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BEYOND THE CALIPHATE:

Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees

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THE SOUFAN CENTER
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Cover photo: REUTERS/Khalil Ashawi - A rebel fighter takes away a flag that belonged to Islamic State militants in northern Aleppo Governorate, Syria, October 7, 2016.

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Key Findings

- As the so-called Islamic State (IS) loses territorial control of its caliphate, there is little doubt that the group or something similar will survive the worldwide campaign against it so long as the conditions that promoted its growth remain. Its appeal will outlast its demise, and while it will be hard to assess the specific threat posed by foreign fighters and returnees, they will present a challenge to many countries for years to come.
- Despite the overall increase in Foreign Fighters since The Soufan Group's last report in December 2015, the flow of fighters came to a virtual standstill as the Islamic State began to lose its territory in both Syria and Iraq and states implemented better measures to prevent travel. However, from 2015, there was a marked rise in the number of foreign women and children traveling to or, in the case of children, being born in the Islamic State.
- While returning Foreign Fighters have not as yet added significantly to the threat of terrorism around the world, the number of attacks inspired or directed by the Islamic State continues to rise. All returnees, whatever their reason for going home, will continue to pose some degree of risk.
- There are now at least 5,600 citizens or residents from 33 countries who have returned home. Added to the unknown numbers from other countries, this represents a huge challenge for security and law enforcement entities.
- States have not found a way to address the problem of returnees. Most are imprisoned, or disappear from view. There will be a need for more research and information sharing to develop effective strategies to assess and address the threat.
- Returnee women and children represent a particular problem for States, as they struggle to understand how best to reintegrate these populations. Proper mental health and social support mechanisms will be especially relevant in the case of children.

INTRODUCTION

A Pew survey published on August 1, 2017,¹ found that the fear of an attack by the so-called Islamic State (IS) ranked first in global concerns, just above climate change. The fact that the threat from a marginal and declining group of a few thousand members² could worry people more than a threat that will affect the lives of everyone in the world – and for the foreseeable future³ – is testimony to the power of terrorism and to the particular ability of IS to horrify. But although the fear of terrorism is disproportionate to the threat, there is unfortunately little doubt that IS, or something similar will survive the worldwide campaign against it. There is little predictable about the trajectory of terrorism in a world in flux, except that it will continue to challenge international security for many years to come.

Even as it has ceded control of its territorial caliphate, concern that IS may remain viable in the long term, both as a group and as an inspiration, has continued, in large part because it has been so successful in attracting foreign recruits. People not only flocked to join it in Iraq and Syria, but have also done so in other parts of the world, whether or not IS has established a formal province there. Many of its foreign recruits appear to have joined in reaction to persistent and obdurate local conditions of poor governance and social stagnation, but in addition to the possibility of self-betterment and freedom from

discrimination and injustice,⁴ many have also seen in IS an opportunity to find purpose and belonging.

IS is not the only violent extremist group to offer unpalatable solutions to the complex problems of identity in a globalized world, al-Qaeda does the same. But by promoting a skillfully branded alternative to nationalism and an opportunity for individual fulfillment in terms of meaning and value, it has tapped into deep veins of disillusion with traditional politics and mistrust of state institutions. This has allowed the geographical range of its appeal and membership to spread well beyond those of its provinces, for example in Sinai and South East Asia,⁵ that seem most likely to survive the collapse of its central core. But to what extent the dispersed veterans of the war in Iraq and Syria will wish to regroup, resurge, recruit and recreate what they have lost, is as yet unknown.

A major factor will be the attitude and ability of the surviving members of the cohort of over 40,000 foreigners who flocked to join IS from more than 110 countries⁶ both before and after the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014.⁷ Although there is disagreement over the threat that returning foreign fighters may present to their countries of residence or origin, or to other countries they pass through, it is inevitable that some will remain committed to the form of violent '*jihad*'⁸ that al-Qaeda and IS have popularized, both within and outside the Muslim world, just as they did following the *jihad* in Afghanistan.



If Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the so-called Caliph, is declared dead, some may switch their allegiance (*baya*) to a local or regional leader of mainstream al-Qaeda or an affiliated group, especially if Ayman al Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda, who expelled al Baghdadi from the movement in 2014,

is replaced by a more charismatic and dynamic figure such as Osama bin Laden's son, Hamza. Or they may follow a new leader within IS; but there is no obvious candidate to take over, especially given the criteria of ancestry and qualification set for becoming Caliph. The regional provinces (*wilayat*) of IS are too small to take over the leadership, but they will provide a local focus for some returnees. Others may act on their own or in a loose association of former comrades or with new recruits. It is clear that anyone who wishes to continue the fight will find a way to do so.

This paper supplements two earlier papers by The Soufan Group: *Foreign Fighters in Syria* (June 2014),⁹ and *Foreign Fighters - An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (Dec 2015).¹⁰ It aims to add detail on where foreign fighters have come from, how many have gone home, and how many remain fighting. It also aims to illustrate the need for further research on almost all aspects of the foreign fighters phenomenon, without which governments may struggle to design and implement effective policy responses.

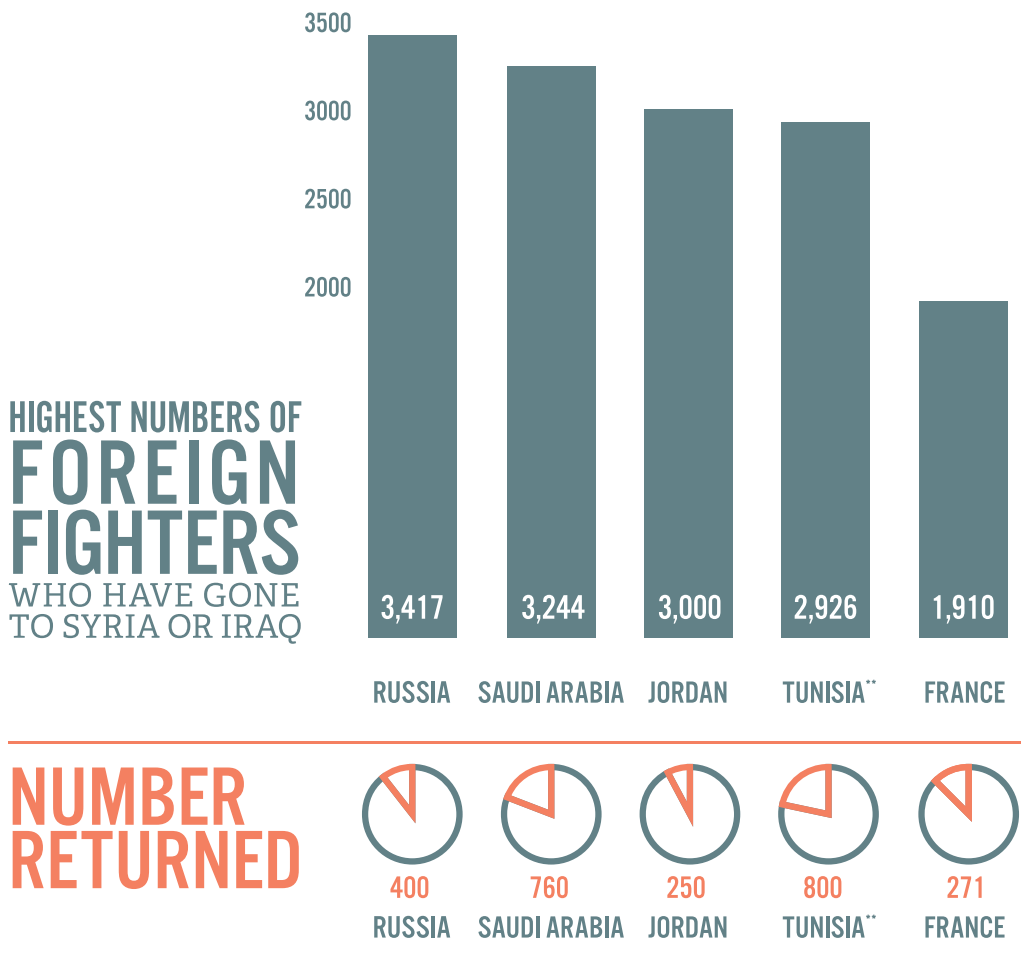
NUMBERS

As time has passed, States have been able to make more accurate estimates of the numbers of their citizens and residents who have travelled to join violent extremist groups in Syria and Iraq; but at the same time, many have become more wary about revealing them. This paper attempts to draw together current figures from reliable sources, but inevitably inaccuracies will occur. Some official figures have remained surprisingly static since The Soufan Group report in December 2015, others have been revised downwards, such as for Tunisia and Turkey, as States have been able to make a more accurate count, but most have crept upwards. Even though the flow slowed considerably once States began to make greater efforts to stop IS supporters from leaving home or prevent them from reaching their destination, the overall total since the last report has increased even though numbers are available for only 48 of the 86 countries previously counted.

Added to the downward revisions for some States, this represents a significant increase; and although the flow came to a virtual standstill as IS in Syria and Iraq began to lose territory and retreat underground, it is evident that the IS appeal continued to resonate. Harder borders, fiercer fighting, and the slow but steady destruction of the caliphate's physical presence may have brought the growth of the foreign fighter phenomenon to a temporary halt, but the push and pull factors that attracted foreigners in such

unprecedented numbers remain, and the caliphate has not admitted defeat, despite the loss of its administrative capital, Raqqa, in October 2017. Already its propaganda has cast the eradication of its territorial control in Syria and Iraq as unimportant, and merely a temporary setback in its preordained journey to victory; and it has promised more attacks in the West.¹¹

Many foreigners have left the battlefield. In July 2017, the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) estimated that about 30% of the approximately 5,000 residents of the European Union thought to have gone to Syria and Iraq had returned home.¹² In some cases, for example in Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom, the number was closer to half. Earlier that year, in February, President Putin said that 10% of the 9,000 foreign fighters from Russia and former republics of the Soviet Union had returned.¹³ Other countries, for example in South East Asia, have not only seen an influx of returnees, but also a certain number of foreign fighters who appear to have chosen to go there rather than return to their own homes, whether or not advised to do so by IS leaders.¹⁴



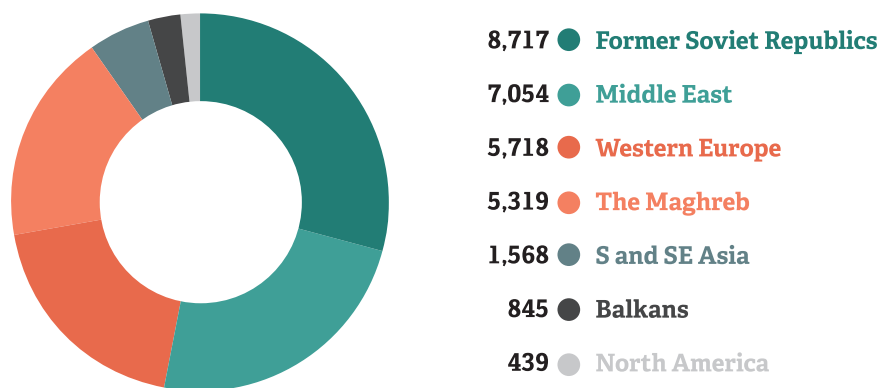
*These figures are an approximation based on available sources.
 **Tunisia's Foreign Fighters number was officially changed by the Tunisian government reflecting approximately half of the numbers originally reported.

Although this paper attempts to track foreigners who have gone to fight with IS in Syria and Iraq, other areas where it has established wilayat also provide destinations for foreign recruits. For example, the IS presence in Libya has survived its loss of territory on the coast and has drawn recruits from neighboring countries as well as from Libya itself. The permeable borders of the region allow fighters to travel home, for example to Sudan, and back again, almost at will.

In Somalia, a group of Al Shabaab members led by a Somali with British nationality declared allegiance to IS in October 2015, and although there was little evidence of an immediate influx of foreign recruits, the group may yet attract Somali diaspora who worry that the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al Shabaab will regard them with suspicion,¹⁵ as well as IS fighters from Yemen. Another group of IS supporters in East Africa has already attracted recruits from Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania, and will also compete with Al Shabaab for diaspora members.¹⁶

Similarly, in Central Asia, IS established a branch in Afghanistan in January 2015, which, despite early setbacks, achieved sufficient momentum and gained enough territory to be able to survive attacks from competing groups of Taliban and from Afghan Government forces and their allies. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan declared its support for IS in 2014, and its members pledged formal allegiance to al Baghdadi in August the following year. It is certain that IS-Khorasan¹⁷ will gain additional foreign members as it offers fighters from Central Asia and Western China a more attractive and convenient option than trying to get to Syria or Iraq, especially as the caliphate there goes underground.

Foreign Fighters By Region



The expansion of IS into South East Asia is also likely to lead to regional recruits joining it there. Fighters from elsewhere appeared in the IS-led battle for Marawi in Southern Philippines, and given the numbers of radicalized men, women and children in South East Asia, active recruiting efforts by IS in the area will present the authorities there with a serious challenge.

Table: Foreign Fighters who have (i) gone to Syria or Iraq; (ii) been stopped in, deported from, denied entry to, or watch-listed by Turkey; (iii) remain fighting; and, (iv) returned.

COUNTRY ¹⁸	FFs ¹⁹	SENTBACK/STOP LISTED IN TURKEY ²⁰	REMAIN	RETURNED	DATE
Afghanistan ²¹				120	03/2017
Albania ²²	~90				05/2017
Algeria ²³	170			87	01/2016
Australia ²⁴	>165 ²⁵		~100	>40	05/2017
Austria ²⁶	296	31/153+51 ²⁷	~150	90	12/2016
Azerbaijan ²⁸	>900	252/1,677			03/2017
W. Balkans ²⁹	~900			250	08/2017
Belgium ³⁰	~478	37 ³¹ /1,519	~250	>102 ³²	08/2017
Bosnia ³³	248 ³⁴		~115	46	12/2016
Bulgaria ³⁵	<10	21/77			09/2015
Canada ³⁶	~180		~90	~60	01/2017
Central Asia ³⁷	>5,000			~500	02/2017
Denmark ³⁸	>145	23/196	~35	67	02/2017
Egypt ³⁹	~600	150/-			01/2017
EU ⁴⁰	~5,000 ⁴¹		~2,200	~1,200	04/2016
Finland ⁴²	>80		~43	~43	02/2017
France ⁴³	1,910	254/2,622	~700 ⁴⁴	271 ⁴⁵	08/2017
Georgia ⁴⁶	>200		>50	<50 ⁴⁷	04/2017
Germany ⁴⁸	>915	133/657	~450	~300	03/2017
India ⁴⁹	75 ⁵⁰	37 stopped			03/2017
Indonesia ⁵¹	~600	435/- ⁵²	384 ⁵³	<50 ⁵⁴	03/2017
Israel ⁵⁵	60			<10	08/2017
Italy ⁵⁶	110		57 ⁵⁷	13	10/2017
Jordan	~3,000 ⁵⁸		~900 ⁵⁹	>250 ⁶⁰	05/2017
Kazakhstan ⁶¹	>500	-/1,914	120 ⁶²		04/2017
Kosovo ⁶³	317		138 ⁶⁴	117 ⁶⁵	04/2017

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COUNTRY ¹⁸	FFs ¹⁹	SENTBACK/STOP LISTED IN TURKEY ²⁰	REMAIN	RETURNED	DATE
Kuwait ⁶⁶	150				08/2016
Kyrgyzstan ⁶⁷	>500			>44 ⁶⁸	06/2016
Libya ⁶⁹	~600				02/2017
Macedonia ⁷⁰	~140				03/2016
Malaysia ⁷¹	91		56	8	12/2016
Morocco ⁷²	1,623	183/2,831	500 ⁷³	198 ⁷⁴	04/2017
Netherlands ⁷⁵	280	22/520	<190 ⁷⁶	50	02/2017
Norway	90 ⁷⁷		40 ⁷⁸	>30 ⁷⁹	09/2016
Pakistan ⁸⁰	>650				01/2016
Russia ⁸¹	3,417 ⁸²	804/4,128		400	03/2016
Saudi Arabia ⁸³	3,244	141/7,523		760	11/2016
Serbia ⁸⁴	50				01/2017
SE Asia ⁸⁵	>1,000				10/2016
Spain ⁸⁶	204	21/325	129	30	07/2017
Sudan ⁸⁷	~150		~70	>2 ⁸⁸	08/2017
Sri Lanka ⁸⁹	32				11/2016
Sweden ⁹⁰	~300	55/300	112	106	09/2016
Switzerland ⁹¹	~70			14	02/2017
Tajikistan ⁹²	1,300	308/2,651	>700 ⁹³	147	07/2016
Trinidad ⁹⁴	>130				02/2017
Tunisia ⁹⁵	2,926	-/4,605 ⁹⁶		>800 ⁹⁷	12/2016
Turkey ⁹⁸	~1,500	<7,240 ⁹⁹		~900	06/2016
Turkmenistan ¹⁰⁰	>400				01/2015
Uighurs ¹⁰¹	~1,200				04/2017
UK	~850	106/1,172	~400	~425	02/2017
USA ¹⁰²	<129			7	09/2017
Uzbekistan ¹⁰³	>1,500				05/2016

THE THREAT

At least initially, those who have traveled to Syria are less likely to see themselves as domestic terrorists than those IS sympathizers who have stayed at home. They generally appear to have had a stronger desire to join something new rather than destroy something old. As a result, returnees have, so far, proved a more manageable problem than initially anticipated. NJ Rasmussen, the Director of the United States National Counter Terrorism Centre, speaking at the Aspen Forum in July 2017, confirmed this,¹⁰⁴ saying that fewer had returned than anticipated and assessing that most would likely stay to defend the caliphate, even if it meant dying in the attempt. In September 2017, the French authorities also commented on a slowing rate of return.¹⁰⁵

Whether or not encouraged or directed by returnees, the domestic terrorist threat from IS supporters who did not go to Syria, Iraq or another IS front, will remain real for many years to come.¹⁰⁶ In September 2014, the IS spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, called on all supporters who could not join the caliphate to attack the enemy wherever they could, and with whatever means, without waiting for instructions. And between the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014 and February 2017, IS conducted or inspired around 143 terrorist attacks in 29 countries, causing the death of over 2,000 people and injuring many more.¹⁰⁷ On at

least one occasion, IS appears to have sent an operative from a third country to mount an attack.¹⁰⁸

So far, the influence or involvement of returning foreign fighters in these attacks has been limited. Thomas Hegghammer, a Norwegian scholar, has estimated that in the first year of the caliphate there were ‘over twice as many IS sympathizer plots (22) as plots involving foreign fighters who returned from Syria (9)’¹⁰⁹ But since then, IS has appeared to want more control of such attacks. Salman Abedi, the man who attacked people leaving a concert in Manchester, UK in May 2017, had help and training from IS supporters in Libya; the group arrested in Australia in July 2017 for plotting to bring down an aircraft had also received help from IS, including being sent elements for their bomb from Syria.¹¹⁰ Others who have made contact with IS about launching an attack have received encouragement, advice and even detailed instructions on how to upload their pledge of allegiance to the Caliph for use after their deaths.¹¹¹

It is highly likely that even as the territorial caliphate shrinks and is increasingly denied an overt presence, its leadership will look to supporters overseas, including returnees, to keep the brand alive.¹¹² Most returnees will be unlikely to experience anything in their lives at home that matches the intensity of their experience as a member of IS, whether or not they were fighting on the front line. If on return they begin again to feel as rootless and lacking in purpose as they did before they left, then they are unlikely to settle back easily into a ‘normal’ life, and as IS increases its external campaign, both through action and propaganda,¹¹³ returnees may be particularly vulnerable to contact from people who were part of the network that recruited them, or appeals for help from ex-comrades in arms. It seems probable that the influence and involvement of returnees will grow as their numbers increase.

A group that falls outside the definition of returnees, but comes close, comprises those people who have been stopped on their way to Syria or Iraq, either by their own author-



ities or those in a transit country. The members of this group will pose a particular problem as they had geared themselves up to join the caliphate only to be frustrated. They will have all the fire and enthusiasm of a new recruit but none of the dampening experience of real life and death in the caliphate. A sense of failure

and resentment towards the authorities may increase the likelihood that they will seek other ways to achieve their objectives. Before he left for Syria, Mohammed Emwazi, better known as the IS executioner Jihadi John, complained bitterly that he had been deported from Tanzania on suspicion — which appears to have been well founded — that he was on his way to join al Shabaab in Somalia. This experience may have prompted his desire for violent revenge. Similarly, one of the attackers of the offices of Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015 had been prevented from going to Syria.

53,781 Individuals — 146 countries

Turkish authorities recorded **53,781 individuals** from **146 countries** whose State of residence feared they might attempt to **join the fight** in Syria and Iraq.



As of mid-June 2017, the Turkish authorities, having persuaded other States to help them monitor the increasing flow of foreigners passing through Turkey to Syria, had recorded the names of 53,781 individuals from 146 countries whose State of residence feared they might attempt to join the fight in Syria and Iraq.¹¹⁴ The bases on which States have added names to the Turkish list vary, but the numbers give some indication of how

governments regard the strength of the IS appeal. When combined with official figures of foreigners who have actually reached the conflict area, the scale of the challenge faced by Security and Law Enforcement Agencies charged with countering the threat from terrorism becomes apparent.

A group one further removed from those who joined IS or have been stopped en route are those who wanted to join but, for whatever reason, did not leave home. These are people who have seen themselves as members of the caliphate and have pledged allegiance to the Caliph, but are obeying its injunction to attack where they can rather than join its forces in Iraq or Syria. Examples include the attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, Bangladesh and the murder of a priest performing mass at a church in Normandy in France, both carried out in July 2016.

The emphasis of IS leaders has always been more obviously on building and defending the caliphate than following the al-Qaeda example of focusing on the ‘far enemy’. Its official

slogan is “remaining and expanding”,¹¹⁵ but the concept of ‘expansion’ has moved from accepting the allegiance of new provinces,¹¹⁶ to the creation of new theatres of action. Europe has seen several, attacks with many more thwarted. For example, France foiled twelve attacks between January and September 2017;¹¹⁷ in a nine-week period between April and June 2017, the United Kingdom saw three successful and five foiled plots;¹¹⁸ Germany suffered five attacks in 2016,¹¹⁹ and has seen more since then. In the United States, over 250 Americans have either tried to travel abroad or have succeeded in traveling to IS territory to fight within its ranks.¹²⁰ Of the 129¹²¹ who have left the United States, 7 have returned from IS territory. Overall, the United States has charged 135 individuals for terrorism offenses relating to IS, with 77 convicted by August 2017.¹²²

Elsewhere, the threat of IS-inspired domestic terrorism has also persisted. Turkey has been particularly hard hit, with 14 attacks up to July 2017, with a further 22 terrorist attacks prevented in 2016.¹²³ Australia suffered four and disrupted 11 Islamist extremist plots in the three years to August 2017.¹²⁴ Authorities in the Arabian Peninsula reported disrupting over 30 plots up to mid 2017;¹²⁵ and in 2016 alone, there were seven IS attacks in South East Asia,¹²⁶ with Malaysia reporting having disrupted a total of fourteen.¹²⁷ In addition, IS has also shown itself capable of attacks in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Somalia, Sweden and Yemen.¹²⁸ Some have involved returnees from Syria and Iraq.

RETURNEES

While the numbers of foreign fighters and those believed to have wanted to become foreign fighters illustrate the scale of the problem, they do little to help address the next challenge: to uncover the identity of those who have left the so-called caliphate, find out where they have gone, assess what risk they pose, and take whatever action is possible to protect the public from harm. However, the recovery of large amounts of data following the fall of IS administrative centers such as Mosul in July 2017, Tal Afar in August 2017 and Raqqa in October 2017, has helped to reveal the identities of many foreign fighters and has already led to the disruption of connected cells in third countries.¹²⁹

Like al-Qaeda, IS has maintained meticulous records of its membership, administrative orders and deployments, and there has been a considerable international effort to collect and share this information,¹³⁰ especially the details and origins of its fighters. By September 2017, INTERPOL had collected the names of around 19,000 people who were confirmed to have joined IS, along with detailed identifying particulars.¹³¹

Returnees, fall broadly into five categories, each presenting a different level of risk: **(i) those who left early or after only a short stay and were never particularly integrated with IS; (ii) those who stayed longer, but did not agree with everything that IS was doing; (iii) those who had no qualms about their**

role or IS tactics and strategy, but decided to move on; (iv) those who were fully committed to IS but forced out by circumstances, such as the loss of territory, or were captured and sent to their home countries; and (v) those who were sent abroad by IS to fight for the caliphate elsewhere.

i. Those who returned early or after a short stay

Surveys of early returnees, albeit that they cover a small sample, suggest that those who left before the caliphate began to shrink, did so because they did not find what they were looking for and retained little sympathy for the group.¹³² Clearly, not everyone who went to join IS or a similarly violent organization will have done so with the immediate intention of learning how to become a domestic or international terrorist; and few of those who decided to return may have seen themselves as one of the hardened killers portrayed in the media.¹³³ But encouraged by the false memories of nostalgia, some may re-invent themselves in that image and decide to continue the fight from a new base, even if no longer associated with IS.

In any case, it will be hard to predict how any returnee may react over time to their experience abroad, or to their reception at home. Even if they are subject to close psychological and police assessment, circumstances may lead them again to seek violent solutions to their problems, especially if they return to the same conditions that they left. Others may suffer from delayed psychological reaction to their life with IS. Terrorism is as much emotional as ideological, and even those who returned disillusioned or revolted by what they saw, or simply mentally or physically exhausted, may over time look back on the caliphate more positively and blame outsiders for its failures.¹³⁴

ii. Those who returned later, but disillusioned

As the caliphate began to lose traction, became more violent towards co-religionists and suffered from increasing internal disagreement, including on doctrine,¹³⁵ it is likely that many other recruits began to have doubts. But doubts over leadership, tactics, or even strategy, do not necessarily translate into doubts over aims and objectives. To some significant extent, all foreign recruits to IS must have supported the idea of a caliphate; and conversely, their motivation must almost certainly have included rejection of the country and society that they left behind.

Even those returnees who were most disappointed by the behavior and tactics of the overall IS leadership may still have admired individual emirs and still harbor the dream of a pure Islamic state run by rulers committed to the full implementation of Islamic

law (sharia). They may still believe that this can only be achieved through violence, and they will have become more accustomed to blood and gore through their experience of fighting with IS. Apart from the very few veterans of other wars, foreign fighters will have witnessed violence at a level for which most were completely unprepared; not only may this lead to unpredictable and uncontrolled behavior, but it will also have created a greater tolerance for extreme action.

iii. Those who returned having had their fill

Many recruits will have joined IS because they were attracted by the heroic image of its fighters portrayed by the group, compounded by a sense of adventure. Early returnees are more likely to have left because they were not cut out for violence than those in this category, especially those who stayed through the high point of the caliphate in 2015, or joined once it began to suffer setbacks. By that time, violence had become fundamental to the survival and expansion of the 'State'. Someone whose search for adventure takes such an extreme form as joining IS, may well seek even more extreme stimulus on return home.

These recruits may also decide to seek new theaters of jihad once they have rested and recuperated. It is unlikely that they will find nowhere to go. Already in 2017, potential recruits to IS and fighters from Iraq and Syria were joining other fights, such as in Mindanao in the Philippines, where IS appeared to have been trying to establish a new base,¹³⁶ as well as in Sinai, Afghanistan¹³⁷ and Libya. Bodies of dead fighters recovered in the Philippines during the battle for control of the town of Marawi that began in May 2017, carried identity papers from the Arabian Peninsula as well as from elsewhere in South and South East Asia.¹³⁸ The Afghan authorities believe that about 100 fighters, not all Afghans, entered the country to join IS in the first six months of 2017.¹³⁹

iv. Those who were forced out or captured and sent home

Most IS members who were still fighting as the caliphate collapsed around them were probably happy to die for the cause, and many did.¹⁴⁰ But some will have survived, and others surrendered. Many of these will be local IS members who will in due course and if they can, follow their leaders underground and commit terrorist attacks in Iraq and Syria. But some foreigners who escape or are captured and then deported will move on to fight elsewhere. Some will join other violent groups.

People leaving the caliphate who still supported its aims and leadership appear to have

been instructed, whether by friends or emirs, what to say about their nationality and activities when accosted by the authorities in order to avoid deportation to a country where they might be arrested.¹⁴¹ Malaysia was one.¹⁴² Those who succeeded may be effective fighters and recruiters, with considerable cachet in extremist circles. Research suggests that the time between a person taking interest in IS or a similar group and committing a terrorist offense continues to shrink,¹⁴³ and these committed returnees may encourage this trend by forming cells, mounting attacks, exaggerating their exploits in Syria and Iraq, and encouraging sympathizers who never left home to make up for their lack of opportunity or lack of courage by taking local action. They may also provide practical advice on how to mount an attack, and explain the importance of pledging allegiance to the Caliph, should there be one, before doing so.

v. Those who were sent home or elsewhere by IS

From the earliest days of its formation in 2014, IS developed and maintained a cell of foreign fighters that could plan and carry out attacks abroad.¹⁴⁴ Francophone recruits from Belgium and France seem to have formed the early core of this cell, and were responsible for the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016.¹⁴⁵ Another major attack in this category was on Istanbul airport in June 2016 when 45 people died in addition to the three Central Asian attackers from IS.

Seeing the impact of these external attacks, it is likely that over time, IS sought recruits from other nationalities to plan similar attacks elsewhere. Certainly, IS appears to have kept the program going for Westerners even when it most needed fighters to defend the caliphate in Iraq and Syria. An alleged IS fighter captured in 2017 claimed that as of February that year, IS continued to offer European recruits the option of joining a group that trained over a seven-month period to carry out terrorist attacks abroad.¹⁴⁶

Strictly speaking, these trained terrorists are not so much returnees as fighters dispatched to operate outside the caliphate. But they will look much the same, use the same routes,¹⁴⁷ and likely join up with others who have left the caliphate. They will also be the most vicious and determined of the returnees. Lists recovered in Iraq in 2017 suggested that at that time, there were potentially 173 members of IS prepared to commit a suicide bombing; six of whom were Europeans.¹⁴⁸ By then, their fate was unknown, as were their whereabouts.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

A subset of returnees that is even harder to quantify, assess and address is the women and children who joined IS but later went home or were captured and await deportation.¹⁴⁹ Without further research, it will be hard to judge the degree of their commitment to IS and their interest in becoming active rather than passive supporters.

The central role of the female members of IS has been to rear children and look after the men. But the IS founder, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, had few qualms about deploying women as, for example, suicide bombers,¹⁵⁰ and over time, IS may also have relaxed its rules, offering new interpretations of the circumstances under which a woman may use violence not just to protect herself and her home, but also to protect the broader community.¹⁵¹ In July 2017, film of a woman carrying a baby and looking like any other civilian



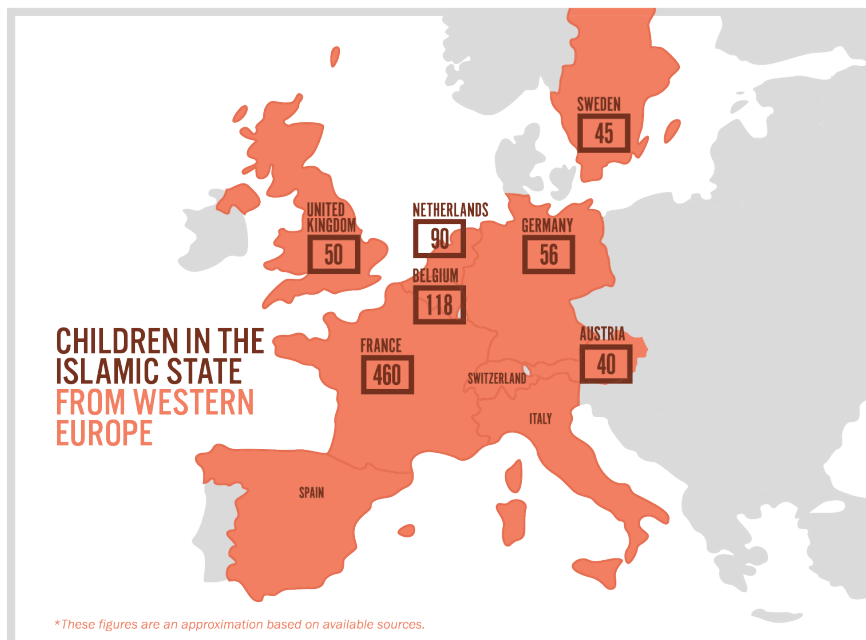
escaping the siege of Mosul, appeared to show her blowing herself up when she was in range of Iraqi forces.¹⁵² There are also reports of women having acted as snipers.¹⁵³

Some experts have argued that these stories and the accompanying suggestion

that under pressure IS changed its policy towards women in combat, need to be addressed with caution¹⁵⁴ Despite the promise in the foundational document of Al Khansaa (the female enforcement unit of IS) that, under certain circumstances of need and endorsement, women may perform *jihad*,¹⁵⁵ there is no evidence that these conditions were ever declared as met. It would be a dramatic change for a group with such strict and unbending social rules, based on a literal reading of scripture, to allow women to challenge the key pillar of female submission on which IS has built its brand. Nonetheless, women who have joined IS must be assumed to have known what they were doing, and be treated accordingly. At the very least, some of the 600+ members of the all-female Al Khansaa unit in Raqqa claimed to have taken part in torture and to have enjoyed doing so.¹⁵⁶

Though some women may have been tricked or coerced by their husbands into traveling to Syria, most will have gone there willingly, probably for much the same reasons as the men.¹⁵⁷ Some female recruits may have been the meek and submissive wives that IS promised their young male recruits, but it is likely that most sought empowerment and the chance to break away from tradition and servitude. The Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, based in Jakarta, has described the growing involvement and importance of female supporters of IS in Indonesia,¹⁵⁸ some of whom have already been involved in terrorist attacks. As well, over 100 have travelled to Syria, and many more have tried; it is likely that at least some of the returnees will present a terrorist risk.

Some women have also shown themselves to be successful recruiters, and as with men, female returnees may encourage others to commit terrorist crimes.¹⁵⁹ In September



2016, the French authorities arrested three women, one of whom was an IS recruiter, for leaving a car bomb near Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The plot had been guided by IS members in Syria.¹⁶⁰ The authorities in Morocco disrupted a similarly directed group of 10 women in October 2016.¹⁶¹ In September 2016, IS claimed an

attack by three women on a police station in Kenya.¹⁶² An August 2017 report from The Heritage Foundation noted a marked jump in the involvement of women in terrorist plots in Europe over the previous two years, finding that in the five months to May 2017, seven terrorist plots in Europe, or 23 per cent of the total, had involved women, a similar figure to the previous year but a marked increase over 2014 and 2015 when the numbers had been only 13 per cent and 5 per cent respectively.¹⁶³

The report noted a similar percentage of plots involving children. The caliphate has regarded anyone over 15 as an adult, but children as young as nine have been trained to use weapons and taught to kill.¹⁶⁴ From 2014 to 2016, IS is believed to have recruited and trained more than 2,000 boys between the ages of nine and 15 as Cubs of the caliphate.¹⁶⁵ In a report on IS atrocities dated August 2016, UNAMI and OHCHR reported a witness saying that IS was training Yazidi and Chechen children as young as 12 in the use of weapons,¹⁶⁶ and IS videos have featured children that look no older than five executing prisoners.

The United Nations Human Rights Council at the beginning of 2016 believed that in Mosul province alone IS had abducted between 800 and 900 children, subjecting those over ten to military training and younger ones to indoctrination.¹⁶⁷ In June 2017, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor reported that IS had recruited over 1,000 children for military training, including as suicide bombers.¹⁶⁸ Although outside the immediate scope of this paper, between April 2011 and July 2017, IS in West Africa, otherwise known as Boko Haram, 'deployed 434 bombers to 247 different targets during 238 suicide-bombing attacks. At least 56% of these bombers were women, and at least 81 bombers were specifically identified as children or teenagers.'¹⁶⁹

Table: Foreign Women and Children in the Islamic State¹⁷⁰

COUNTRY	TOTAL ¹⁷¹	WOMEN	CHILDREN
Australia ¹⁷²	165	~25	70
Austria ¹⁷³	<300	17	40
Belgium ¹⁷⁴	~478	~85	~118 ¹⁷⁵
Bosnia ¹⁷⁶	148	60	81
Canada ¹⁷⁷	~160	~35	
EU ¹⁷⁸	~4,000	~680	
France	1,910	~320	460 ¹⁷⁹

BEYOND THE CALIPHATE

COUNTRY	TOTAL ¹⁷¹	WOMEN	CHILDREN
Germany ¹⁸⁰	~900	~190	56 ¹⁸¹
Indonesia	~600	113 ¹⁸²	
Italy ¹⁸³	110	6	
Kazakhstan ¹⁸⁴	~500	>200 women	and children
Kyrgyzstan ¹⁸⁵	~500		>130
Kosovo ¹⁸⁶	~300	44	27
Malaysia ¹⁸⁷	91	12	17
Morocco ¹⁸⁸	1,623	~275	
Netherlands ¹⁸⁹	280	>90	> 90
Russia	3,417		>350 ¹⁹⁰
Spain	204	21 ¹⁹¹	
Sweden ¹⁹²	267	~70	45 ¹⁹³
Switzerland	~70	7	
Tunisia ¹⁹⁴	~3,000	~100	
UK	~850	>100 ¹⁹⁵	50 ¹⁹⁶

THE RESPONSE

Public reaction to incidents of domestic terrorism carried out by people known to the authorities has been critical. The public asks why, if these people were known to the authorities, were they allowed to be free, or not subject to round-the-clock surveillance. This illustrates the fundamental problem – and success – of modern terrorism: governments are under pressure to limit freedoms on suspicion that a crime might be committed, rather than as a result of proven criminal activity. They are under pressure to increase protective measures even though by doing so they are just as likely to raise public anxiety as to spread reassurance.

Given the numbers involved, the real problem for the authorities is in prioritizing targets, and in establishing what sort of approach to take in each case. When a ‘known wolf’, meaning a terrorism suspect, is able to carry out an attack, it is not necessarily because the authorities are paying no attention; it is more likely because they have decided that their attention should be focused elsewhere. Allocating more resources to security is not always the answer; the focus has to be on reducing the threat to manageable levels rather than increasing the capacity of the State to surveil its citizens, a policy that in any case may be more likely to increase terrorism than to reduce it.¹⁹⁷

Government policies for dealing with returnees have generally fallen into one of two

categories.¹⁹⁸ The first is incarceration, and many governments have criminalized going abroad to join groups such as IS. But proof is often hard to come by; and incarceration only postpones the problem, and at the same time risks further radicalization, or the radicalization of fellow inmates. Prison authorities are divided on the merits of segregating prisoners convicted of terrorism from the general prison population as the risk that an extremist prisoner will exert malign influence on his fellows, rather than become deradicalized through their influence, depends on too many variables to be easily calculated. At the same time, if extremists are grouped together, their views are likely to harden and they will form close bonds.

The second approach is generally described as rehabilitation and reintegration, though most returnees were never integrated in the first place. Such programs are notoriously hard to design and run, and the majority of early efforts have stuttered or come to a halt.¹⁹⁹ Even recent attempts, such as in France in 2017, have failed.²⁰⁰ These programs can be extremely resource intensive, and also risk criticism that they treat terrorists far better than other, less dangerous criminals, especially if conducted outside prisons. There are indeed many similarities between the drivers that lead people towards violent extremist groups and the drivers that lead them towards more traditional criminal gangs.

Dealing with child returnees is harder still.²⁰¹ But useful studies on treating both adults and children²⁰² have emerged, and as practical experience follows, it may become easier to design programs and follow-up mechanisms that prove generally successful in understanding and limiting the threat from the wide range of different people that should be subjected to them. Institutional coherence, a culture of sharing information, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems will be essential to government efforts.²⁰³ And increasingly, communities are likely to be involved, though with government support.

This whole of society response reflects the whole of society challenge that IS terrorism has successfully created. It has managed to shake the concepts of immutable borders and national sovereignty on which the international order is founded in a more dramatic and successful way than any preceding insurgent or separatist group. The questions of identity, and the widespread mistrust of government institutions and mainstream politics that IS has managed to exploit are unlikely to go away; nor therefore is the phenomenon of foreign fighters and returnees, whether they join the remnants of IS or other new groups that emerge in its image.

¹ http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/08/01/globally-people-point-to-isis-and-climate-change-as-leading-security-threats/?utm_content=buffer5b9c6&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

² As at July 2017, the US estimated that 12,000 fighters, including foreigners, remained with the Islamic State. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/are-we-nearing-the-endgame-with-isis>

³ https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/07/climate/document-Draft-of-the-Climate-Science-Special-Report.html?_r=0

⁴ A United Nations study of Foreign Fighters, published in July 2017, found consistent evidence of such drivers. See http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/img/Report_Final_20170727.pdf.

⁵ see: http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/07/IPAC_Report_38.pdf. for a discussion of the links between IS and the Southern Philippines.

⁶ RAN Manual on Responses to returnees: Foreign terrorist fighters and their families July 2017 estimates more than 42,000 from over 120 countries https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

⁷ Brett McGurk, Special US Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. July 2017 <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/are-we-nearing-the-endgame-with-isis>).

⁸ IS schools teach that “a believer’s aim of jihad for the sake of Allah is either victory over the Kuffar (infidels) or death for the sake of Allah.” http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/an_education_in_terror.

⁹ <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>.

¹⁰ http://www.soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL.pdf.

¹¹ IS issued a recorded statement by al Baghdadi to this effect on 28 September 2017.

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

¹³ See also <http://www.intelligencepost.com/what-is-lorem-ipsum/>

¹⁴ Some appear to have been instructed to go to SE Asia by IS, others may have chosen to do so because no visa is required to travel from Turkey for example to Malaysia.

¹⁵ <http://intelligencebriefs.com/al-shabaab-killing-its-kenyan-tanzanian-commanders-fighters-over-isis-allegiance/>

¹⁶ <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates>

¹⁷ The historic and highly symbolic name used by IS to refer to parts of Iran and Central Asia.

¹⁸ The table does not include countries for which there has been no new update since the Soufan Group paper of December 2015.

¹⁹ Figures revise the Soufan Group update of December 2015.

- ²⁰<http://www.mia.gov.tr/kurumlar/mia.gov.tr/Genel/deas%207%20temmuz.pdf>
- ²¹http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/409. P. 14.
- ²²<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/2388-de-radicalising-the-western-balkans>. Unchanged since 2015.
- ²³Official source Jan 2016. These figures remained unchanged at March 2017, see <http://www.slate.fr/story/139865/afrique-du-nord-ouest-annees-difficiles-daech-etat-islamique-alqaida>.
- ²⁴<https://www.asio.gov.au/abc-rn-breakfast-fran-kelly.html>.
- ²⁵<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-03/asio-warns-of-threats-in-south-east-asia/8323604>.
- ²⁶http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_Verfassungsschutz/Verfassungsschutzbericht_Jahr_2016.pdf. Figure unchanged at May 2017.
- ²⁷Prevented from leaving Austria. http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_Verfassungsschutz/Verfassungsschutzbericht_Jahr_2016.pdf
- ²⁸<https://www.meydan.tv/en/site/news/21656/>
- ²⁹(Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia) <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/2388-de-radicalising-the-western-balkans>.
- ³⁰Pieter Van Ostaeyen & Guy Van Vlierden, <https://emmejihad.wordpress.com>
- ³¹According to Van Ostaeyen and Van Vlierden, 45 were stopped abroad and 22 in Belgium as at end August 2017. Ibid.
- ³²170 according to official from Belgian Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (OCAM/OCAD) in February 2017.
- ³³<https://www.yahoo.com/news/bosnia-preparing-return-islamic-state-fighters-133936992.html>
- ³⁴http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/women-in-ve-eng_594236.pdf.
- ³⁵https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf
- ³⁶<https://www.csis.gc.ca/thtrtnvrnmnt/trrrsm/index-en.php>.
- ³⁷<http://www.intelligencerpost.com/what-is-lorem-ipsum/> According to briefing by officials, about 95% of Central Asian fighters in Syria/Iraq were previously resident in Russia.
- ³⁸<https://www.pet.dk/English/Center%20for%20Terror%20Analysis/~media/VTD%202017/VTD2017ENpdf.ashx>.
- ³⁹Plus 500-1,000 with IS in Sinai. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/02/egypts-failed-revolution?mbid=nl_161228_daily&CNDID=26432331&spMailingID=10134301&spUserID=MTMzMTgyNzU5Mjk3S0&spJobID=1062412909&spReportId=MTA2MjQx-MjkwOQS2
- ⁴⁰Compilation of figures for those EU countries included in this table suggest a more likely figure of over 5,500. https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf.
- ⁴¹https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf.
- ⁴²'Väldsam extremism, lägesöversikt', Inrikesministeriet (Finland), February 2017. http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79235/03_2017_Vakivaltaisen_ekstremismin_tk_1_2017.pdf
- ⁴³<http://www.lejdd.fr/politique/collomb-sur-les-francais-de-retour-de-syrie-et-dirak-nous-en-sommes-a-217-majeurs-et-54-mineurs-3404645>
- ⁴⁴<http://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN1ALOSM>
- ⁴⁵Including 54 children, <http://www.lejdd.fr/politique/>

collomb-sur-les-francais-de-retour-de-syrie-et-dirak-nous-en-sommes-a-217-majeurs-et-54-mineurs-3404645

⁴⁶<http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CAD93.pdf>.

⁴⁷<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/georgia-tackles-thorny-problem-radicalization>.

⁴⁸Updated July 2017. <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications>. 890 at end 2016 <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/public-relations/publications/annual-reports>

⁴⁹ 45 from India, others were migrant workers. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pro-islamic-state-group-warns-of-attack-on-taj-mahal/story-nnoYq5kP43TXHHU6x0d9wJ.html>. In May 2017, 142 Indians were considered to be affiliated with IS. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/assessing-the-islamic-state-threat-to-india-it-is-a-serious-but-manageable-challenge/>.

⁵⁰ Twenty-one from Kerala; <http://www.firstpost.com/india/kerala-youth-who-joined-islamic-state-in-2016-killed-in-airstrike-in-afghanistan-3880275.html>.

⁵¹ <https://www.bnpt.go.id/kalah-di-irak-dan-syria-alumni-isis-sasar-indonesia.html>.

⁵² 360 plus 75 stopped by Indonesian authorities. <http://aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/indonesia-seeks-stronger-anti-terror-law-against-daesh/662781>

⁵³ October 2016. <http://aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/indonesia-seeks-stronger-anti-terror-law-against-daesh/662781>. Fifty per cent women and children.

⁵⁴ <http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/indonesia-and-the-islamic-state-threat/>.

⁵⁵ <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/19-Israelis-to-have-citizenship-revoked-for-fighting-with-ISIS-503145>

⁵⁶ Official briefing, Brussels October 2016

⁵⁷ https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf

⁵⁸ <http://www.680news.com/2015/12/12/jordanian-woman-who-fled-islamic-state-dorm-recounts-sophisticated-recruitment-by-extremists/>

⁵⁹ http://ara.reuters.com/article/ME_TOPNEWS_MORE/idARAKBN17Y1UG?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0.

⁶⁰ <http://www.thearabweekly.com/Levant/8268/Jordan-wary-about-jihadists-wishing-to-return-home>.

⁶¹ <http://www.islamedianalysis.info/about-500-600-people-originating-from-kazakhstan-fighting-alongside-isis/>

⁶² http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2017/01/11/feature-01.

⁶³ http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Reintegration_842325.pdf

⁶⁴ Briefing by Kosovar Security Council Secretariat, October 2017

⁶⁵ Of which 75 are men, the rest women and children (Ibid).

⁶⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kuwait-security-cyberarmy-idUSKCN1111CT>. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kuwait-security-cyberarmy-idUSKCN1111CT>

⁶⁷ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/is-central-asia-ready-to-face-isis/>

⁶⁸ In September 2017, the Kyrgyz authorities estimated that around 400 fighters were still alive.

⁶⁹ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/178-how-islamic-state-rose-fell-and-could-rise-again-maghreb>.

⁷⁰ <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/2388-de-radicalising-the-western-balkans>.

- ⁷¹<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/12/194965/special-branch-drop-bombshell-reveal-14-attack-attempts-msia-foiled?m=1>. Though could be 300-400 according to regional security sources in September 2017.
- ⁷²Bureau Central d'Investigations Judiciaires (BCIJ) <https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/52912/abdelhak-khiam-annonce-marocains-rejoint.html>. Though this account also inverts the figure as 1,632.
- ⁷³Nov. 2016. http://telquel.ma/2016/11/30/marocains-daech-grand-retour_1525637 (but quoting weak source)
- ⁷⁴Oct. 2016. Ibid quoting BCIJ.
- ⁷⁵Focus on Returnees, AIVD <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2017/02/15/publication-focus-on-returnees>.
- ⁷⁶As at July 2017, briefing by officials.
- ⁷⁷<https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/krim/pst-40-fra-norge-tilsluttet-is-i-syria-akkurat-naa/a/23564273>
- ⁷⁸January 2017. http://www.pst.no/media/82645/pst_trusselvurd-2017_eng_web.pdf.
- ⁷⁹Ibid.
- ⁸⁰<https://www.dawn.com/news/1275069> reports 650 in all foreign theatres.
- ⁸¹<https://meduza.io/feature/2016/03/28/rossiyane-protiv-rossiyan-v-sirii> <https://rg.ru/2016/03/17/mvd-na-storone-terroristov-v-sirii-i-irake-voiuut-do-35-tys-rossiian.html>. President Putin's number of 9,000, see above, seems to have been an estimate that included former republics of the USSR.
- ⁸²Informal estimates by security sources estimated the number at over 5,000 in July 2017.
- ⁸³Ministry of Interior source.
- ⁸⁴http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/women-in-ve-eng_594236.pdf.
- ⁸⁵https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0122.
- ⁸⁶Spanish Prosecutor to the Audiencia Nacional, July 2017.
- ⁸⁷There has been no official update since October 2015 when the number stood at 70, but well-informed sources suggest that these figures (including Libya) are more likely correct <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article63168>.
- ⁸⁸<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article59480>.
- ⁸⁹<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-sri-lanka/sri-lanka-says-32-elite-muslims-have-joined-islamic-state-in-syria-idUSKBN13D1EE>
- ⁹⁰Gustafsson, Linus and Magnus Ranstorp. 2017. "Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An Analysis of Open-Source Intelligence and Statistical Data." Swedish Defence University. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- ⁹¹<https://www.newsd.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/48136.pdf>.
- ⁹²<http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/is-central-asia-ready-to-face-isis/>.
- ⁹³<https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-islamic-state-pardoned-militants-reintegration/28661770.html>
- ⁹⁴<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/world/americas/trying-to-stanch-trinidads-flow-of-young-recruits-to-isis.html?smid=tw-share&r=0>
- ⁹⁵Official figure from December 2016 including Libya, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/tunisia-return-islamic-state-fighters-syria-controversy.html#ixzz4WcAgFSRd>. A United Nations expert group put the number at 4,200 in Iraq and Libya in July 2015. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16223&LangID=E>. Figures vary widely and tracking departures to Libya and onward travel is near impossible. The true number could be around 7,000, including Libya.

⁹⁶ Plus over 12,500 stopped from leaving the country by Tunisian authorities.

⁹⁷ <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/tunisia-says-800-returning-jihadists-jailed-or-tracked-20161230>.

⁹⁸ Official figures provided through the Turkish MFA, Sept 2017.

⁹⁹ Number of Turks arrested or detained by the authorities for affiliation with IS or AQ from 2011 to July 2017. (Ibid)

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.counter-terror.kz/ru/article/view?id=3470>

¹⁰¹ Uighurs have joined various al-Qaeda-related groups, not just IS. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13438-central-asian-militants-shifting-loyalties-in-syria-the-case-of-the-turkistan-islamic-party.html>

¹⁰² <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/09/opinions/terrorism-16-years-after-9-11-opinion-bergen/index.html>.

¹⁰³ All al-Qaeda-related groups. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/isis-and-central-asia-a-shifting-recruiting-strategy/>.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-newsroom/nctc-speeches-and-testimony/item/1782-nctc-director-provides-assessment-at-aspens-security-forum>

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.ladepêche.fr/article/2017/09/28/2654514-menace-jihadiste-vient-desormais-principalement-interieur-selon-patron-dgsi.html>

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Evans, DG of BSS from 2007-29013, told the BBC in August 2017 that he believed the current phase of terrorism would last another 20 years.

¹⁰⁷ <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/index.html>, and there have been many more since then.

¹⁰⁸ The Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul on 1 January 2017. <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-reina-nightclub-attack-and-the-islamic-state-threat-to-turkey>

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/440/html>

¹¹⁰ <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/08/australia-disrupts-sophisticated-plot-directed-by-islamic-state.php>

¹¹¹ See: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/04/world/asia/isis-messaging-app-terror-plot.html?_r=0.

¹¹² For a discussion of the diverse threat see: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ICCT-Reed-Pohl-The-Four-Dimensions-of-the-Foreign-Fighters-Threat-June-2017.pdf>.

¹¹³ See: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/the-islamic-state-may-be-failing-but-its-strategic-communications-legacy-is-here-to-stay/>.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.mia.gov.tr/kurumlar/mia.gov.tr/Genel/deas%CC%A7%207%20temmuz.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Baqiya (remaining) and tatamaddad (expanding).

¹¹⁶ IS magazine Dabiq issue 5 celebrates at length the growth of the caliphate under the title “Remaining and Expanding”. <https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue-5-remaining-and-expanding.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Gerard Colombe, French Minister of the Interior speaking to Jean-Jacques Bourdin on BFMTV on 24 August 2017. Updated 8 Sept.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/05/britain-faces-different-level-of-terror-threat-after-london-bridge-attacks>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/public-relations/publications/annual-reports>

¹²⁰ <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/TaskForceFinalReport.pdf>

¹²¹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/09/opinions/terrorism-16-years-after-9-11-opinion-bergen/index.html>

¹²²<https://news.law.fordham.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/TheAmericanException9-17.pdf>

¹²³<http://www.mia.gov.tr/kurumlar/mia.gov.tr/Genel/deas%CC%A7%207%20temmuz.pdf>

¹²⁴<https://www.asio.gov.au/abc-rn-breakfast-fran-kelly.html>. Plus one right wing plot. <https://www.asio.gov.au/independent-national-security-legislation-monitor-inslm-2017-statutory-deadline-reviews-public.html>.

¹²⁵http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/573. No start date given.

¹²⁶Briefing from United Nations al-Qaeda/Daesh Monitoring Team, July 2017.

¹²⁷<https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/12/194965/special-branch-drop-bombshell-reveal-14-attack-attempts-msia-foiled?m=1>. Time frame not clear.

¹²⁸This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

¹²⁹<http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-isis-intel-20170908-story,amp.html>.

¹³⁰Aymenn Jawad al Tamimi deserves special mention in this regard.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²See for example, Enhancing the Understanding of the Terrorist Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in Syria, Hamed El Said and Richard Barrett, July 2017. http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/img/Report_Final_20170727.pdf

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Charlie Winter was among the first scholars to suggest this, see for example <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/mosul-isis-propaganda/532533/>

¹³⁵See, for example <http://www.jihadica.com/caliphate-in-disarray/>

¹³⁶<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/philippines-isis/536253/>, See also <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/isis-recruits-fighters-philippines-instead-syria-n796741>.

¹³⁷According to Afghan security officials, IS operates from Nangarhar and Kunar in the east to Badakhshan, Jawzjan and Faryab in the north and Baghdis and Ghor in the west. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-blast-idUSKBN1AG00M>.

¹³⁸<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/local-news/2017/06/01/8-foreign-fighters-killed-marawi-545097>.

¹³⁹Informal briefing July 2017, though in April 2017, US authorities said that despite IS wishing to do so, there was so far no evidence. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-islamic-state-idUSKBN1AI0V1>

¹⁴⁰A study by Scott Atran and others The devoted actor's will to fight and the spiritual dimension of human conflict, published in Nature in September 2017, found that those who fought for a 'sacred value', such as espoused by IS, were far more prepared to die than those united by another bond. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-017-0193-3>.

¹⁴¹http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/573. p 5.

¹⁴²See: <https://undocs.org/S/2017/35>; further confirmed in July 2017.

¹⁴³For example, one of the perpetrators of the attacks in Paris in November 2015 is said to have joined IS in Syria within one month of showing interest in Islam.

¹⁴⁴For the role of Belgian foreign fighters in this respect see Pieter Van Ostaeyen and Guy Van Vlierden, http://europeandemocracy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Belgian_fighters-DRAFT8-webversion.pdf

¹⁴⁵Though it is interesting to note that Mehdi Nemmouche, who killed four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, despite being a core member of IS who had recently returned from Syria, does not appear to have been despatched to commit his crime.

¹⁴⁶ Referred to as the al-Khasar Brigade <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/clandestine-isis-unit-training-britons-to-launch-attacks-on-uk-9hjm3b6gr>; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/06/isis-fighters-cannot-escape-syria-create-chaos-europe-says-us/>.

¹⁴⁷ People leaving areas controlled by IS have used whatever route may work, joining genuine refugees or contracting smugglers individually. Most appear to have left through Turkey.

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.dw.com/en/interpol-receives-apparent-islamic-state-suicide-bomber-list/a-39951605>.

¹⁴⁹ As at September 2017, the Iraqi authorities said that they held 1,400 foreign wives and children of suspected IS fighters. <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKCN1BLOSF>.

¹⁵⁰ For example Sajida al Rishawi in the Amman bombings of November 2005.

¹⁵¹ See https://ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss7.pdf. For an analysis of the IS position.

¹⁵² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/female-suicide-bomber-jihadist-bride-isis-iraq-fall-of-mosul-a7832276.html>

¹⁵³ Briefing by security officials in August 2017. It is interesting to note that the Taliban in Pakistan, in some ways similar to IS, began publication of *Sunnat-e-Khula* in August 2017 an on-line English language magazine that encouraged female preparation for fighting, based on the example of a 7th Century Muslim heroine.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Simon Cottee and Mia Bloom https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/isis-female-suicide-bomber/539172/?utm_source=twb.

¹⁵⁵ Charlie Winter, "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the al-Khansaa Brigade," Quilliam Foundation, February 2015, p. 22.

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.raqqa-sl.com/en/2017/08/29/the-story-of-hajer-isis-all-female-battalion/>.

¹⁵⁷ See also: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/08/isis-women-ideology-mosul/>

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2105470/what-turns-hong-kong-maid-towards-islamic-state>

¹⁵⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

¹⁶⁰ <https://apnews.com/785366b506c74f8bb1b74aff384e1cb/official-paris-gas-canisters-suspect-pledged-loyalty>.

¹⁶¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-security-idUSKCN1231K0>

¹⁶² <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-africa-using-women-soldiers-kenya-attack-mombasa-police-station-claimed-islamic-2415485>.

¹⁶³ <http://www.heritage.org/europe/report/european-islamist-plots-and-attacks-2014-and-how-the-us-can-help-prevent-them>

¹⁶⁴ Focus on Returnees, AIVD 2017 <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2017/02/15/publication-focus-on-returnees>

¹⁶⁵ http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/an_education_in_terror. IS regards nine as the earliest a boy may achieve puberty and so qualify as a fighter.

¹⁶⁶ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMIRreport12Aug2016_en.pdf

¹⁶⁷ Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 May – 31 October 2015. p.14.

¹⁶⁸ <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/1890/Children-exploited-by-all-factions-in-Iraq>.

¹⁶⁹ <https://ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Exploding-Stereotypes-1.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ Accurate numbers are difficult to extract from official accounts as some are absorbed into a total figure for all who have travelled, some include children born in Syria and Iraq while others do not, and some are clearly estimates without the basis being clear.

¹⁷¹ Taken from Table 1.

¹⁷²March 2017. <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/seventy-children-of-australian-jihadis-in-syria-and-iraq/news-story/5c70d4f56a55ec176e7f65600f36b803>

¹⁷³https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-Annexes-Links.pdf.

¹⁷⁴August 2017. <https://emmejihad.wordpress.com>.

¹⁷⁵38 (ibid) though some may have returned plus 80 born there (OCAM/OCAD briefing The Hague, February 2017)

¹⁷⁶<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/2388-de-radicalising-the-western-balkans>; http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/women-in-ve-eng_594236.pdf.

¹⁷⁷<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2016-pblc-rpr-trrrst-thrt/index-en.aspx>.

¹⁷⁸https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf.

¹⁷⁹<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰Half under five.

¹⁸¹<https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications>

¹⁸²'Analysis of the background and process of radicalization among persons who left Germany to travel to Syria or Iraq based on Islamist motivations', Federal Criminal Police Office, Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism, October 2016, p. 45.

¹⁸³<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-asia-security-idUKKBN1AE0EN>.

¹⁸⁴http://securityobserver.org/italian-foreign-terrorist-fighters-numbers-features-and-case-studies/#_edn14

¹⁸⁵<https://tengrinews.kz/tv/novosti/obschestvo/4278/>.

¹⁸⁶<https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27643417.html>.

¹⁸⁷Jan. 2017. http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/women-in-ve-eng_594236.pdf.

¹⁸⁸Dec 2016. <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/12/194965/special-branch-drop-bombshell-reveal-14-attack-attempts-msia-foiled?m=1>

¹⁸⁹<https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ICCT-Mehra-FTF-Dec2016-2.pdf>. For figures for women from Australia, Morocco, and Switzerland.

¹⁹⁰Focus on Returnees, AIVD, 2017, <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2017/02/15/publication-focus-on-returnees>. Also https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

<https://www.rferl.org/a/wives-children-russian-born-islamic-state-fighters-return-iraq-syria/28712456.html>.

¹⁹¹Spanish Prosecutor to the Audiencia Nacional, July 2017.

¹⁹²<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

¹⁹³Under 19. Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Informal briefing by officials, August 2017

¹⁹⁵Shiraz Maher, August 2017. <http://www.newstatesman.com/world/middle-east/2017/08/what-should-happen-foreign-women-and-children-who-joined-isis>

¹⁹⁶Noman Benotman and Nikita Malik, March 2016. The Children of Islamic State. <https://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2725/>

files/2016/04/the-children-of-islamic-state.pdf

¹⁹⁷A UNDP study *The Journey to Extremism in Africa* (Sept 2017) found that heavy handed security operations by the State were a major factor in driving people towards extremism. <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en/reports>

¹⁹⁸For a discussion of this issue, see, for example, Charles Lister, *Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration?* <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/En-Fighters-Web.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹See for example, Hamed el Said: *Deradicalising Violent Extremists: Counter Radicalisation and Deradicalisation Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States*, Routledge, (2013).

²⁰⁰The one (of 13) centre opened, in September 2016. It closed in July 2017. <http://m.france24.com/en/20170801-france-jihad-deradicalisation-centre-closes-policy?ref=tw>.

²⁰¹The only undoubtedly successful program for radicalized children is Sabaoon in Pakistan, a school run by Social Welfare, Academics and Training (SWAaT) Pakistan, for children recruited by the Taliban.

²⁰²See for example, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ICCT-vanderHeide-Geenen-Children-of-the-Caliphate-2.pdf>.

²⁰³See <https://icct.nl/publication/tackling-the-surge-of-returning-foreign-fighters/>.

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About The Soufan Center (TSC)

The Soufan Center (TSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving as a resource and forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue related to global security issues and emergent threats. TSC fills a niche-role by producing independent, quality research and hosting proactive events in order to effectively equip thought leaders, policy makers, governments, bi- and multilateral institutions, the media, funders, and those in the non-profit and academic communities to engage in strategic security-related practices. Our work focuses on a broad range of complex security issues—from international and domestic terrorism, to humanitarian crisis analysis, to refugee and immigrant issues, and more.

TSC's dynamic team of research and policy analysts, with diverse professional, educational and cultural backgrounds — including experience in human rights; international development; federal, state and local government; law enforcement; and military — leverage subject matter expertise against real-world experience to offer world-class investigative methodologies, innovative analytical tools, and contextualized, actionable solutions.

About The Global Strategy Network

The Global Strategy Network (TGSN) is a worldwide affiliation of practitioners and policymakers with a shared commitment to resolving conflict and increasing social resilience to political violence. Our network has both local and international expertise in addressing conflict and the drivers of conflict having worked in national governments, regional organizations, the United Nations and the private sector.

Our mission is the design and delivery of tailored programs and projects directed towards establishing social cohesion. We also have significant research capabilities. We work with governments, civil society and international organizations as well as private donors to implement effective and sustainable projects in some of the most troubled parts of the world.

We take a broad view of conflict resolution, seeing social and economic factors as important as political ones. We validate projects as well as design new ones on the basis of a careful analysis of needs, feasibility and impact. We regard effective monitoring and evaluation as the sole measure of success. TGSN places strong emphasis on gender equality and the engagement of youth in all areas of our work.



THE GLOBAL STRATEGY NETWORK

This report is a collaboration between The Soufan Center
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