Although the European Security Strategy entitled “A Secure Europe in a Better World” (European Commission, 2003) enlists terrorism as one among several other threats (proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, state failure, organised crime), it was the terrorist bomb attack in Madrid in March 2004 that made EU politicians argue strongly in favour of greater European cooperation in fighting terrorism.

While much of this EU assessment is in compliance with the broad outlines of US thinking on global security, most Europeans view the threat of terrorism differently from Americans, for whom terrorism has been the primary international threat since 9/11, 2001.

Americans have a comprehensive vision of the region and the countries are somehow linked. Europeans, with regard to their geographical proximity to the Middle East, worry greatly about the consequences of instability/insecurity in this region. The real difference between Europeans and Americans is that the US has mainly chosen to fight its war on terror abroad, whereas the Europeans have focused to a large extent on the threat at home.¹⁴

The current influx of refugees trying to enter the EU area reveals the great impact of the Iraqi-Syrian situation. European governments also worry about the effect of their policies on their own Muslim populations (Keohane, 2005). At present, there are roughly 15 to 20 million Muslims in the EU.¹⁵

The rapid growth of Daesh forced the EU to develop more effective strategies in its foreign policy understanding and EU members determined a joint position on many issues

14 This is not to say that the US has done nothing to improve its domestic counter-terrorism policies. Since 2001 Washington has radically overhauled its internal legal, border and intelligence agencies, most notably by creating a new Department of Homeland Security. Nor is it to suggest that European governments have done nothing to pursue terrorists outside Europe.

15 The increase of influx of refugees and migrants reveals the fragility of the EU in a context of the rise of extreme right political parties. Some reactions among EU populations towards Muslim migrants have evidenced clear xenophobic feelings.

such as participating in the international coalition under the leadership of the US in order to tackle foreign terrorist fighters, supporting Syria and Iraq with the arms aid and increasing the aid for refugees in the countries of the region. Simultaneously, some EU countries are acting individually, such as France carrying out air strikes against Daesh's land positions.

On 20 October 2014, the Foreign Affairs Council expressed the EU's resolve to tackle the crises in Syria and Iraq and the threat posed by Daesh in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. To this end, it called on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission to develop an EU comprehensive regional strategy (European Commission, 2015a). The EU is the leading donor in the international response to the Syrian crisis, with over €5 billion since the start of the conflict until 2016. At the conference Supporting Syria and the Region, held in London on 4 February 2016, the EU and the member states proposed an aid package of €3 billion for 2016 (European Commission, 2015b).

The need for a comprehensive EU policy framework for the diverse regional crises has been raised.¹⁶ The EU responsibility has been highlighted to ensure that it uses its influence and its numerous instruments effectively and coherently to defend human lives, human dignity and rights, and help resolve these crises, in close coordination with regional and international partners. In particular, this strategy draws and complements the EU counter-terrorism/foreign fighter's strategy and the Joint Communication: Towards a comprehensive EU approach to the Syrian crisis.¹⁷ The overall objective of the EU strategy is to counter the threat posed by Daesh and other terrorist groups to regional and international stability, and simultaneously to create the conditions for an inclusive political transition in Syria. However, an important requirement for the success of the EU's strategy is the achievement of synergy and complementarity between EU and EU member state actions both at political and operational levels.

In its foreign policy against Daesh, the EU carefully avoids any discourse against Islam. "Terror is not about religion." In their struggle with Daesh, especially considering the alliance of Muslim countries in the region, they underline the alliance of civilisations against Daesh and terror.

16 These crises have created a humanitarian disaster affecting more than 13.5 million people forced to flee their homes (3.8 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, with UNHCR predicting 4.3 million by the end of 2015, and 7.6 million internally displaced persons in Syria alone), and more than 17 million people in need of humanitarian aid (12.2 in Syria and 5.2 in Iraq).

17 In 2011, Syrian peaceful protest movements with democratic aspirations, inspired by "Arab Spring" movements in other countries and driven by a sense of frustration with the prevailing non-inclusive political and economic order, were brutally repressed by the Assad regime. This pushed a portion of the Syrian population into armed rebellion. The Assad regime's brutal repression of protest and insurgency, massive human rights violations and systematic obstruction of democratic reforms, and the continuation of the conflict without a clear end in sight have led gradually to the increased power of extremist groups at the cost of the moderate opposition. Jabhat al-Nusra, the official arm of al-Qaeda in Syria, and then Daesh, enhanced their attractiveness and capabilities. In 2014, Daesh in particular managed to extend its control over oil and gas-rich areas in eastern Syria, western Iraq and border crossings along the Syria-Turkey border that it previously disputed with other armed groups.

Regional Actors: Common Rhetoric Stand towards Daesh but Great Policy Divergence

Iran: Quest for More Presence in the Region

Middle East Sunni leaders tend to dislike the renewed Iranian leadership in the region. As the international community and Iran solve their differences over Iran's nuclear programme, Iran is being watched suspiciously, particularly by the Sunni Gulf states and Israel.

With Saddam out of power and a government dominated by the Shia majority in Iraq, Iran has lost a major threat and tries to strengthen its presence in the region. While Iraq's new Shiite Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, is more inclusive towards Sunni and other minorities than his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki, he maintains close ties with Tehran, giving Iran an opportunity to be part of a delicate process of Iraqi national reconciliation.

Syria is Iran's only Arab state ally, and Iran is supporting the Assad government. However, although it criticises the US for allowing its allies in the Gulf to fund radical Sunni groups in Syria, Iran also intervenes to support Iraqi and Syrian governments but regardless of coalition.

The election of Hassan Rouhani changed the outlook for relations with the West – and thus with the region in general. Western leaders have accepted that the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies were essential players in the fight against Daesh.

Among the various consequences of this war against Daesh, the Assad regime, Iran and Russia are showing a big and peculiar rapprochement, in spite of the still existing differences between them, and in spite of the fact that this is further worsening Tehran's image and reputation in the Arab Sunni World (Vatanka, 2015).

Turkey: the Occasion to Tackle the Kurdish Issue

The number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey in 2016 is expected to rise to more than 2.7 million, including 1.7 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR (n.d.)). Turkey is now hosting the largest refugee community from Syria. It has also been providing significant humanitarian assistance to the refugees. In spite of this, until the terrorist attack in July 2015 on Turkish territory, when a Turkish student believed to have links to Daesh blew himself up among a group of mostly Kurdish peace activists in the border town of Suruc, killing more than 30 people, Turkey's relationship with Daesh was ambivalent; the US Air Force was not allowed to launch attacks on Daesh from the US base at Incirlik.

However, in retaliation for the bombing, a group claiming to have links to the PKK, which is holding the government responsible for not doing enough to prevent Daesh attacks, killed two Turkish police officers in the Kurdish town of Sanliurfa. Turkey responded by opening the Incirlik Air Base for coalition strikes on Daesh and arrested hundreds of suspected members of both Daesh and the PKK.

The Turkish government demands a regime change in Damascus because it considers the Assad regime a major threat (Turkey Has “Other Priorities”, n.d.). Turkey has been accused of allowing extremist fighters to cross into Syria and of allowing oil from Daesh-controlled wells to be sold in Turkey.

Originally, Turkey is reported to have been relatively close to Jabhat al-Nusra and to have allowed militants to join the fighting in Syria from Turkish territory and injured fighters to retreat to Turkish medical facilities. Some of the fighters who originally joined Jabhat al-Nusra via Turkey subsequently joined Daesh, particularly after the latter’s takeover of Mosul. Turkey’s allegedly permissive policies may have contributed to the marginalisation of the Free Syrian Army and to the rise of Daesh in Syria.

Another factor in Turkey’s relations with Daesh is the Daesh enmity with the Kurds. After the beginning of the conflict in 2011, Syrian Kurds managed to take control of many of the predominantly Kurdish areas in north-eastern Syria. However, as radical groups grew in power in the Syrian conflict, fighting erupted between Kurdish groups and radical Islamist groups. The Kurds have been the most effective fighting force against Daesh while Turkey’s bombing campaign against the Kurds is likely to strengthen Daesh (Tol, 2015).

Kurds in Syria were coerced by the Syrian regime to stay out of the Syrian uprising since early 2011 in exchange for de facto autonomy in the mainly Kurdish-populated regions of the northeast of the country. Since the emergence of Daesh, Syrian Kurds have been in the frontline of the fight against Daesh, together with Kurds from neighbouring countries. First, they defended the mainly Kurd-populated areas in Syria (2013) and in Iraq (Mount Sinjar in 2014) and access from Syria to the rest of Iraq’s Kurdistan region. Subsequently, they also defended the besieged city of Kobani and other mainly Kurdish-populated self-proclaimed “autonomous cantons.”

Turkey has an interest in this fight because of the historic conflict between Kurdish separatists and the Turkish state. The situation of Turkish Kurds is fluid at the moment. In fact, the Turkish-Kurdish peace process was halted because of the situation in Syria. Meanwhile, Turkey has a flourishing trade relationship with autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan,

much of whose oil output goes north to Turkey. But the scale of the violence in both Syria and Iraq has unsettled this rapprochement.

According to some analysts, Turkey was preventing the Kurdish refugees in Turkey from returning to Syria to fight against Daesh as part of a covert deal, which would allow Daesh to take back some territory from Syrian Kurdish control, undermining the efforts of the Kurds to establish and protect their autonomous region in Syria (Kurds Battle Daesh, 2015).

Initially, Turkey did not join the US-led coalition against Daesh but on 24 September 2014, reportedly after US pressure, the government issued a statement saying that Turkey would support operations against Daesh.

On 30 September 2014, the Turkish Parliament allowed Turkish forces to operate in Syria and Iraq. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said that Turkey would “fight effectively against both Daesh and PKK and all other terrorist organisations within the region.” However, he also questioned the effectiveness of air strikes, saying that they only postponed the threat from the extremist group. The Parliament voted on the proposal on 2 October, passing it with an overwhelming majority. The motion also provided for foreign military forces to operate from Turkish bases.¹⁸

Saudi Arabia: Losing Momentum

Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), supported by Qatari aircraft, have joined the US in conducting airstrikes in Syria, and Bahrain also hosts the base for the US Navy's 5th Fleet. The UAE contributed F-16 Falcons and hosts coalition aircrafts on its bases. Since December 2014, however, the UAE has suspended its combat missions over Syria, invoking safety concerns for its pilots should their planes be downed, following the capture and killing by Daesh of a Jordanian pilot. Saudi Arabia contributed four F-16 fighter jets, with which it conducted airstrikes in Syria, and has moved 30,000 troops along the border with Iraq. Qatar participated in a support capacity in the strikes in Syria and reportedly hosts a secret US base. Although Qatar has expressed its will to cooperate with the US, it has been repeatedly accused of links to Jabhat al-Nusra and of funding Daesh.

In August 2014, the Saudi Grand Mufti said that al-Qaeda and Daesh “have nothing to do with Islam and are the enemy number one of Islam.” On 26 September 2014, the Saudi Ambassador to the UK made a statement condemning Daesh and pledging that Saudi Arabia would take action against it: a self-proclaimed Daesh – which is neither Islamic nor a state – plagues the region, at the centre of which sits the Kingdom of Saudi

¹⁸ In February 2015, Turkey made its largest single intervention in the Syrian conflict to date; Turkey sent over 500 troops supported by 49 tanks and 51 armoured vehicles to evacuate the shrine. The 38 Turkish troops defending the tomb were removed along with the relics themselves from their promontory in the River Euphrates to a village just on the Syrian side of the Turkish border.

Arabia, the “birthplace of Islam”¹⁹ and the government banned individuals from going to Syria or Iraq to join the fighting.²⁰

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has consistently asserted that the fight against extremism ought to be locally owned by the regional stakeholders. This has led to some contention between the United States and Saudi Arabia (Obaid & al-Sarhan, 2015) which believes that policy should be guided by the idea that Sunni empowerment is the key ingredient needed to defeat Sunni extremism.

The decision taken by Saudi Arabia to participate in airstrikes against Daesh over Syria demonstrates its determination and commitment. Saudi Arabia has denounced Daesh and contributed to military action in Iraq, while the government has issued an order to the religious establishment to condemn Daesh.

Saudi Arabia has long made it clear that there can be no solution to the problem of extremism in Syria, or in the wider region, without the removal of Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad. From the Saudi perspective, the removal of Assad is a prerequisite for securing the necessary unity and strength to fight Daesh in Syria; consequently, Assad continues to be the number one source of recruitment for Daesh. This same point of view guides Saudi thinking with regard to coalition building. Saudi Arabia has repeatedly asserted that the states that back Assad, in particular Iran, cannot be meaningful partners in the fight against Daesh unless and until they shift their position on Syria’s discredited and destructive president. The revised US stance towards the departure of Assad as a prerequisite to the stability of the region, therefore, is contrary to the Saudi point of view.²¹ This change in the US approach reflects a new reality in Syria following the start of Russian air strikes against fighters of Daesh that Moscow has begun on the request of the Syrian authorities on 30 September.

Saudi Arabia’s active military participation in the international coalition against Daesh is a clear sign of the country’s commitment to defeating this extremist group. It also signals Saudi Arabia’s intention to be the regional leader in the broader struggle. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria in 2011, and in Iraq even before Daesh’s gains in Mosul and beyond, Riyadh made it clear that if there is to be any prospect of real success, a locally owned effort must be supported.

19 As the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, stressed most recently: “The evils of terrorism must be fought with force, reason and speed.” We have taken action in our country, and on Tuesday the Royal Saudi Air Force joined the international military operation against this latest terrorist group.

20 Although Daesh is hostile to the regime in Riyadh (and to the other Gulf monarchies), it shares much of the Wahhabi fundamentalist ideology that the Saudis use to bolster their own political legitimacy.

21 “By February 2012, the debates about Syria in both the Arab League and the United Nations explicitly focused on regime change. The Arab League ‘peace plan’ for Syria established the goal of forming a new national unity government and required that Assad step down, conditions that hardly seemed calculated to elicit regime cooperation. The draft resolution circulated to the Security Council expressed full support for the Arab League’s goal of replacing the regime with a national unity government, occasioning Russian and Chinese vetoes,” in Bali, A. U. & Rana, A. (2012, March 1). Pax Arabica? Provisional Sovereignty and Intervention in the Arab Uprisings. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2193050

Saudi Arabia believes that airstrikes must quickly be followed by a meaningful policy on the ground if the effort is to be truly effective. Saudi Arabia is best placed to lead this effort. The priority must be placed on moving forward local ownership by arming and training the Syrian rebels and Iraqi tribal forces that are prepared to take the fight to Daesh.²²

Saudi Arabia is convinced that its leadership of the Sunni Islamic world²³ and its guardianship of the two holy mosques make it a key target for Daesh. To restore the “caliphate”, Daesh would ultimately need to embed itself at the epicentre of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina. To demonstrate the depth of its ambition, Daesh has launched a campaign to take over Saudi Arabia, ominously called Qadimun: which means “we are coming” in Arabic.

Israel: The Big Winner in the Short Term

Since the outset of Arab Spring in 2011, Israeli policy has been characterised by the adoption of a low profile. On Daesh, Israel has been implementing “a mostly risk-averse, minimalist and pro status quo policy” (Berti, 2015). Israel considers Daesh a threat that “will pass”, while Iran is considered as the more structural danger, especially since it started its rapprochement with the US.

Some fear that whatever would replace the Assad regime could be worse for Israel. The main fear for Israel is the involvement of Hezbollah and the potential for a spillover of the conflict into Israel, particularly via Lebanon. The Syrian government accuses Israel of helping the Sunni rebels (Jabhat al-Nusra) on its border. Israel does not hesitate to carry out air strikes when necessary: an air strike launched by the Israeli air forces on 18 January 2015 killed the Iranian General Mohammad Ali Allah-Dadi, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards who was advising Hezbollah forces supporting the Assad government.

Israel is still limiting its actions in Syria and Lebanon, and the Syrian government is cautious about responding to any strikes that Israel carries out. Bashar al-Assad seems to have no interest in provoking Israel and the US when there is a chance that the West is shifting its focus away from overthrowing him to defeating Daesh.

However, the volatility of this situation was illustrated in January 2015 when Hezbollah targeted two Israeli military vehicles, killing two Israeli military personnel and a Spanish UN peacekeeper.

²² Riyadh has already taken steps to make this happen and is now working closely with the US to organise and equip vetted moderate rebels in Syria and to support tribal forces in Iraq. As part of this effort, Saudi Arabia is currently training Syrian rebels within its own borders.

²³ Bahrain is the Gulf State with a majority Shia population. The government is close to Saudi Arabia, particularly since the latter sent troops to Bahrain in 2011 to help shore up the Bahraini authorities in the face of mounting Shia protests. The sectarian nature of the conflict in Iraq and Syria finds strong resonance in Bahrain, reflecting as it does the fundamental problem in Bahrain: a Shia majority ruled by a Sunni elite.

Bibliography

BERTI, B. (2015, March 13). *Seeking Stability: Israel's Approach to Middle East and North Africa Analysis*. Eurasia Review. Retrieved from http://fride.org/download/19.03.2015_EurasiaReview_US_BB.pdf

CHALIAND, G., & BLIN, A. (Eds). (2007). *The History of Terrorism from Antiquity to Al Qaeda*. Berkeley Los Angeles-London: University of California Press. Retrieved from https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/177/177597_History%20of%20Ter.pdf

CHARBEL, G. (2015, February 15). The Region's New Borders Will Be Drawn in Blood. *Al Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2015/02/barzani-iraq-peshmerga-kurds-islamic-state-interview.html>

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2003, December 12). A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy. Retrieved from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2015, February 6). Elements for an EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq As Well As the Da'esh Threat. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Brussels, 6.2.2015 JOIN(2015) 2 final/. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/20150206_JOIN_en.pdf

HOUSE OF COMMONS (2015, March 19). ISIS and the Sectarian Conflict in the Middle East. Retrieved from <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP15-16/RP15-16.pdf>

KEOHANE, D. (2005, May). *The EU and Counter-Terrorism*. London: Centre for European Reform. Retrieved from <http://library.coleurop.be/pdf/CER/keohane.pdf>

KURDS BATTLE DAESH ON SYRIA BORDER AS TURKEY BLOCKS REFUGEES. (2015, June 15). *Khaleej Times*. Retrieved from <http://khaleejtimes.com/region/kurds-battle-daesh-on-syria-border-as-turkey-blocks-refugees>

NAIR, K. K. (2015, July 17). *Al Qaeda versus the ISIS*. Centre for Air Power Studies. Retrieved from http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_Infocus_KKN_3.pdf

OBAID, N., AL-SARHAN, S. (2015). A Saudi View on the Islamic State. In J. Barnes-Dacey, E. Geranmayeh & D. Levy (Eds.). *The Daesh through the Regional Lens*. Retrieved from [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR122_IS_REPORT_Combined_140115\(new\).pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR122_IS_REPORT_Combined_140115(new).pdf)

SIMON, S., & STEVENSON, J. (December, 2015). The End of Pax Americana. Why Washington's Middle East Pullback Makes Sense. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/end-pax-americana>

THE WHITE HOUSE (2014, September 10). Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/fact-sheet-strategy-counter-islamic-state-iraq-and-levant-isil>

TOL, G. (2015, August 6). *Erdogan's High-Risk Strategy*. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/erdogan%E2%80%99s-high-risk-strategy>

TURKEY HAS "OTHER PRIORITIES" THAN BATTLING ISLAMIC STATE. (n.d.). *Al Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/turkey-syria-islamic-state-foreign-fighters.html>

UNHCR (n.d.). Syria Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>

VATANKA, A. (2015, September 30). *Russia, Iran, and the Syria Test*. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/russia-iran-and-syria-test>

EuroMeSCo

Comprising 102 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

EuroMeSCo aims to be a leading forum for the study of Euro-Mediterranean affairs, functioning as a source of analytical expertise. The objectives of the network are to become an instrument for its members to facilitate exchanges, joint initiatives and research activities; to consolidate its influence in policy-making and Euro-Mediterranean policies; and to disseminate the research activities of its institutes amongst specialists on Euro-Mediterranean relations, governments and international organisations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with four publication lines (EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Studies, EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars, workshops and presentations on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Barcelona City Council. It incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council formed by Mediterranean universities, companies, organisations and personalities of renowned prestige.

In accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's Barcelona Process, and today with the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean the aim of the IEMed is to foster actions and projects which contribute to mutual understanding, Exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures as well as to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

Adopting a clear role as a think tank specialised in Mediterranean relations based on a multidisciplinary and networking approach, the IEMed encourages analysis, understanding and cooperation through the organisation of seminars, research projects, debates, conferences and publications, in addition to a broad cultural programme.



ACPSS was established in 1968 as an independent research unit within Al Ahrum Foundation. Since its establishment, ACPSS has been one of the leading think tanks in Egypt and the region, committed to independent research and critical thinking, through its research capacity and multitude of specialised publications, commentaries and articles in Al Ahrum, its website, as well as partnership and membership in regional and international research networks.

The ACPSS cooperates with different organisations and research institutions in the world, through the exchange of publications and information on topics of mutual interests. In addition, the Centre receives a number of visitors from abroad, including academic staff, prominent scholars, representatives of press and publishing agencies and the media, as well as members of diplomatic missions in Cairo. The research scope of ACPSS has evolved over time to incorporate international studies, regional politics, and domestic politics.