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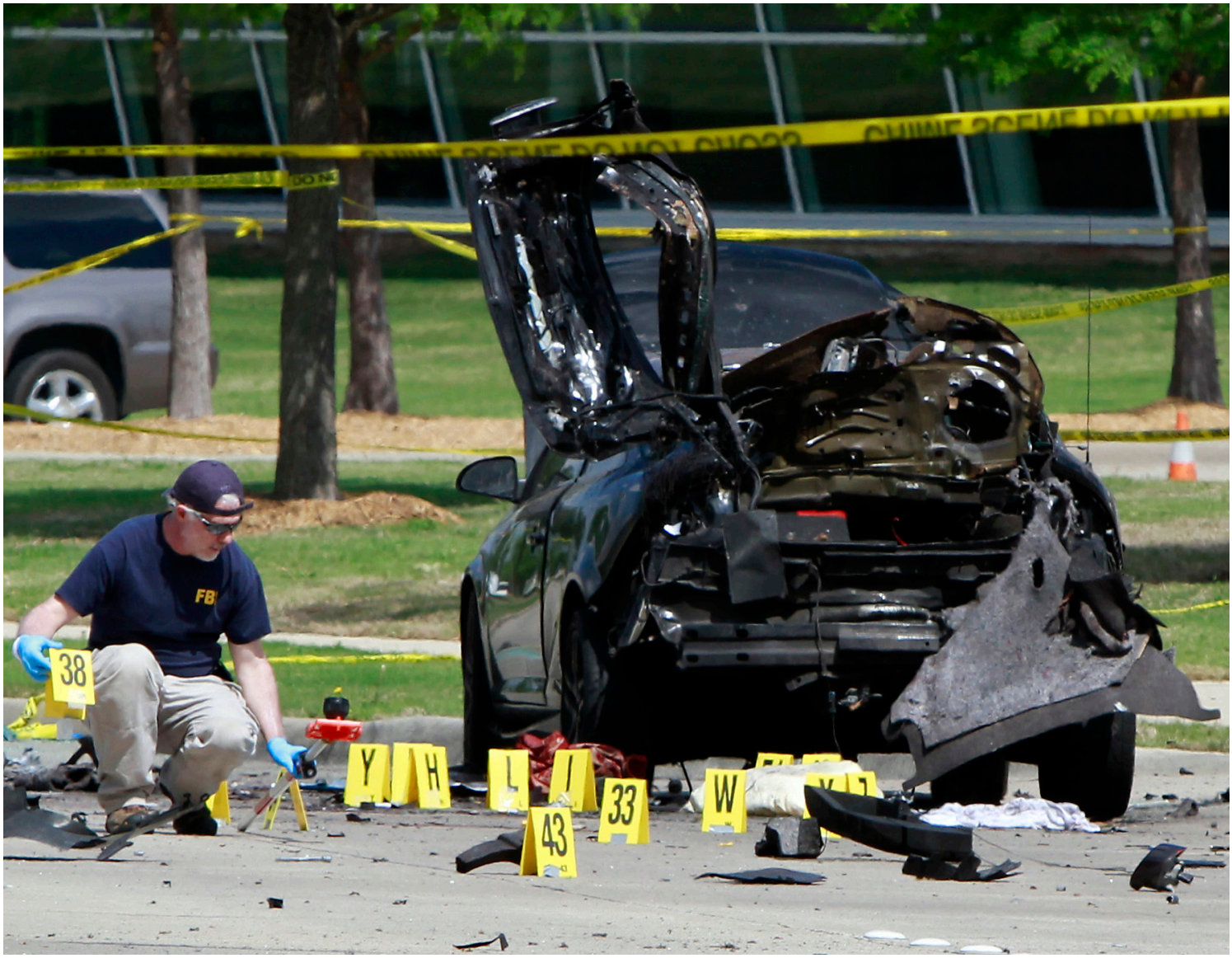

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The Virtual Entrepreneurs of the Islamic State

How the group's virtual planners threaten the United States

Seamus Hughes and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens

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In our feature article, Seamus Hughes and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens focus on the threat to the United States from the Islamic State's "virtual entrepreneurs" who have been using social media and encryption applications to recruit and correspond with sympathizers in the West, encouraging and directing them to engage in terrorist activity. They find that since 2014, contact with a virtual entrepreneur has been a feature of eight terrorist plots in the United States, involving 13 individuals.

In our other cover article, Ahmet Yayla, the former police counterterrorism chief in the Turkish city of Sanliurfa near the Syrian border, outlines how investigations into the New Year's Eve Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul have made clear the "immense scale of the Islamic State threat to Turkey." While the attack, remotely steered by Islamic State operatives in Raqqa, was the work of a single gunman, a 50-strong network in Istanbul with access to at least half a million dollars provided logistical support. With the Islamic State declaring all-out war on Turkey, Turkish counterterrorism capacity severely weakened by recent purges, as many as 2,000 Islamic State fighters already on Turkish soil, and the possibility that Islamic State fighters will flood into Turkey as the caliphate crumbles, Yayla warns of severe implications for international security.

Daniel Heinke, the director of the state bureau of investigation (LKA) in Bremen, outlines the key findings of an official German study of almost 800 German foreign fighters—the largest such study by a Western government—and the takeaways for smarter counterterrorism. He notes that while the number of Germans traveling to join the Islamic State has slowed to a trickle, there has been a surge in violent Islamist extremism inside the country, creating concern that returning foreign fighters will add "lethal capabilities to an already highly adrenalized Islamist community." Andrew Zammit outlines how the jihadi threat in Australia has transformed since the Islamic State called for attacks in Western countries. While there has been an increase in attacks and plots in Australia, they have also become less sophisticated and ambitious. Finally, Matthew DuPée examines the growing financial windfall the Afghan Taliban and other jihadi groups are extracting from illegal mining in Afghanistan, which is now providing the Taliban with as much as $300 million in revenue per year.

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Cover: A member of the FBI Evidence Response Team investigates the crime scene outside of the Curtis Culwell Center after a shooting occurred the day before, on May 4, 2015, in Garland, Texas. (Ben Torres/Getty Images)

The Threat to the United States from the Islamic State's Virtual Entrepreneurs

By Seamus Hughes and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens

Among the most recent evolutions of jihadi terrorist tactics in the West has been the rise of the virtual entrepreneur. The increased use of social media, often paired with applications that offer the option of encrypted messaging, has enabled members of groups like the Islamic State to make direct and lasting contact with radicalized Americans. In some cases, these individuals direct terror plots, and in others, they provide encouragement and motivation for attacks. In the United States, there are 14 known cases of terrorist-related activity involving 19 U.S.-based individuals where the involvement of an Islamic State virtual entrepreneur has been documented. This outsourcing of terrorism has been a game changer in Islamic State efforts to attack the West.

Over the last year, a new term has entered the lexicon of American and European terrorism analysts, law enforcement, and national security journalists: the 'virtual plotter.'[1] This phrase, and variations of it, describes members of jihadi terrorist groups, mainly affiliated with the Islamic State, who use social media and applications with encryption capabilities to reach out to and correspond with radicalized Westerners. The emergence of applications such as Telegram, SureSpot, Kik, and—since its recent offering of end-to-end encryption—WhatsApp has been a particular game changer for the Islamic State and its efforts in the West. In some cases, its members plot and direct attacks, helping to hone and focus the often undisciplined zeal of potential lone-actor terrorists so as to ensure that their eventual actions achieve either the maximum propaganda value or casualty impact.[a]

More frequently, however, these virtual plotters have acted in a more auxiliary capacity, plugging their Western contacts into wider extremist milieus (both online and offline) and encouraging extreme beliefs, while offering suggestions and options for mobilization. Indeed, because of the variety of roles they play, the authors have chosen to refer to these individuals as 'virtual entrepreneurs,' thus allowing for a broader encapsulation of the different categories of their involvement. Out of a total of 38 Islamic State-inspired domestic plots and attacks in the United States between March 1, 2014, and March 1, 2017, at least eight (21 percent) have involved some form of digital communication with virtual entrepreneurs.[b] The peak period for this activity was 2015, with virtual entrepreneurs involved in six separate plots. In addition, virtual entrepreneurs have also been involved in at least six other terrorism-related cases, including assisting with logistics related to traveling to join the Islamic State.[c] This brings the total number of U.S. terrorism cases linked to Islamic State virtual entrepreneurs to 14, involving 19 U.S.-based individuals.

This development is a reminder that the strategies and tactics pursued by the modern global jihad movement, as part of its efforts to maintain an international presence and ability to conduct attacks, are varied and evolving. Jihadi strategists swiftly adapt to the constantly shifting environments around them while opportunistically exploiting new technologies. One of the benefits of such increased contact with radicalized Westerners is that it has given the Islamic State wider scope to claim ownership of attacks that it had little to do with in reality. This allows it to inflate its impact and reach, which is crucial to the group's propaganda efforts.

To some extent, the emergence of virtual entrepreneurs represents a hybrid between what are commonly seen as the two previous manifestations of the jihadi terrorist threat to the West: networked and inspired lone-attacker plots. The former relies on direct involvement by an organization in terms of training, direction, financing, and indoctrination. The lone-actor and now hybrid categories rely more on the creation of loosely connected milieus, often online, and the wide availability of an accessible form of global

a The plots are often referred to as 'Islamic State-enabled.' While this typology is useful, it is also problematic as it may suggest that the plots are planned by the Islamic State leadership. It remains unclear if Islamic State virtual entrepreneurs are taking direction from senior Islamic State figures or acting independently.

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b The eight separate plots involved 13 individuals in total. They are Fareed Mumuni and Munther Omar Saleh (2015); David Daoud Wright and Nicholas Rovinski (2015); Munir Abdulkader (2015); Justin Nojan Sullivan (2015); Jalil Ibn Ameer Aziz (2015); Emanuel Lutchman (2015); Abdul Malik Abdul Kareem (2015); and Mohamed Bailor Jalloh (2016). The dates provided here reflect when the defendants were charged, as opposed to when the offense was carried out or contact was made with the virtual entrepreneur. Three individuals were killed either conducting their operation or during attempts to arrest them. Garland attackers Nadir Soofi and Elton Simpson were killed while conducting their operation. Usaamah Abdullah Rahim was killed when officers tried to arrest him. Soofi and Simpson committed the attack with assistance from Adbul Malik Abdul Kareem. Source: court documents.

c They are Avin Brown (2014), Mohammed Hamzah Khan (2014), Nader Elhuzayel (2015), Ardit Ferizi (2015), Aaron T. Daniels (2016), and Abdul Raheem Habil Ali-Skelton (2016).

jihadi propaganda. Together, these help inspire individuals to carry out attacks on their own and in the name of the global jihad movement, or a specific group within it.

Law enforcement has understandably struggled to categorize this new development. Speaking at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, FBI Executive Assistant Director for the National Security Division Michael Steinbach offered some measure of clarity. He described the current threat picture as "a hybrid between directed and enabled … individuals overseas using encrypted communications to elicit some type of assistance from somebody in the U.S." He also pointed out that these figures often do not specifically direct attacks but rather help in "getting somebody ready to go … getting them motivated, showing them a menu of targets and then saying, 'hey, you take care of it.'"[2]

However, while the use of this tactic has increased as the Islamic State continues to exploit social media and online encryption technologies, the phenomenon of jihadi entrepreneurs making virtual connections with unaffiliated radicalized Westerners is certainly not new. As is often the case when discussing innovative jihadis, one need only look at the activities of the late Yemeni-American jihadi ideologue and recruiter Anwar al-Awlaki, who, via email, was in contact with a number of radicalized individuals in the West and who, in at least one case, helped plot a potential attack.[d] Social media and encrypted messaging apps, along with an expansion of jihadi territories across the globe, are all factors that have nonetheless added a new dimension to such virtual communications.

One of the most devastating recent examples of this tactic come from Europe. In France, Islamic State member Rachid Kassim has been linked to at least two plots that were initially believed to have been carried out by inspired lone-actors with no oversight or direction from the Islamic State.[3] He is also thought to have been the orchestrator of over half of the 17 total plots foiled by French authorities in 2016.[4] Much of the planning was done through his Telegram channel 'Sabre de Lumière' (Sword of Light).[5]

In the United States, the impact of virtual entrepreneurs has not been as deadly as in Europe, but this is not for want of trying. The most sustained efforts to import this type of terrorism to the United States have come from a group based in Islamic State-held Raqqa, Syria, which the FBI has nicknamed 'the Legion.' Made up of around a dozen English-speaking and mainly Western Islamic State operatives, the group has systematically reached out to individuals in the United States using a mixture of direct messaging on Twitter and encrypted messaging.[6][e] The Legion has presented such a threat that, between 2015 and 2016, three of its members were killed in targeted strikes: Junaid Hussain, Reyaad Khan, and Raphael Hostey. While not a member of the Legion, Abu Sa'ad al-Sudani, another Islamic State virtual entrepreneur who was identified by the Department of Defense as a "member, recruiter and external planner," was also killed in April 2016.[7]

Hussain, the most prominent member of the Legion, was a British foreign fighter and former hacker.[8] In 2013, while on bail for hacking charges, Hussain traveled to Islamic State-controlled territory, assuming the *kunya* 'Abu Hussain al-Britani.'[9] Before his death in August 2015, which is thought to have been the result of a British operation codenamed 'Illuminative' carried out by a U.S. airstrike, Hussain had achieved celebrity status among the online English-speaking Islamic State community. Both he and fellow British national Khan were identified by the then-British Prime Minister David Cameron as being "involved in actively recruiting ISIL sympathizers and seeking to orchestrate specific and barbaric attacks against the West."[10] The other known British member of the Legion, Hostey (also known as Abu Qaqa), had traveled to Syria in 2013 and was mainly engaged in recruiting foreign fighters and creating English-language propaganda.[11] Little is known about al-Sudani, who was better known online as Abu Isa al-Amriki, though he has been connected to a number of failed attacks and, under the name 'HoneyNTea,' used Telegram to run an Islamic State terrorist cell in India.[12] In an online posting entitled Days of Sahawatt, al-Sudani describes himself as "merely a solider [sic] from among many other better soldiers here in the Islamic State."[13]

Virtual entrepreneurs are not only found in Syria. Another prominent figure is Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan, who has used various online aliases, including Mujahid Miski. A Somali-American from Minnesota, he traveled to Somalia in 2009 to join the al-Qa`ida-linked militia al-Shabaab and was indicted that year on charges of material support to terrorism. He has since claimed that he left al-Shabaab in 2013 due to its brutal treatment of Somali civilians. Miski has also stated in an interview that in late 2015, his home was raided by al-Shabaab, forcing him to flee and turn himself in to Somali authorities.[14] It is likely that he was also targeted because of his support for the Islamic State.[f]

Before Miski turned himself in, he too was active online and maintained contact with a number of Americans. Over the years, he acted as a key conduit between al-Shabaab and radicalized members of the Somali-American community in the Twin Cities. Following the rise of the Islamic State, he had also formed online relationships with American supporters of the group, helping them in a variety of ways.[15]

This paper analyzes the impact of virtual entrepreneurs in the United States and is among the first to use primary sources to do so. It is based on a review of court filings and interviews with law enforcement officials, reporters, and attorneys connected to the cases. To present a broader and more accurate picture of the threat, the authors have categorized exchanges between American-based Islamic State sympathizers and virtual entrepreneurs as either 'direct

d This was the case of British Airways employee Rajib Karim. For more, see Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki Became the Face of Western Jihad," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, September 11, 2011, and Scott Shane, *Objective Troy* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2016).

e The membership of the Legion has yet to be fully identified. At the very least, it publicly consisted of British citizens Junaid Hussain (also known as Abu Hussain al-Britani) and his wife, Sally Jones (also known as Umm Hussain al-Britani); Reyaad Khan (also known as Abu Dujana); Raphael Hostey (also known as Abu Qaqa); and Trinidadian citizen Shawn Parson (also known as Abu Khalid al-Amriki). Based on conversations with individuals familiar with the group, the authors also strongly suspect that another British national, Omar Hussain (also known as Abu Sa'eed al-Britani), is also a member. Abu Sa'ad al-Sudani was not a member of the Legion but had close coordination with the group. For example, in at least one instance, Omar Hussain edited the online postings of al-Sudani.

f Since early 2015, the Islamic State has attempted to coax, and later coerce, al-Shabaab to switch its allegiances from al-Qa`ida. The leadership has fiercely and violently resisted these efforts, imprisoning and killing any suspected Islamic State sympathizers.

plotting' or 'encouragement and facilitation.'[g]

Direct Plotting

Ultimately, virtual entrepreneurs have found themselves targeted by authorities not only because of their online conversations with radicalized Americans, but also their direct involvement in terrorist plots in the West. Among the most clear-cut examples of a virtual entrepreneur planning an attack is that of Ohio resident Munir Abdulkader, who pleaded guilty to a plot to attack U.S. government officers.[16] His flirtation with the Islamic State began in July 2014 when he established Twitter accounts to voice his support for the group.[17] Once he had plugged himself into the online Islamic State community, it was not long until he came across and reached out to Hussain who, in effect, became his handler in the spring of 2015. According to court documents, Abdulkader "was in electronic communication with at least one member of ISIL overseas named Junaid Hussain, and placed himself under the direction of ISIL and its overseas leadership."[18] Initially, Abdulkader was interested in traveling to Syria, but according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy Mangan, who prosecuted the case, "Hussain helped push him to a different course" and turn his focus to a domestic attack "when they decided it simply had gotten too dangerous to go to an airport."[19]

Over the course of their communications, Hussain "ultimately laid out … an overall terrorist attack plan for Abdulkader … to implement."[20] More specifically, he instructed Abdulkader to kidnap an American soldier and record his killing on camera, providing him with the target's name and address. The pair also discussed the best weapon to use and the need to record the attack for later propaganda dissemination.[21] Following this, Hussain suggested that Abdulkader attack a police station in Cincinnati, Ohio. Abdulkader also drew encouragement from Hussain that helped increase his mettle to carry out a violent act. During one of their encrypted online discussions in May 2015, he recounted to Hussain his first experience at a shooting range, telling him it was a "whole new experience but did well. We used magnums, other pistols, m15 or m5 … I love it! Got the targets in face or [stomach]," to which Hussain responded, "Next time ul [sic] be shooting kuffar [nonbelievers] in their face and stomach."[22]

Among Hussain's main interests was inciting and directly planning attacks against people and groups seen as maligning the Prophet Mohammad. In mid-May 2015, David Daoud Wright, Nicholas Alexander Rovinski, and Usaamah Abdullah Rahim were in the advanced stages of a plan to kill an organizer of the Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest, an event in Garland, Texas. Rahim, the senior member of the group, liaised with Hussain about possible attacks. The target was decided upon as a result of these conversations, during which "Hussain directly communicated instructions to Rahim with regard to the murder of [the] Intended Victim," which Rahim subsequently passed on to his accomplice, Wright.[23]

Due to the contact between Rahim and Hussain and subsequent activities by the plotters—including Rahim's purchase of combat knives at the recommendation of Hussain "in case the 'feds' tried to arrest him"[24]—they soon became the subjects of law enforcement surveillance. On June 2, 2015, Rahim was approached by investigators while walking through a parking lot in Roslindale, Massachusetts, and shot dead after attempting to attack them with a knife. Rovinski pleaded guilty, and Wright is currently awaiting trial on terrorist charges.

Junaid Hussain and Reyaad Khan had begun their attempts to direct plots in the United States as early as 2014, when they used social media to solicit Minnesota resident Abdul Raheem Ali-Skelton to "carry out an attack in the United States."[25] During the previous months, he had been interacting and debating with Islamic State members on social media and was soon referred to the two Legion members. Ali-Skelton refused their request, however, and was later arrested and convicted for lying about his contact with the Legion.

Encouragement and Facilitation

While it is in their roles as direct plotters that virtual entrepreneurs gain the most attention, much of their work has involved encouraging their contacts to take on more extreme positions and helping them make connections in real-world foreign fighter networks.

"Very soon carrying out 1st operation of Islamic State in North America," 'TheMujahid' texted to his online contact. The response was quick: "Can u make a video first?"

"TheMujahid," it has since been revealed, was North Carolina native Justin Sullivan, and his Islamic State contact was Hussain, who was writing under one of several online monikers he was using.[26] According to documents from his case, messages found on Sullivan's cell phone showed that he "conspired and agreed with Junaid Hussain to commit such attacks on behalf of, and in support of, ISIL and in an effort to change United States policies against ISIL by avenging U.S.-coalition airstrikes against ISIL fighters."[27] Sullivan had converted to Islam in September 2014 and soon began reading Islamic State propaganda. In December 2014, he used his father's gun to murder his elderly neighbor, though the motive for this has never been fully established.[28]

By mid-2015, Sullivan had planned to buy an assault rifle at a local gun show and expressed a desire to kill up to 1,000 people.[29] Perturbed by his son's behavior, which included destroying Buddha statues and other non-Islamic religious items, Sullivan's father called 911 and informed authorities of his suspicion that his son was becoming an Islamic State supporter.[30] After subsequently entering into conversations with an FBI undercover agent in which he discussed his intentions to carry out an attack, he was arrested in June 2015 and pleaded guilty to providing material support to terrorism. Sullivan's case is indicative of the wider impact of virtual entrepreneurs in the United States beyond direct attack planning.[31] He was not only provided with the encouragement, reassurance, and comradery he needed, but he also received specific advice on how to ensure his attack could provide the most benefit to the Islamic State.

Another U.S. case that sheds further light on the multifaceted role of virtual entrepreneurs is that of Jalil ibn Ameer Aziz of Pennsylvania. Prior to his arrest in December 2015 on charges of conspiracy to provide material support to the Islamic State, Aziz was heavily involved in online extremist networks, creating at least 57 pro-Islamic State Twitter accounts.[32] When authorities searched his house, they discovered a tactical-style backpack with multiple machine guns and other weapons.[33]

Aziz helped connect would-be American Islamic State foreign fighters with Hussain and Khan. According to court filings, Hussain provided Aziz with a Turkish telephone number, which he was

g While such an approach is useful and necessary in order to better understand the threat, the levels of involvement of virtual entrepreneurs remain fluid and defy precise categorization.

Graphic produced by the Program on Extremism at George Washington University

then to share with a potential recruit so that he could communicate with them using encrypted messaging applications. Hussain also suggested to Aziz that if there were any problems, the recruit should contact another member of the Legion, Hostey, via a Twitter profile he provided.[34]

Hostey also communicated with at least two other Islamic State supporters. One of them, Avin Brown, was the first American to be arrested for trying to travel and join the Islamic State. U.S. prosecutors charged him with providing material support to terrorism in March 2014 after he attempted to board a flight in North Carolina bound for Turkey.[35] Brown was friendly online with Hostey and helped connect him with another American Islamic State recruit, Mohammed Khan, from Chicago. In October 2014, Mohammed Khan and his two younger siblings were arrested at O'Hare International Airport as they attempted to fly to Turkey in order to join the Islamic State, with Hostey allegedly providing the logistical support.[36]

Between late 2015 and mid-2016, another domestic Islamist terrorist, Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, had been in communication with Islamic State virtual entrepreneur al-Sudani. Jalloh had traveled to Nigeria, via his native country of Sierra Leone, in June 2015 where he met an unnamed Islamic State facilitator with the intent of receiving assistance to join the group in Libya. He eventually decided against this and opted instead for a plan to attack the U.S. homeland. It was on his way back to the United States, while he was in Sierra Leone, that Jalloh first made online contact with al-Sudani. According to court documents, he was someone whom Jalloh "understood was an ISIL figure engaged in plotting attacks in the

United States."[37]

After his return to the United States, Jalloh communicated regularly with al-Sudani during the first half of 2016. On two separate occasions, al-Sudani arranged for a total of $700 to be sent to him via a family member of Jalloh's in Sierra Leone, who gave the funds to a contact of al-Sudani's in the country. By March 2016, court records show that al-Sudani "was actively plotting an attack in the United States." As part of these efforts, he had put Jalloh in touch with another U.S.-based contact of his in the hope that they would plan an attack together.[38] Unbeknownst to al-Sudani, his contact was an FBI informant. Jalloh first met the informant in April 2016 in Virginia and began discussing with him various options for an attack in the name of the Islamic State. During the meeting, Jalloh claimed that he was constantly thinking about conducting an attack, and when asked to elaborate, he said "Nidal Hassan type of things. That's the kind of stuff I started thinking."[39] As a result of the investigation, Jalloh was arrested in July 2016 after attempting to buy a weapon in North Carolina that he intended to use for an attack. He was later sentenced to 11 years in prison for conspiracy to provide material support to the Islamic State.[40]

Al-Sudani was also heavily involved in encouraging New York-based Islamic State supporter Emanuel Lutchman to plan an attack in the city. They began communicating online in December 2015 after Lutchman found al-Sudani's contact in an Islamic State-produced online document.[41] During these discussions, Lutchman expressed his desire to travel to Libya in order join the Islamic State, but he was told by al-Sudani that he first had to prove himself to the group by executing an attack in the United States. Al-Sudani also pointed out that due to his location "behind enemy lines," Lutchman's real utility to the Islamic State was as a domestic terrorist.[42] He told Lutchman to plan an attack for New Year's Eve 2015, when he would have easy access to large crowds. He also offered Lutchman various pieces of advice both to ensure that the operation was as effective as possible and to avoid capture beforehand. Once the operation was complete, al-Sudani promised Lutchman he would vouch for him to the Islamic State after he arrived in Libya.

By late December, Lutchman—while maintaining regular contact with al-Sudani, who continued to offer advice and moral support—had begun plotting an attack with three accomplices. He was unaware, however, that all of these individuals were working for the FBI. On December 28, Lutchman identified a restaurant in Rochester, New York, as a target and began planning an attack that entailed taking hostages and executing them with a machete.[43] Two days later, he recorded the video al-Sudani had requested of him. Holding his index finger aloft, he pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and announced that "the blood that you spill of the Muslim overseas, we gonna spill the blood of the *kuffar* [unbelievers]."[44] He was arrested immediately afterward, and in August 2016, Lutchman pleaded guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to the Islamic State.

The virtual entrepreneurs of the Islamic State appear to be issuing similar sets of instructions to their American contacts, almost as if they are working from a common script. For example, al-Sudani asked two things of Lutchman that match what Hussain had advised Usaamah Abdullah Rahim and Justin Sullivan. Lutchman was told to carry a weapon with him at all times in case the authorities attempted to arrest him, so that if "something happens, kill them all."[45] Al-Sudani also asked Lutchman to send him a written message and videos announcing his *bay`a* (allegiance) to the Islamic State, which could be released after the attack and allow the group to claim responsibility and "let the worlds know [ISIL is] coming."[46] While it is unclear if Islamic State virtual entrepreneurs are sharing information and tradecraft amongst themselves, this certainly would appear to be the case.

Figures like al-Sudani and Hussain gained such respect among English-speaking Islamic State supporters around the world that they were also sought out online in order to give their blessing for attacks, much in the same way that extremist sheikhs provided *fatwas* in the past. Around the same time that Ohio resident Munir Abdulkader was coordinating his attack with Hussain, a young man from New York was looking for approval for a "martyrdom attack."[47] According to court records submitted as part of a plea agreement, the man in question, Munther Omar Saleh, reached out to Hussain for advice on behalf of his friend Fareed Mumuni, stating "akh (a brother) who is planning on hitting a black car cop [police car] with a pressure cooker, the black car keeps following him, and he wants to avenge our akhs (brothers) who have been raided and blocked from hijrah. Is it permissible for him to do the attack and die purposely in the process?" Hussain responded, "Yes akhi (my brother) he can do an isthishadi (martyrdom) operation on the police akhi if he has no other way to fight them he can do it." Not one to miss an opportunity for propaganda production, Hussain also told Saleh to have Mumuni send any martyrdom video directly to him.[48] [h] When the FBI arrived at Mumuni's house to execute a search warrant, he attacked one of the special agents with a knife, stabbing him repeatedly but failing to penetrate his body armor.[49] He was instructed to do so by Hussain, and this is consistent with the type of instructions he gave to Rahim and al-Sudani to Lutchman.

While Hussain provided instructions in a plot to attack the organizer of the Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest, he was also, at the very least, on the periphery of a major conspiracy to attack the event itself. On May 3, 2015, Elton Simpson and his accomplice, Nadir Soofi, traveled to Garland, Texas, as part of a plot to use assault rifles to kill attendees. In the months preceding the attack, which ended in the deaths of both men before they could enter the venue, Simpson had been in direct contact with at least two virtual entrepreneurs using Twitter direct message and SureSpot.[i] Indeed, while he was willing to risk using the internet to communicate with fellow extremists abroad, Simpson was wary of discussing his violent plans via Twitter, once lightheartedly chiding one of his contacts for his lax protocols: "I expect a higher level of security from you my brother."[50]

Shortly before Simpson attempted the attack, he logged on to Twitter and urged users to follow @_AbuHu55ain, one of the accounts operated by Hussain.[51] In addition, an hour before the attack, Hussain himself tweeted a number of messages suggesting he was aware of the impending shooting, including: "The knives have been sharpened, soon we will come to your streets with death and slaughter!"[52] Two days later, the Islamic State released a statement taking credit for the attack in what was its first of several claims of operations in the United States.[53] While the clues certainly exist,

h Although the court records do not explicitly name the 'ISIL Facilitator,' the U.S. attorney announced it was Junaid Hussain in remarks to the press.

i Elton Simpson's online discussions with Hussain were presented as evidence for the prosecution in United States v. Abdul Malik Abdul Kareem (2016).

there is no clear evidence that Hussain had a direct hand in plotting this attack, though there is no doubt he encouraged Simpson's extremism by offering moral support and helping validate his beliefs. While discussing Hussain's role in the Abdulkader case, however, Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy Mangan told the judge that Hussain had boasted to Abdulkader about his involvement in directing the Garland attacks, telling him "there's more to come."[54] Furthermore, in December 2015, FBI Director James Comey claimed that on the day of the attack, one of the gunmen and "an overseas terrorist" exchanged 109 encrypted messages. The overseas terrorist was reportedly believed to be Hussain. The details of these exchanges are as yet unknown, with the FBI unable to access them.[55]

It is often overlooked that Simpson's support for global jihadism was established before the rise of the Islamic State. In 2009, he attempted to join al-Shabaab in Somalia, a country that preceded Syria as the prime destination for Westerners wishing to make *hijrah*.[56] His interest in the broader movement led him to also reach out to Miski in the months before the attack in Garland.[57]

In December 2014, Miski engaged with Simpson via Twitter direct messages during which both men discussed their support for the January 2015 attacks in Paris and their shared admiration for al-Awlaki. It appears that, among other things, Simpson was using Miski as a way to receive advice and information from a jihadi sheikh with connections to Miski. On December 7, 2014, Simpson, using his Twitter handle @birdofgreen, messaged Miski's account @Muhajir_1436_Miski: "Did the brother interpret the dream for you? Or not yet." Miski soon responded, telling Simpson that "he said the Hoor al-Ayn is waiting for you eagerly."[58] The Hoor al-Ayn are virgins that jihadi ideologues claim are promised to recruits who carry out suicide operations, and Miski's reference to this is telling. While it is not clear what Simpson's dream was about, it can be reasonably surmised that it was related to a possible operation he had discussed with Miski, who was all too happy to offer encouragement.

This dialogue was the first of at least two conversations about dream interpretation. In the second, Miski suggested to Simpson that while he will "loose [sic] an opportunity to do something good like Hijrah … Allah will hold you back for something far better."[59] While cryptic, this too suggests that Miski was pushing Simpson in the direction of committing a domestic attack. This is further supported by another conversation days later when Simpson asked Miski, "I wonder what it means when one sees imam Anwar [al-Awlaki] in a dream," to which Miski responded, "Maybe he's telling you what he told Nidal," likely referring to the November 5, 2009, domestic terrorist attack carried out by Nidal Hasan in Fort Hood, Texas.[60]

Miski and Simpson also communicated via Twitter about the gathering in Garland. In April 2015, a week before the attack, Simpson expressed his frustration about the event over Twitter, saying "When will they ever learn? They are planning on selecting the best picture drawn of Rasulullah (saws) [a reference to the Prophet Mohammad] in Texas." Miski soon retweeted the message and also posted his own statement encouraging Americans to attack the event, telling his followers that "The brothers from the Charlie Hebdo attack did their part. It's time for brothers in the #US to do their part."[61] This was a reference to the January 2015 al-Qa`ida-linked killings at the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, known for its frequent depictions of the Prophet Mohammad.

Miski's name has also surfaced in several other cases analyzed in this article. It has been reported that he was in touch with Nicholas Rovinski, who was convicted for his role in the plot to kill an organizer of the Mohammad cartoon contest.[62] He was also allegedly an online contact of the young New Yorker Saleh, although the nature of their discussions remains unclear.[63]

In conjunction with the aforementioned American jihadis, court records related to the case of Abdi Nur, an American who successfully traveled to join the Islamic State in Syria, show that he too had extensive online conversations with Miski. They were both from the same area in Minneapolis, and one piece of advice that Miski, an experienced foreign fighter, imparted to his friend was to maintain close contact with fellow Americans in Syria. According to Miski, this was because "being connected in Jihad make you stronger and you can all help each other by fulfilling the duties that Allah swt (sic) put over you … Like us in Somalia the brothers from mpls [Minneapolis] are well connected so try to do the same … It is something we have learned after 6 years in Jihad."[64] Miski is also named as one of three co-conspirators with whom Keonna Thomas, a convert from Pennsylvania, discussed her desire to travel to Syria and become a martyr.[65]

Beyond their various degrees of direct contact with a myriad of radicalized Americans, the impact of virtual entrepreneurs, while significant, is difficult to measure. Their activities and the public profiles they cultivated have nonetheless made them beacons of inspiration for their fellow Western jihadis, many of whom have no doubt been motivated after witnessing what they were able to achieve.

Conclusion

Social media, coupled with the ever-increasing availability of applications that offer encrypted messaging, has given virtual entrepreneurs the ability to both bypass Western counterterrorism measures and build close, trusting online relationships with recruits. As a result, virtual entrepreneurs have come to be seen by their followers as leadership figures from whom they can draw inspiration and take advice and instruction on how to act on their extreme beliefs.

Along with helping to inspire radicalized Westerners, the work of Islamic State virtual entrepreneurs has given the group new ways to take ownership of their attacks, ensuring that they continue to receive attention and media coverage. Crucially, virtual entrepreneurs require few resources and offer a very favorable balance between cost and benefit. This is particularly relevant today as the Islamic State continues to lose ground in Iraq and Syria but retains its desire to remain relevant while maintaining a significant online presence and capability to strike Western targets.[66]

It is, therefore, no surprise that this trend is on the rise throughout the West. In Europe, the strengthening of security measures and increased military pressure have made it difficult for people to travel and join the Islamic State as well as for the group to train send operatives back home to conduct attacks. The resulting reduction in the flow of foreign fighters has seen virtual entrepreneurs favor encouraging more operations in European nations rather than helping to facilitate travel. In a recent analysis of 38 Islamic State-linked plots and attacks in Europe between 2014 and October 2016, 19 (50 percent) were found to have involved "online instruction from

members of IS's networks."[j]

The story is similar in the United States. Since 2015, as seen in the cases of Abdulkader and Lutchman, some have been directed away from their initial intention to join the Islamic State by virtual entrepreneurs who ask them to instead focus on domestic attacks due to difficulties associated with travel. The authors' current data shows that virtual entrepreneurs were involved in 21 percent of the total 38 plots in the United States in the same period as the European study.[k] While this number is lower—and in 2016, there was only one documented instance of a virtual entrepreneur being involved in a domestic plot (compared to six in 2015)—it may change. Due to the time it takes for cases to go to court, it will be some time before additional details come to light. It is worth noting as well that three of the most influential members of the Legion—Hussain, Hostey, and Khan—were killed in 2015, while Miski was arrested that same year and al-Sudani was killed in mid-2016. Whether or not they can be replaced remains to be seen.

There are a number of factors that may influence this. The first of these is whether the Islamic State and other jihadi groups intent on striking the West maintain enough territory to continue harboring individuals with the capability to inspire and plan attacks via the internet. While virtual entrepreneurs can technically be just as effective while operating outside of jihadi-held territory, it is not so simple. They may, for example, lose credibility in the eyes of Western jihadis gained by the likes of Hussain and Miski who, due to their locations, were able to present themselves as legitimate members of terrorist organizations. This potential lack of safe havens would also likely make virtual entrepreneurs more vulnerable to interception by Western security services.

Second, much will depend on how both Western states and technology companies deal with this issue. At present, it remains somewhat unclear how companies offering messenger apps with encryption services plan to respond. While Telegram announced in 2015 that it had shut down 78 Islamic State-related unencrypted channels, it also clarified that it had not interfered with any private, encrypted chats.[l] When asked about the use of Telegram by the Islamic State, the company's founder, Pavel Durov, responded by suggesting that it was a regrettable but nonetheless acceptable by-product of the more important issue of offering true privacy to internet users. "I think that privacy, ultimately, and our right for privacy is more important than our fear of bad things happening, like terrorism," he said.[67]

In the traditional policy realm, Western states continue to struggle in their efforts to develop effective and coherent policies on combating terrorist use of the internet. In Europe, EUROPOL has set up the Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU). According to EUROPOL Deputy Director Wil van Gemert, it "detects terrorist and violent extremist online content, flags and refers such content to internet providers, and asks for its removal."[68] However, it is not clear if the EU IRU has begun to look into encrypted messaging applications. In the United States, policy is still taking shape. Under the previous administration, government officials repeatedly met with senior technology company executives, urging them to police their platforms further and more aggressively enforce their terms of service.[69]

As the response to this threat develops, it is unlikely the world has seen the end of virtual entrepreneurs with the deaths of Legion members and others associated with them. Their recent successes could ensure that they will be central to jihadi groups' current and future efforts to strike the West while continuing to pose a complex challenge to counterterrorism authorities. CTC

j According to the study, a further "twelve plots can with a high degree of certainty be linked to IS's section for international operations and the Abaaoud-network. Nearly all of [these twelve] involve returning foreign fighters." Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10:6 (2016).

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The Reina Nightclub Attack and the Islamic State Threat to Turkey

By Ahmet S. Yayla

The Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul on New Year's Eve made clear the immense scale of the Islamic State threat to Turkey. Investigations have shed new light on the group's command and control over sleeper operatives in Turkey and the large network of clandestine cells and logistical and financial support elements it has set up to sustain terrorist activity. Turkish government complacency has allowed the threat to grow, as have purges of experienced counterterrorism professionals, including those after last year's failed coup. As the Islamic State shows signs of crumbling in Syria and Iraq, Turkey now faces a nightmare scenario of a mass influx of Islamic State fighters into its territory.

In the early hours of January 1, 2017, the Islamic State took the gloves fully off in its terrorist campaign against Turkey. A single gunman gained entry to the Reina nightclub on the Bosphorus, a famous haunt for celebrities and Western tourists, killing 39 and wounding 71 before escaping into the night.[1] For the first time ever[a] after a high-profile attack in Turkey, the Islamic State claimed responsibility, warning "the government of Turkey should know the blood of Muslims, which it is targeting with its plane and guns, will cause a fire in its home."[2]

On January 16, 2017, after a massive manhunt, the attacker—later identified as an Uzbek national named Abdulkadir Masharipov (alias Muhammed Horasani) from a small town in Kyrgyzstan with a predominantly Uzbeki population[3]—was finally captured alive in the Esenyurt district of Istanbul.[4] Investigations revealed he had been directed to launch the attack by a senior Islamic State operative in Raqqa, Syria, and had been provided logistical and financial support in Istanbul by a large Islamic State network operating clandestinely in the city.

This article examines the Reina attack and subsequent investigations for implications on the Islamic State threat to Turkey. It then explores why the threat has grown so acutely in Turkey. Given its long border with Syria and Iraq, Turkey was always likely to experience blowback from the Syrian civil war and the emergence of the Islamic State as a quasi-terrorist state. This article argues, however, that government complacency over the threat allowed it to build a deeper presence and wider support inside Turkey. It will also explain how Turkish vulnerability to Islamic State terrorism has been accentuated by the removal of many experienced counterterrorism professionals following last year's coup attempt. Finally, the article looks at how the threat to Turkey and Europe may evolve in the future.

The Reina Nightclub Plot

The Reina nightclub attack was carried out eight weeks after Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi called for all-out war against Turkey. In an audio released on November 2, 2016, al-Baghdadi stated, "Turkey entered the zone of your operations, so attack it, destroy its security, and sow horror within it. Put it on your list of battlefields. Turkey entered the war with the Islamic State with cover and protection from Crusader jets."[5]

Al-Baghdadi was referring to the Turkish military incursion into northern Syria, which had been launched in the summer of 2016 and was then bearing down on the Islamic State stronghold of al-Bab. The Turkish push deeper into Islamic State-held territory from Jarabalus to al-Bab appears to have crossed a red line for the group. The Islamic State had previously pursued what one observer labeled a "calibrated strategy" against Turkey. This involved launching attacks aimed at fracture points in Turkish society without claiming responsibility so as not to lose its battle for hearts and minds or jeopardize its ability to use Turkey as a recruiting, financing, and logistics base.[6] The fourth issue of the Rumiyah magazine, released on December 7, 2016, designated Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin as the two leaders "plotting against Islam together." On December 22, in a significant escalation, the Islamic State released a video of two Turkish soldiers being burned to death.[7]

Three days later, on Christmas day, the Islamic State activated Abdulkadir Masharipov, a sleeper operative in Turkey, and tasked him with carrying out an act of larger retaliation. Born in 1983, Masharipov graduated from Fergana State University in Uzbeki-

a It was the second attack in Turkey that the Islamic State claimed. The first was a car bombing in southeastern Turkey in November 2016. Tim Arango, "ISIS Claims Responsibility for Istanbul Nightclub Attack," *New York Times*, January 2, 2017.

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A view of the Bosphorus in front of the Reina nightclub, one of Istanbul's most exclusive party spots, early on January 1, 2017, after the New Year's Eve attack. (Ozan Kose/AFP/Getty Images)

stan with a major in physics and a minor in computer science.[8] While much remains unclear about his jihadi path, Masharipov has been involved with jihadi terrorist organizations since 2011 according to information provided to Interpol by Uzbekistan,[9] where he was a known terrorist and subject to a national arrest warrant.[10] He spoke four languages: Uzbek, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian.[11] After his capture, Masharipov told police that he had received military training at an al-Qa`ida camp in Afghanistan after traveling there in 2010.[12] At some later point, while he was in Pakistan, Masharipov became a member of the Islamic State, pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi.[13] [b]

According to Masharipov's subsequent account to interrogators, about a year before the Reina attack, he had been given orders by an Islamic State emir in Raqqa to travel to Turkey to establish himself, along with his wife and two children, in Konya—a city in the middle of Turkey—and await further orders. It is not clear how Masharipov established contact with the group in Syria. As no evidence has emerged that he ever traveled to Syria, it appears that at some point while he was in Pakistan, he established remote contact with the group's leadership in Syria. According to his statement to police, after traveling from Pakistan, Masharipov was arrested inside Iran and detained there for over a month before Iranian authorities deported him in January 2016 across (a likely remote part of) the Iranian-Turkish border without informing the Turkish police or customs agents.[14]

According to Masharipov's testimony to the Turkish prosecutor, on December 25, 2016, he was directed, via the messaging app Telegram, by an Islamic State emir in Raqqa he knew as "Abu Shuhada" to launch an attack on New Year's Eve in Istanbul. Abu Shuhada, Masharipov said, was responsible for Islamic State operations in Turkey. Masharipov added that he discussed the details of the attack and his plan with another commander in Raqqa, whom he knew by the alias "Rahova," and later informed Abu Shuhada via Telegram that he was ready to carry out the attack.[15]

After traveling with his wife and two children to Istanbul, Masharipov claimed he was provided an AK-47 assault rifle with six loaded magazines and three stun grenades before the attack by an Islamic State member, whose name was never made known to him.[c] The delivery was remotely arranged by Abu Shuhada and was dropped off at the apartment building "Medikule Residences" in the Zeytinburnu district of Istanbul, where Masharipov rented a room before the attack. In this residence, he readied his rifle, taped the ammunition magazines together into pairs to save time when

b Masharipov's wife, Zarina Nurullayeva, subsequently told police that Masharipov pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and al-Baghdadi during the period in which they were living in Pakistan. "ISIL told me they are taking my son to Iran: Istanbul nightclub attacker's wife," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 7, 2017.

c The unknown Islamic State member who delivered the weapons was dressed in black cloth with a mask covering his face, but his eyes were reportedly indicative of someone from the Caucasus region. Yüksel Koç, "Reina saldırganı tutuklandı," DHA, February 11, 2017.

changing them out during the impending attack, and then put all of his weapons into a backpack.[16]

After his arrest, Masharipov provided the password to his email account to the police, and among his emails, the police found a "martyrdom" video he made, recorded by his wife, Zarina Nurullayeva, on December 27, 2016.[17] In this video, Masharipov said he was going to carry out a suicide attack in the name of the Islamic State. He asked his children to behave well and not to upset their mother after he was gone, and he requested that his son grow up to become a suicide bomber just like him.[18]

In the safe house where Masharipov was apprehended, the police also found a tablet computer. According to the prosecutor's indictment, the police recovered a voice message from an emir in Raqqa, who appears to have been senior to Abu Shuhada. In his message sent to Masharipov, the senior emir gave his farewells to Masharipov and guaranteed him that his family was going to be well-taken care of, asking him not to worry about his family under any circumstances.[19]

Masharipov's target was Taksim Square in Istanbul, where a large public gathering was expected to welcome in the new year. At some point before setting out, he sent Abu Shuhada target reconnaissance video he had recorded in the square during daylight hours. He said Abu Shuhada then gave his approval over Telegram from Raqqa. Even before the Islamic State officially claimed the Reina attack, this footage—later labeled a "selfie video" by international media because Masharipov surreptitiously filmed the square while turning the camera on himself—was released on a pro-Islamic State Telegram account, which claimed the perpetrator "was a lion of the caliphate."[20]

But when Masharipov arrived at the square around midnight local time, he aborted the attack because there were too many police officers present. Using Telegram on his cell phone, he immediately communicated this decision back to Abu Shuhada and was told to look for an alternate target. Already familiar with the Reina nightclub and observing, as he passed by in a taxi, that it was not well protected, he reported to Abu Shuhada it could be a possible target. After Abu Shuhada confirmed Reina as the new target, Masharipov went back to his residence in Zeytinburnu to get his weapons and stun grenades and returned to Reina via taxi to carry out the attack.[21]

"I entered Reina to die," Masharipov later told interrogators.[22] The way he carried out the attack made clear that he was a well-trained, experienced, and battle-hardened fighter.[d] He approached the entrance, killing the police officer located there without any hesitation and then entered the nightclub, spraying people with his automatic assault rifle. He remained calm as the revelers panicked and screamed, changing the magazines five times without any interruptions or apparent excitement. In total, he shot 180 rounds, killing and wounding his victims as many looked him in the eye.[23]

"When I was out of bullets, I threw two stun grenades. I put the third one near my face to commit suicide, but I didn't die. I survived. My purpose was not to fall hostage," he later told Turkish investigators.[24] After fleeing the nightclub, Masharipov evaded capture for more than two weeks. He was captured in the Esenyurt district of Istanbul on January 16, 2017, and detained and interrogated for 25 days before being charged.[25]

During the interrogations, he claimed infidels had been his target.[26] "I wanted to stage the attack on Christians in order to exact revenge on them for their acts committed all over the world," he told an interrogator.[27] He said that after the attack, he left Reina wounded because the stun grenade had exploded in his hand. He crawled out of the club through the front door, pretending that he was one of the victims. When the SWAT team officers arrived at the front gate, they believed Masharipov was one of the victims and handed him over to other police officers who pulled him out of the crowd toward the sidewalk from which he fled seconds later.[28]

In the apartment building where Masharipov was captured, police found two aerial drones, two handguns, several cell phone SIM cards, and $197,000 in cash.[29]

The Reina Attack Support Network

Subsequent investigations established that Masharipov was provided support on the ground in Istanbul by a large network. After the attack, Masharipov hid in five different safe houses before he was captured.[30] He was apprehended along with three women (Dina, 27, from Senegal; Aysha M., 27, from Somalia; and Tene T., 26, an Egyptian-French citizen) as well as an Iraqi man. The women were allegedly also members of the Islamic State and sent as "gifts" to him after the attack.[31] Masharipov claimed he first went to the Zincirlikuyu neighborhood to hide, meeting with a Uighur he had become acquainted with to get help and spend the night. Afterward, he went to Basaksehir to meet with another Islamic State cell, which resulted in the leader of the cell taking him and an Iraqi member of the group to a prearranged safe house. He was then transferred to another safe house, which was considered a more secure place in Esenyurt, where he was eventually captured.[32]

Masharipov initially had had his son with him, but the boy was taken from him by an Islamic State member, according to Turkish court documents. Masharipov was allegedly told that his son would be given back to him when it was time to leave Istanbul.[33] His wife subsequently claimed that their son was taken to Iran.[34]

Masharipov's wife was detained in an operation that captured 11 suspects on January 12, 2017.[35] In her statement, Nurullayeva stated that her husband left their Istanbul lodgings three days before the attack and that she and their daughter were then transferred to an Islamic State safe house by Islamic State members.[36] Nurullayeva and her two-year-old daughter stayed in hiding in such places as Basaksehir and Pendik in Istanbul. It was later revealed that Russian authorities had arrested Nurullayeva in 2011 on charges of being a member of a terrorist organization.[37] [e]

The safe house where Masharipov was hiding when he was caught was supervised by a suspected Islamic State operative "Mua-

d His "professionalism" was evidenced by his use of tracer ammunitions at the end of each magazine (as a reminder to reload the magazine) and his use of steelhead, armor-piercing ammunition. Pinar Hilal Balta, "Reina saldırganı 'profesyonel' olabilir," *Timeturk*, January 7, 2017; Yüksel Koç, "Reina saldırganı tutuklandı," DHA, February 11, 2017.

e Bakhtiiar Abdurashidov, an alleged Islamic State member who was arrested in the same operation that captured Nurullayeva, was accused of facilitating Masharipov's transfer to the Pendik safe house. Two other suspects, Adili Salumi and Islam Magomedov, were accused of being watchmen for the safe house. Even though Salumi had been blacklisted as a terrorist and banned from entering Turkey, he had managed to enter the country illegally. "Reina saldırganının esi dahil 11 kisi tutuklandı," *Cumhuriyet*, February 3, 2017.

viye" (code name "Abdurrauf Sertin"), who was arrested on January 5, 2017, in a raid in Zeytinburnu, that netted several alleged key figures in the Islamic State's network in Istanbul.[38] Muaviye was allegedly supervising several safe houses in Istanbul.[39 f] Also arrested was "Abu Jihad" (alias "Yasser Mohammed Salem Radown") the Islamic State's alleged *qadi* (judge) for Istanbul.[g] Abu Jihad had been sent to Turkey by the group after serving as a *qadi* in different Islamic State territories.[40] A third man arrested in the raid was Maitibake Tusunmaimaiti, an Islamic State operative who had been in touch with Masharipov before and after the attack.[41] Tusunmaimaiti had $159,380 in his possession at the location where he was caught and was, according to the Turkish prosecutor, supervising Islamic State operatives based at 12 terrorist hideouts who were working to shelter foreign fighters in Istanbul. The police also found an additional $150,000 at a different house where Tusunmaimaiti was staying, revealing just how deep the financial pockets of the network supporting the Reina attack were.[42 h] Abdullah Türkistanli, a fourth operative caught in the same operation, was, according to a Turkish prosecutor, the emir in charge of Islamic State operatives based at 60 terrorist hideouts housing foreign fighters in Istanbul.[43]

Based on the author's research and personal experience investigating terrorist hideouts in Turkey, each location is typically manned by two to three armed fighters and is often protected with booby-traps. Typically only one individual in these micro-cells is responsible for communicating with his emir via encrypted messaging systems such as Signal or Telegram. By this arithmetic, a single emir like Türkistanli could have been overseeing over 100 fighters loyal to the Islamic State in Istanbul, which gives a sense of the scale of the group's presence in Turkey's largest city. Thus far, the investigations into the Reina attack have revealed that more than 50 individuals directly provided support to Masharipov before and after the attack.[i] Almost all of those arrested were from the Caucasus region and Central Asia, and many were Russian speakers.[44] Police operations also revealed the presence of almost 100 safe houses operated by the Islamic State in Istanbul. An unknown number remain undiscovered. The investigations have also revealed just how cash rich the group is inside of Turkey. In total, just over $500,000 was confiscated by the authorities from the network linked to the attack, a clear indication of the priority given to international operations by Islamic State decision-makers.[45]

The Islamic State's Network in Turkey

The Istanbul-based network, which provided support to the Reina attacker, was just one part of a web of cells that the Islamic State maintains in Turkey. The group has thus far recruited around 3,000 active Turkish fighters in Syria and Iraq. It has also established a vast and sustainable network within Turkey through the involvement of mostly Turkish individuals, but also a significant number of foreign operatives. This network remains involved in recruitment activities; arranging and providing logistical support to Islamic State operations; financial operations; and the establishment of numerous terrorist cells and safe havens inside Turkey.[46] No official numbers exist on the scale of the Islamic State presence in Turkey, and any estimates are very tentative. But based on the author's research and data available on the number of terrorist hideouts in Turkey, there may be as many as 2,000 hardcore fighters loyal to the Islamic State inside Turkey.

Screen captures from the "selfie video" showing alleged Reina nightclub attacker Abdulkadir Masharipov in Taksim Square. The reconnaissance video, which Masharipov told interrogators he uploaded to his Islamic State handler in Raqqa, Syria, was first released on a pro-Islamic State Telegram account after the attack.

The network in Turkey includes attack units composed of Turkish and foreign-established cells in different cities around the country, intelligence units (the *emni*[47]), logistical support units, border units, communication, and finance units, and a variety of other sympathizers playing supportive roles. Most of these structures are overseen by city emirs who, in turn, report up to regional emirs. In contrast, the *emni* and attack cells are directly tied to the Islamic State's center in Raqqa, Syria, rather than being linked to each other, making it impossible for them to give up information about other cells.[48]

There are two types of cell structures working for the Islamic State in Turkey. The first are the local, Turkish cells, which tend to be more loose-knit and less experienced than the foreign cells based in Turkey. They have tended to carry out suicide bombings rather than gun attacks, likely because they are less experienced in urban warfare. One example was the "Dokumacı network," which in 2015 carried out bombings in Diyarbakir, Suruc, and a Kurdish and opposition rally in Ankara, killing a total of over 130.[49]

The second type of cell structure is composed of foreign fighters. They tend not to mix with the local cells and have, so far, been staffed mostly by fighters from Caucasus countries, including Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, as well as Uighur Turks and Central Asians from the former Soviet bloc. Almost all of these fighters speak Russian, making it easy for them to work together.[50] Islamic State defectors interviewed by the author have said that the Caucasian contingent within the Islamic State has a reputation as being the most formidable of the group's fighters.[51] It is possible that

f Islamic State safe houses are typically leased by individuals who do not reside in them.

g Ten foreigners in the process of being transferred to Syria were captured in the same raid. None of them had passports. "DEAS'ın 'kadı'sı Ebu Cihad kod isimli Yasser Mohammed Salem Radown tutuklandı," *Habertürk*, January 25, 2017.

h In the Istanbul operations targeting the network behind the Reina attack, more than $500,000 in cash has been recovered so far from the cells and safe houses raided, a clear indication of the steady flow of cash for operations.

i More than 50 terrorists were arrested due to their ties with the Reina attack, and the police took legal action against 168 foreigners in a larger net. Angela Dewan and Emily Smith, "Istanbul nightclub attack suspect confesses, governor says," CNN, January 17, 2017.

the Islamic State has used these foreign fighters for attacks inside Turkey because they have fewer local ties, making it easier for them to be persuaded to launch attacks and operate clandestinely.

As has been outlined, Caucasian and Central Asian foreign fighters played a key role in the Reina nightclub attack. Operatives from the region also played a critical role in the gun and suicide bomb assault on Istanbul airport on June 28, 2016. This was carried out by two Russian citizens from Dagestan, Rakim Bulgarov and Vadim Osmanov, who entered the country legally a month before the attack; the identity of the third attacker and his country of origin has yet to be shared with the public.[52] The mastermind of the attack was allegedly Akhmed Rajapovich Chatayev, a senior Chechen Islamic State commander who lived in Turkey between 2013 and 2015 and is believed to have previously worked to target Turkish interests, who continues to pose a threat to Turkey and other nations from Syria.[53]

As illustrated by the Reina attack, the foreign cells also maintain a large number of safe houses in which to hide foreign Islamic State members. The safe houses are essential to the Islamic State's efforts to move terrorists around the country and back and forth to the Islamic State territories. In the aftermath of the Reina attack, almost 100 Islamic State safe houses were uncovered, many of them in Istanbul.[54] Istanbul has been the main location for Islamic State safe houses because it is the main arrival hub for foreign fighters. But the network of safe houses is spread across the country and is present in such major cities as Ankara, Izmir, Kocaeli, and Konya as well as the border towns of Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Kilis, and Hatay where foreign fighters hide and wait for their turn to be smuggled into Syria.[55]

It has recently come to light that the Islamic State has also been operating training centers in Turkey. In early March, court filings revealed the Islamic State ran four separate training centers and schools in the towns of Sincan, Altındag, Etimesgut, and Çubuk in Ankara province, which were used to train Turkish youth to become Islamic State militants.[56] The investigation into the Istanbul airport attack has revealed the Islamic State ran a training center, which airport attacker Vadim Osmanov attended. This center was used for the initial and entry-level training of foreign fighters coming to Turkey to join the Islamic State and also to arrange their transfers to Syria.[57]

Islamic State activity in Turkey has taken a variety of other forms. As noted in reports by the European Union-funded Conflict Armament Research (CAR), "Turkey is the most important choke point for components used in the manufacture of IEDs" by the Islamic State.[58] In fact, CAR reports assessed that Islamic State "forces source most of the products used in the manufacture of weapons and ammunition from the Turkish domestic market."[59] Similarly, thousands of Islamic State and other jihadi fighters—including one of al-Baghdadi's deputies, Ahmet el-H—received free medical treatment in Sanliurfa and other Turkish cities.[60] The Islamic State was also able to establish a secret factory in Turkey where it has produced a large number of uniforms for its fighters[61] and hundreds of suicide vests,[62] ensuring the uninterrupted flow of needed materials.

The Slow Turkish Response

The threat now facing Turkey is self-inflicted to some degree. The Islamic State was able to establish such an extensive network in Turkey because Turkey was complacent about the threat—for example, President Erdogan's hesitancy to blame the Islamic State as the terrorist organization behind attacks until the June 2016 Istanbul airport attack.[63] Ankara was prepared to tolerate a certain degree of Islamic State activity on its soil and on its border with Syria because it was seen as an enemy to the Assad regime and to Kurdish fighters linked to the PKK rather than a direct threat to Turkish national security. Another factor slowing the response to the Islamic State threat has been the long-held view by Turkey's security establishment that the PKK is a greater threat to the country than Islamists. In 2014 and 2015, Turkey did not carry out a single pre-planned, intelligence-led counterterrorism operation on its soil against the Islamic State and other jihadi terrorist organizations. Even in 2016, when Turkey started treating the threat more seriously, counterterrorism operations were mostly launched in reaction to different terrorist incidents, and in most cases, suspects were released swiftly.[64]

Until the beginning of 2016, Turkey did little to stop or interrupt the flow of foreign fighters going back and forth across the Turkish border,[65] resulting in over 25,000 foreign fighters[66] joining Islamic State ranks through this route.

As the civil war in Syria escalated, the author (who directed counterterrorism operations in the border town of Sanliurfa until 2014) witnessed firsthand Turkey's southern borders being overwhelmed with refugees fleeing from Syria—over three million—who were let in regardless of their background.[67] In fact, the influx of refugees was so overwhelming that it became a major security concern for border cities because of the opportunities it provided the Islamic State to infiltrate operatives into Turkey. Sanliurfa alone received more than 400,000 refugees in just 20 months. By the time it declared a caliphate in June 2014,[68] the Islamic State was essentially the main southern neighbor of Turkey.[69] In the months that followed, it strengthened its control of major border areas and thereby its ability to transport material and foreign fighter movements back and forth across the border.

The lack of full-throated condemnation of the Islamic State among Turkey's political class[j] and the significant level of popular approval in Turkey for fighters confronting the Assad regime allowed the group to gain a degree of support inside Turkey. In 2015, public opinion research found eight percent of the Turkish population had a favorable opinion of the Islamic State.[70] Islamic State supporters inside Turkey have openly celebrated attacks in the West, for example parading openly and tweeting in celebration after the July 2016 Nice truck attack.[71] Even more disturbingly, as late as 2015, extremist preachers were allowed to organize gatherings for Islamic State supporters to openly support the group in front of the media. One aggressively pro-Islamic State Turkish preacher, Abu Hanzala, who lives openly in Turkey, can be heard on a YouTube video saying "anyone who supports the fight against ISIS, he is an infidel for sure."[72]

Although Ankara is now treating the threat from the Islamic State more seriously, the Turkish government's current focus on countering domestic political opponents suggests it has not yet recognized the gravity of the situation.

j For example, Prime Minister Ahmet Davudoglu referred to the Islamic State as a "bunch of frustrated young guys" and failed to condemn them in public speeches. "Davutoglu ISID'e yine 'terörist' diyemedi, 'mesrulastırıcı' laflar etti," *Diken*, August 7, 2014.

Curtailed Counterterrorism Capacity

The Islamic State threat to Turkey has been exacerbated by a series of purges of experienced police and security officials that has seriously degraded Turkey's counterterrorism capabilities. Following the sensational corruption charges against senior figures in then Prime Minister Erdogan's party in December 2013, the ruling party moved to purge and arrest all of the police chiefs and officers, prosecutors and judges they perceived to be involved.[73] Within the Turkish national police, senior officers in counterterrorism, intelligence, and organized crime divisions in the Istanbul Police Department were fired and replaced.[74]

After the failed coup on July 15, 2016, the purges only accelerated. More than 125,000 government officials, including military officers, police officers, judges, prosecutors, and academics, were removed from office, of which almost 40,000 were arrested.[75] The top ranks of the military were also targeted, with half of its active duty generals removed. The Turkish National Police lost more than 20,000 officers in the period since late 2013, including police chiefs and officers who had spent years in the field fighting terrorism; they were either fired or, in many cases, arrested. In the judiciary, a third of prosecutors and judges were fired and/or arrested, a number well over 4,000.[76] All of this has resulted in Turkey losing its most experienced manpower and a great deal of institutional knowledge in the fight against terrorism as most of the newly appointed police have never worked in counterterrorism-related jobs and do not have the necessary skills and training.

The Future Threat

The Islamic State will likely expand its campaign of attacks in Turkey. In the fifth issue of the Rumiyah magazine, issued on January 6, 2017, the group stated the country's NATO membership, secular governance, security operations against Islamic State operatives on Turkish soil, support for the Shi`a-dominated government in Baghdad, and incursion into Islamic State territory in Syria meant war.

The investigations into the Reina nightclub attack reveal just how large of a presence the Islamic State now has inside Turkey, with a network of 50 with access to half a million dollars proving support to the attacker. The group appears to currently have the capacity to wage a sustained campaign of terrorism in Turkey by ordering operatives already on Turkish soil to move forward with attacks and providing them with the financial and logistical assistance they need through support networks on the ground. Masharipov's case shows how senior Islamic State operatives in Syria are now able to manage every aspect of terrorist attack planning through encrypted communications. This is allowing them not only to direct terrorist plotters like Masharipov in real time but also to arrange for weapons, supplies, and hiding places to be provided to such plotters. Such coordination has also been noted in the group's terrorist plots against Europe,[77] but the group's large presence in Turkish cities means that it has a much larger support infrastructure there for terrorism.

The investigations also show there are true sleeper cells in Turkey with almost a year elapsing between Masharipov being dispatched to the country and the attack's launch. During this time, he settled into a Turkish city with his wife and two children and kept no connections, as far as is known, to local Turkish cells. This high level of operational security is concerning to counterterrorism officials. There are likely dozens of known and unknown established cells throughout Turkey, with several likely awaiting activation by the Islamic State.

A sustained campaign of attacks by the Islamic State could lead to large-scale loss of life and significant damage to the Turkish economy. The targeting of a nightclub popular with foreigners suggests Western diplomatic, commercial facilities, and tourists could all emerge as primary targets.

The Islamic State still has a large support base among Turks,[78] providing the group with continued recruitment opportunities and operational advantages, though it is possible a surge in attacks could create a backlash. Although the Islamic State has been pushed back from areas on the Turkish border, it will still likely be able to find ways to send operatives directly from Syria to carry out attacks. The Turkish counterterrorism apparatus has been critically damaged, crippling the police's counterterrorism and intelligence departments and leaving Turkey vulnerable to a variety of future terrorist attacks. And the government has yet to make repairing that capability a priority, raising questions of its understanding of and commitment to tackling the Islamic State threat.

One possibility that should not be discounted, given the fighting between Kurdish forces and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, is fighting erupting between PKK supporters and Islamic State supporters inside Turkey as happened during the 1990s between the PKK and Turkish Hezbollah.[79] It is also possible that the Islamic State and the PKK could independently and simultaneously decide to increase the frequency of their attacks in Turkey, taking advantage of the current situation and forcing Turkey to defend itself with poorly trained, inexperienced, and unprepared counterterrorism and intelligence-gathering forces.

The nightmare scenario for Turkey is a mass influx of Islamic State operatives across its border. As Iraqi forces advance in Mosul and coalition-backed forces push toward Raqqa, there is no question that many Islamic State members fleeing from these cities—including Syrians, Iraqis, Turks, and a variety of other nationals—will end up in Turkey, considerably increasing the likelihood of the establishment of new terrorist cells and new attacks. Several defectors the author has interviewed[80] indicated that Islamic State commanders have decided in the worst case scenario to instruct their fighters to shave their beards and cut their hair to blend into societies in close proximity, with Turkey being the nearest. Syrian Islamic State fighters traveling to Turkey under such a scenario may be able to pass themselves off as refugees, given the country already has three million Syrian refugees. In such a scenario, the current Islamic State infrastructure in Turkey used to facilitate the transfer of foreign fighters from Europe, Asia, and Northern African countries to Syria through Turkey would likely be mobilized to reverse the direction of travel flows.

A surge in the number of Islamic State fighters inside Turkey could also threaten Europe, particularly given the significant number of those involved in Islamic State attacks and plots in Europe who traveled back through Turkey. Other countries around the world could also be threatened because of Istanbul's many international air connections.

Turkey's counterterrorism capacity is vital for both the country itself and the West, including European countries, NATO members, and even the United States. A failed or unsuccessful Turkish counterterrorism apparatus threatens not only Ankara but every European capital as well. CTC

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German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The Updated Data and its Implications

By Daniel H. Heinke

German security authorities have collected and analyzed data on the majority of the 910 individuals who traveled to Syria or Iraq based on Islamist motivations, the largest such study conducted by any Western government. The analysis confirms earlier findings that there is no typical socio-demographic profile of jihadi terrorists and foreign fighters. With a growing threat emanating from returning foreign fighters, the counterterrorism response needs to be both multifaceted and specific, tailoring approaches to certain sub-groups such as minors, women, converts, and immigrants.

The fact that "Germany is increasingly in the crosshairs of the Islamic State"[1] was underscored by the December 19, 2016, terror attack against a Christmas market in Berlin. Although the truck attacker, Anis Amri, did not spend time with a terrorist group overseas, preliminary investigation results indicate he had contact with a radical network in Germany that recruited a significant number of German nationals and residents for the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.[2]

The official current estimate is that more than 910 Islamists have left Germany for Syria or Iraq since 2012, although it has not been possible in all cases to verify that these individuals did indeed reach their destination. About one-third of those who departed to join the Islamic State or other Islamist factions are known to be or assumed to be back in Germany. More than 70 of these returnees have experienced armed combat with the Islamic State or at least have undergone some type of military training. About 145 Islamists from Germany are presumed to have been killed in the conflict so far.[a]

German security authorities (i.e. the police and domestic intelligence agencies at both the *Länder* (states) and the federal level (including the agency headed by the author—the Criminal Police Bureau, Bremen Police) jointly collected and aggregated information about 784 individuals who had departed Germany to travel to Syria or Iraq before June 30, 2016. This analysis[3] was conducted by a task force set up by the *Bundeskriminalamt* (Federal Criminal Police Agency), the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Domestic Intelligence Service), and the *Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus* (Hessian Center for Information and Expertise on Extremism).

This article outlines and discusses the findings of the official study and examines what the data means for the threat moving forward in Germany. It updates an article co-authored two years ago in this publication by the author, which was based on early official data about German foreign fighters[b] in Syria and Iraq.[4]

The Foreign Fighter Flow

Significant numbers of individuals began traveling to Syria or Iraq because of an Islamist motivation in around 2012/2013, reaching a first peak by the third quarter of 2013 according to the official data. After a decline in the rate of departures over the next months, the numbers peaked again in the second quarter of 2014, coinciding with the proclamation of the caliphate by the Islamic State on June 29, 2014, and remained relatively high during the rest of the year. The rate of departures dropped significantly in 2015, however, and has been further declining since that time. For the past year, the number of monthly departures averaged around five, compared to 100 at the peak.

Demographics

It remains difficult to identify a clear-cut "target group" for jihadi radicalization. Various studies analyzing so-called jihadis in the Western world (i.e. violent extremists claiming an affiliation with Islam) with a focus on shared analysis of investigations of executed or prevented terrorist attacks have been published in the past years, but time and again, such studies confirm the existing intelligence does not support a reliable socio-demographic profile of jihadis.[5]

The departees included in the official data are 79% male and 21% female. The share of female departees rose significantly after the proclamation of the caliphate in June 2014, climbing from just 15% before the proclamation to 38% in the first year of the post-proclamation phase; since then, it has fallen to 27%. This still very large contingent of female extremists constitutes an exceptional phenomenon not previously encountered, at least on this scale, with regard to jihadism in the West.[6]

The age range of the departees is 13 to 62 years, with an arithmetic mean age of 25.8 years. The age bracket 22-25 years provides for the largest group (322 individuals), with another 164 departees between 18 and 21 years, and 143 in the 26-29 years bracket. Again, there are considerable differences between the groups who had de-

a This is as of March 1, 2017. (Source: Ministry of the Interior, Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, Germany).

b For purposes of this article, German foreign fighters include all Islamists who traveled or attempted to travel to jihadi battlegrounds overseas from Germany, including German nationals and residents.

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parted prior to and after the proclamation of the caliphate (henceforth coined "early departees" and "late departees," respectively). The mean age of the late departees is three years younger than the early departees (23.5 years in the second-post caliphate year, 24.2 years in the first post-caliphate year versus 26.6 years with the early departees); and the percentage of minors (individuals under the age of 18 years) is significantly higher (early departees 5%, first post-caliphate year 11%, second post-caliphate year 16%).[7]

It should be noted that these numbers include gender specific differences: female departees tend to be significantly younger than their male counterparts (median age 23.5 versus 26.5 years); accordingly, the share of minors among the female departees is considerably higher (13% versus 6% among the males, i.e. nearly four out of 10 departed minors are female). Not included in the report on German foreign fighters compiled by the German agencies are the (substantial) number of children of mostly very young age who were taken by their departing parents. The fates of these children, and the potential threat emanating from them, after growing up in a violence-filled and highly ideologically charged environment such as the Islamic State, however, produces an urgent need to prepare for their reintegration into society.[8]

Of the 688 individuals with known marital status, 44% were single, 28% legally married, and 22% were married under Islamic law. Two hundred and ninety departees are known to have children. In the last year, however, the share of single individuals without children and/or their own household rose significantly. The reasons why the Islamic State seems to be decreasingly attractive to socially established individuals is not entirely clear from the collected data. One possibility is that the real-life utopia the caliphate presented after its proclamation appealed to radicalized families as well, whereas the current state of decline lost this pull-factor.

Close to 90% of all departees lived in urban areas, with just 13 cities being the place of residence of nearly half of all departees.

Sixty-one percent of the departees were born in Germany, with a broad range of other places of birth (38 countries). The most significant other countries are Turkey (6%), Syria (5%), the Russian Federation (5%), Morocco (3%), and Lebanon (3%). Of the individuals born abroad, 39% immigrated at an age of under 14 years, 23% as teenagers and adolescents,[c] and 38% at an age of more than 21 years.

Thirty-five percent of all departees have German citizenship exclusively (with significant differences with regard to gender—42% of the women versus 33% of the men). Another 43% hold a dual citizenship including Germany, while 22% hold foreign citizenship.[d]

Including the individuals born in Germany, a total of 81% of all departees had what German authorities define as a "migration background."[e]

The data available on the schooling, training, and occupation of the departees is broad. Seventy-two departees are known to have attended a school at the actual point of their departure. One-hundred and sixteen individuals are known to have begun vocational training. Of these, 42% had completed this training prior to their departure, 32% had dropped out of it before they left Germany, and 26% were still in training when they left Germany. Ninety-four individuals are known to have begun university studies, of whom 10% had completed a degree, 28% had discontinued it, and 63% were still enrolled at the time of their departure. Another 111 individuals are known to have had a regular job at that point, while 166 others were unemployed.

Religion/Ideology

At least 624 individuals are assessed to belong to the core salafi ideological spectrum, while only 29 definitely were not adherents to this religious movement, thus rendering this specific religious outlook by far most important single variable in describing this very heterogeneous group. German domestic intelligence places the current total estimate of salafis in Germany at 9,700, with a persistent upward trend.[f] This very dynamic movement provides a relatively large recruitment pool from which to draft more jihadis.

At least 134 departees (17% of the total number) are converts. Converts comprised no less than one-third of the female departees, in several cases presumably because of marriage to a Muslim man.[g]

Criminal Background

Two-thirds of the departees have been the subject of criminal investigations (i.e. suspected of or tried for criminal offenses) with significant differences in their delinquent behavior before and after their Islamist radicalization. Prior to Islamist radicalization, property crime and violent attacks (assault, robbery, etc.) were the most common types of criminal activity, with 62% of those with crime links involved in property crimes and 60% of those with crime links involved in violent attacks. The next most common type of crime was drug trafficking (35%). Politically motivated offenses (i.e., criminal acts directed against political or ideological opponents or constituting unlawful support of a political or ideological organization) made up only a small percentage of crimes, 4%.

After the beginning of the radicalization process, the prevalence of crimes that individuals engaged in shifted dramatically, with politically motivated offenses (under German law) perpetrated by more than half of this sub-group (55%), followed by violent attacks (47%) and property crime (41%). Drug-related offenses dropped to

c German law differentiates between "youths" (age 14-17) and "adolescents" (age 18-20).

d The largest groups of foreigners have citizenships of Turkey (14% of the total number) and Russia (4%), with Syria, Morocco, and Tunisia the next most represented.

e In Germany, individuals with a migration background are officially defined as "all persons who have immigrated since 1949 to the territory that today constitutes the Federal Republic of Germany, all foreigners born in Germany, and all German nationals born in Germany who have at least one parent who immigrated to Germany or who was born as a foreigner in Germany." See Bundesamt für Statistik (Federal Statistical Office) for further details.

f This is as of March 1, 2017, per the Ministry of the Interior, Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, Germany.

g Two years ago, Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger highlighted the disproportionately high number of converts among Western foreign fighters, confirming a historically well-known phenomenon. Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), p. 81.

just 14%. More than half (53%) of the individuals with a criminal record were suspected of or were tried for three or more offences, including nearly one-third (32%) who had been charged with six or more crimes. More than half of the departees were suspects in ongoing criminal investigations.

These findings correlate with recent studies highlighting the so-called "crime-terror nexus"[9]—in other words, the apparently growing number of jihadis who originate from petty criminal backgrounds. As Belgian counterterrorism official Alain Grignard has noted, many foreign fighters in this generation appear to be Islamized radicals rather than radicalized Islamists.[10]

Radicalization Factors

The vast majority of the departees were radicalized in a "real life environment." The most relevant factors (with multiple aspects possible) for the beginning of the radicalization were like-minded friends (54%), contact with extremist mosques (48%), internet contacts (44%), so-called Islam seminars (27%), organized Qur'an distributions (24%), and family (21%), with contact with extremists in school or prisons accounting for only a very few cases. During the course of the radicalization process, the importance of close social contacts rose even higher, with the most serious impact coming from like-minded friends (63%) and contacts to extremist mosques (57%).

In the majority of cases, the internet (for purposes of distributing propaganda online) played only a supportive and reinforcing role.

In many cases, the radicalization process was very quick. In cases where details on the duration of radicalization are known to the security authorities (only about half of the total), nearly half (46%) of the departees left within one year after the beginning of the radicalization process, with close to a quarter (22%) departing within six months of the start of this process. Overall, 68% of the departees left within two years. Again, there are noteworthy gender differences. The share of female departees among individuals who left within one year of the beginning of the radicalization process is significantly higher (27% versus 18% for male departees).

The analysis concludes that the radicalization process of very quickly radicalized individuals—especially women—"still takes place largely, though not always, out of sight, and that it is more often a self-referential process,"[11] (in other words, a radicalization process not predominantly fueled by social contacts, but by inward musings).

Radicalization took place even more quickly after the proclamation of the caliphate. The median duration of the radicalization of the departees dropped from 27 to 20 months. Correspondingly, the share of departees who left Germany within one year after the beginning of their radicalization climbed from 42% to 60% in the post-caliphate declaration phase. In this context, the seemingly real-life implementation of the Islamist utopia seems to have worked as an accelerator for the radicalization process, as it appeared to fulfill the Islamist ideals, thus strengthening and reinforcing the desire to actively take part in this endeavor.

Although individual radicalization normally gets noticed by family, friends, or acquaintances at some point, a surprisingly high number of persons departed before their Islamist radicalization was recognized by others, according to the German official data. Naturally, however, the recognition of an ongoing radicalization would depend on the duration of the individual radicalization process.[h]

"Although individual radicalization normally gets noticed by family, friends, or acquaintances at some point, a surprisingly high number of persons departed before their Islamist radicalization was recognized by others."

The Threat from Returning Fighters

The threat posed by the departed Islamists from Germany should be evaluated within the overall jihadi context. The military setbacks the Islamic State have experienced over the last year and a half—including the loss of relatively secure access routes—coupled with the unprecedented surge in refugees from Syria and other Middle East and North African countries to Europe have contributed to a significant change of the threat landscape. The Islamic State quickly adapted and called upon its adherents in Western countries not to try to travel to the so-called caliphate, but to commit terrorist attacks—be they suicide attacks or hit-and-run attacks—in their countries of residence.[12] Germany has seen Islamic State sympathizers respond to this call by carrying out attacks involving easily available weapons such as knives; axes; home-made, crude improvised explosive devices; and in the case of the Berlin attack, a truck.[13]

As the official report correctly points out, the initial success of the Islamic State, and especially the proclamation of the caliphate, mobilized and radicalized significant parts of the German salafi community in an unprecedented way. The ongoing conflict in Syria—and to a lesser extent Iraq—has been used by salafi jihadis to propagate their extremist ideology, focusing on the simple dichotomic message of a constant worldwide, defensive fight between the *ummah* (the community of the Islamic peoples) and the infidels.[14]

While the caliphate may have lost its "pull potential" since early 2015, there is no evidence, despite the much slower rate of departures, that the jihadi ideology symbolized by the Islamic State has weakened in strength in Germany and much of Western Europe. German domestic intelligence reports still rising numbers of violence-promoting Islamists in Germany. While 1,000 of the German salafis were considered violent just half a year ago,[15] the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) chief Hans-Georg Maaßen put that number at 1,600 at a conference in late February 2016. The federal criminal police office BKA rates approximately 570 individuals—not all of them currently residing in Germany, however—as "Gefährder," meaning capable of plotting a terrorist attack.[16]

In this context, the returning Islamists pose a serious threat to

h The analysis provides detailed information on the outward signs of the individual radicalization that is not relevant to this article. See Daniel H. Heinke, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters: German Islamists in Syria and Iraq and What Can be Done About Them," *Marshall Center Security Insights No. 15* (2016).

"The data shows that there are no simple patterns of radicalization or recruitment of jihadi fighters. Hence, countermeasures need to be both multifaceted and specific."

the national security of Germany and Western Europe in general. As of late 2016, approximately 15,000 foreign terrorist fighters are thought to be in Syria and Iraq,[17] among them a large number of the 5,000-6,000 who traveled from Europe,[18] and many of them will try to return to their countries of origin, especially if they came from Western Europe. Already 30% of the individuals who departed from the European Union are known or assessed to have returned,[19] mirroring the rate of returnees to Germany described in the introduction of this article. Given limited resources, the sheer numbers carry the threat of overwhelming the agencies tasked with counterterrorism on domestic soil.[20]

Radicalized to a jihadi worldview, and in many cases having experienced armed combat with the Islamic State or at least undergone some sort of (para-) military training, the returning foreign fighters are adding lethal capabilities to an already highly adrenalized Islamist community.[21] An especially dangerous threat would include the linking up of returning fighters with individuals in their communities who were barred from departure to Syria through administrative measures.

Returning foreign fighters still committed to the cause may choose to continue their jihadi activities on their own or to act under the direction of the dedicated Islamic State operations branch. Training and battlefield experience are elements that most extremists in Germany lacked previously. This reality establishes a challenge to be faced not only within the next couple of years, but most probably for an entire generation.[22]

Another concern is that given high rates of past criminality among German foreign fighters, many of the returnees will be part of friendship groups with strong ties to criminal activities. They may reestablish these links to support terrorist attacks on German soil—either through crimes as a means of financing or through the procurement of weapons.

Furthermore, in many cases, returning fighters will have developed personal bonds with others abroad, often within certain ethnic groups (for example, European foreign fighters of Chechen descent) that transcend national borders. Just as in the Afghan jihad, the Syrian jihad has created a generation of foreign fighters with international Rolodexes. One example were the foreign fighters from Germany and Austria who joined the Chechen Junud al Sham fighting brigade in Syria. As Guido Steinberg has noted, "The shared experiences of that group created tight bonds between Germans, Turks, Caucasians, and jihadis of other nationalities which will likely shape the nature of the terrorist threat in Germany."[23] These bonds may create networks that are exceptionally hard for security authorities to infiltrate.[i]

Using the Data to Combat Terrorism

The official data compiled on German foreign fighters and their radicalization trajectories is useful in countering future departures of foreign terrorist fighters and developing a strategy on how to deal with the returnees. As the largest such study conducted by any Western government, it is also useful to policymakers in other countries facing the same threat.

The key findings of the German security services' study were as follows:

1. Race, country of origin, gender, age, relationship status, educational background, or prior criminal involvement of the departees are so diverse that no universally accepted common denominator could be deduced.

2. Radicalization predominantly takes place in a "real life" environment.[j]

3. As foreign departures slow from Germany, the pull effect of the so-called caliphate is further diminishing to a nearly non-existent level.

4. The number of individuals trying to return to Germany is increasing.

5. Nearly all departees belong to the salafi religious/ideological stream.

6. Around 80% of the departees have a so-called "migration background."

7. Certain gender-specific radicalization aspects call for gender-specific prevention activities; women tend to undergo a quicker radicalization process and within the private sphere.

The data shows that there are no simple patterns of radicalization or recruitment of jihadi fighters. Hence, countermeasures need to be both multifaceted and specific. While a full discussion of the types of approaches that may be warranted are beyond the scope of this article, a number of observations can be made.[k]

The first is that the scale of the foreign fighter problem means that criminal investigations alone will not suffice in tackling it. Due to the challenges the prosecution faces in these cases (including the availability and collection of evidence and the conversion of intelligence into admissible forensic evidence[24]), the verdicts so far tend to impose sentences of three to four years for the active support of the Islamic State rather than on more concrete charges of murder.[25] This means that the threat emanating from these individuals in

i Another threat to public security are returning fighters who turn their back on jihadism but choose to employ skills obtained in jihadi battle-zones within organized crime groups. Martin Gallagher, "'Criminalised' Islamic State Veterans – A Future Major Threat in Organised Crime Development?" *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10:5 (2016): pp. 51-67.

j Editor's note: Georg Heil illustrated the various aspects of such a "real life environment" with the example of the German Abu Walaa network. See Georg Heil, "The Berlin Attack and the Abu Walaa Islamic State Recruitment Network," *CTC Sentinel* 10:2 (2017). Jan Raudszus presented another interesting case study in "Der Tag des Verführers," *Die Zeit*, September 29, 2016.

k It should also be pointed out that administrative measures aimed at preventing individuals from departing to Syria, such as the requirement to report to police stations at certain intervals and the withdrawal of passports and other identity documents, will not be very effective in combating the threat from foreign fighters who have already returned to Germany.

many cases will be only delayed for a relatively short period of time. It also means there is a strong argument for collaboration between foreign intelligence services (both national and allied ones) and law enforcement agencies to be intensified to try to provide evidence for more serious offenses committed when these individuals were serving the Islamic State.

A second observation is the criminal background of many departees provides law enforcement with opportunities to aggressively pursue criminal investigations into activities of foreign fighters not directly related to terrorist activities, thus providing a different angle for law enforcement operations.

Thirdly, the significant role played by contact with extremist mosques and study circles in the radicalization of German foreign fighters should inform the debate over whether more concerted efforts to proscribe organizations considered a threat to public security, including closing down affiliated gathering places (like clubs or even mosques whose activity breaks German law), are warranted.[l] While not eliminating the extremist views of the main actors, such measures can counter the establishment and operation of radicalization hubs.

Fourthly, given the increasingly fast pace of radicalization, attempts to counter radicalization efforts directed against possible new recruits in the early stages of radicalization may also be warranted, as well as initiatives developed to deradicalize or disengage known extremists, including returned foreign fighters.[26]

Although several states and cities have already developed prevention programs and agreed to a coordinated set of preventative and intervention measures directed against Islamist violent extremism, Germany still lacks a national strategy[m] against violent extremism, let alone a coherent national counterterrorism strategy. The findings outlined in this article indicate this strategy would be well advised to deal not only with criminal offenses but with a sort of social—though unlawful—movement. They also indicate a tailored and specialized CVE approach would be helpful, orientated to specific sub-groups, whether women, people with migration background, or other identifiable clusters.

The foreign fighter phenomenon already has a societal impact reaching far beyond the scope of law enforcement and public security. This 'fallout' may include polarization between political, ethnic, or religious groups or a rising anxiety within the population leading to a "securization of society,"[27] requiring countermeasures on a political level within a comprehensive strategic approach. In the meantime, the terrorist threat in Germany, as in many other Western European countries, remains at an all-time high. Law enforcement agencies as well as domestic intelligence agencies at both the federal and state level will have to remain vigilant, and returning foreign fighters will be among the top of their list of persons of interest. CTC

l Editor's note: Georg Heil described how a mosque in Heidelberg and a "madrassa" in Dortmund were allegedly used to indoctrinate individuals by the extremist network Abu Walaa. See Georg Heil, "The Berlin Attack and the Abu Walaa Islamic State Recruitment Network," *CTC Sentinel* 10:2 (2017).

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Australian Jihadism in the Age of the Islamic State

By Andrew Zammit

The jihadi threat within Australia has transformed. Terror plots have become more frequent, with up to 16 occurring since September 2014, but have also become less ambitious. Australian jihadism has evolved since the 1990s, following international developments, most recently the Syrian civil war and the rise of Islamic State. The threat has also been shaped by aspects of Australia's counterterrorism response, particularly the use of travel restrictions to prevent suspected jihadis from joining groups abroad. These measures appear to have contributed to the increased number of plots, but also helped to keep the plots relatively unsophisticated.

On December 23, 2016, Australian counterterrorism authorities raided houses across Melbourne to disrupt a suspected terror plot inspired by the Islamic State. Four men were charged for allegedly planning to detonate improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the center of Melbourne on Christmas Day, targeting such popular locations as Federation Square and St. Paul's Cathedral.[1]

This plot was just the most recent manifestation of what had become a continuous threat for Australia. Four violent jihadi attacks had occurred since September 2014, resulting in the deaths of one police employee, two civilians, and three perpetrators. Security agencies had foiled up to 12 jihadi plots during the same 16-month period. Whereas jihadi plots were once rare in Australia, today the threat has undergone a dramatic change. This article explains the threat transformation. It outlines the 16 alleged or proven plots since late 2014, shows how Australian jihadism has evolved since the 1990s to reach its current level, and explains how the plots became more frequent, though less sophisticated.

The Current Threat: Its Scale and Form

After September 2014, when the Islamic State escalated its efforts to launch attacks abroad, Australia faced an unprecedented series of terror attempts. This began shortly before the now-deceased Islamic State spokesman Mohammad al-Adnani's worldwide call to arms on September 22 of that year.[2] On September 12, the National Terrorism Alert Level was raised from medium to high for the first time in its history.[3] This move was made on the advice of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which had long been concerned that the foreign fighter flow to Syria would be a "game changer."[4] Less than a week later, security agencies intercepted a message from a Syria-based Australian Islamic State member allegedly instructing his supporters at home to murder a random member of the public.[5] On September 19, 2014, the agencies responded by launching Australia's largest ever counterterrorism raids. More than 800 federal and state police officers in Joint Counter-Terrorism Teams (JCTTs)[a] raided houses across Sydney and Brisbane to suppress the threat and disrupt suspected support networks.[6]

Counterterrorism operations soon became routine, with raids occurring roughly every month. By the end of 2016, up to 12 alleged jihadi plots had been disrupted by counterterrorism action while four violent attacks had occurred. These incidents are summarized in the appendix.[b]

These plots share several characteristics. First, the role of the Islamic State itself was often limited. Some of the plots involved virtual planning (where overseas Islamic State members communicated directly with the plotters in Australia to instruct and encourage them),[7] while most appear to have been launched by unconnected individuals merely inspired by the Islamic State. Similarly, none of the Australian plots involved returned fighters from Syria or Iraq, nor were they centrally planned by the Islamic State in a way comparable to attacks in Brussels and Paris.[8] This contrasts with the situation in Europe. According to a 2016 dataset created by scholars Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, there were 38 Islamic State-associated terror plots in Europe between January 2014 and October 2016. In only six of these was the Islamic State's role limited to just inspiration.[c]

Another characteristic of the Australian plots is that most of them were small-scale and unsophisticated, being carried out by individual attackers or very small cells. They tended to involve blades or sometimes firearms (mainly handguns or shotguns) rather than attempts to make explosives. In most cases, the plotters did not appear to seek mass casualties but aimed to kill one or more people in a highly public manner. The most common targets were police officers.

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a Joint Counter-Terrorism Teams (JCTTs) were created after 9/11 to bridge federal-state divisions in counterterrorism. JCTTs operate in each state and include ASIO officers, federal police officers, state police officers, and members of any other relevant agencies (such as the NSW Crime Commission).

b The appendix is based on a database maintained by the author.

c The authors found there were 12 plots in Europe during this period linked to the Islamic State's external operations wing and another 19 plots involved "online instruction from members of IS's networks." Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10:6 (2016): pp. 4, 8.

This is not unique to Australia; such attacks have been seen across the West in recent years. What is distinctive is that Australia's current threat has consisted almost entirely of these types of relatively unsophisticated plots. This reality makes the threat Australia faces different than Europe, which experienced several Islamic State plots involving explosives like triacetone triperoxide (TATP) and automatic firearms.[9] The main exception was the suspected Christmas Day 2016 plot in Melbourne, where the attackers were unusually ambitious and allegedly attempting to make IEDs and target popular venues.

The current threat also differs from Australia's past jihadi activity. The four main jihadi plots Australia experienced before 2014 (occurring in 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2009) were more ambitious. These pre-2014 plots sought to cause mass casualties, often by using explosives and usually involving returned foreign fighters.

Understanding this transformation requires understanding of how jihadism within Australia has evolved over the past 20 years and how the counterterrorism response has shaped the threat.

How the Threat Grew

Prior to 9/11, Australia was not significantly affected by the political events behind modern jihadism, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the rise and fall of Islamist movements in the Middle East and North Africa. In contrast, Europe became an inadvertent haven from the 1980s onward as members of mainly Egyptian and Algerian jihadi groups fled state crackdowns. Support networks also formed in Europe to mobilize foreign fighters, first to the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and then to Bosnia and Chechnya, helping to create the groundwork for future attacks.[10]

The Australian situation was different, however, with few jihadi support networks present before 9/11. The main exception was that the Indonesian jihadi group Jemaah Islamiyah established a small Australian branch focused on fundraising, with an estimated 30 members across Perth, Sydney, and Melbourne.[11] There were also informal pro-jihadi networks mainly located in Sydney and centered on a few key figures, such as Belal Khazaal. Before arriving in Australia from Lebanon in 1987, Khazaal had reportedly been part of a Sunni jihadi milieu based around Palestinian camps in Sidon, which included followers of Abdullah Azzam.[12] In the 1990s, he was a leader in the Islamic Youth Movement (whose membership has been estimated at fewer than 50), which produced an extremist magazine called Nida'ul Islam that ran interviews with Usama bin Ladin, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada, and the leaders of Jemaah Islamiyah and several other jihadi groups.[13] He would later be convicted in absentia by Lebanese courts for terrorism offenses and also convicted in Australia for compiling a terrorist manual.[14] [d] The networks surrounding Khazaal interacted closely with Jemaah Islamiyah's Australian branch at times, and some members of these networks trained in Afghanistan with al-Qa`ida and in Pakistan with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Yet on the whole, Australia was mostly unaffected by, and somewhat oblivious to, the global jihadi threat.

This did not last. After the 9/11 attacks, three factors escalated the threat within Australia. The first factor was opportunity. The rise of al-Qa`ida affiliates and emergence of new jihadi theaters across the world provided new avenues for people to join the movement.[15] Aspiring Australian jihadis took advantage of this reality over the next decade. Some continued to train in Pakistan, but this largely ended around 2003. Several Australians became involved with Lebanese jihadi groups such as Asbat al-Ansar and Fatah al-Islam, while some joined jihadi groups in Somalia and Yemen.[16]

The second factor was that Australia's strategic significance increased. Before 9/11, Australia had less strategic importance for the global jihadi movement and only experienced one known jihadi plot. This was al-Qa`ida's unsuccessful attempt to co-opt members of Jemaah Islamiyah's Australian branch to attack the Israeli Embassy in Canberra, the Consulate in Sydney, and a prominent Jewish businessman in Melbourne.[17] The targets and timing (during the build-up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics, which would guarantee global publicity) suggests that Australia was seen as a potential arena for violence rather than a valuable target.

After 9/11, this changed. As Australia joined the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and provided extensive counterterrorism assistance to Southeast Asian countries following the 2002 Bali bombings, it was repeatedly named in al-Qa`ida propaganda.[18] It became clear to aspiring jihadis within Australia that the country was deemed a legitimate target. Moreover, global jihadi propaganda evolved to designate the West as a generic enemy (sometimes citing issues other than foreign policy, such as cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad) regardless of a particular Western country's relationship with the United States.[19]

The designation of Australia as a target was not limited to threatening statements. In late 2002, Melbourne man Joseph Thomas was offered money by senior al-Qa`ida figure Khalid bin Attash to identify military installations to target in Australia.[20] This did not result in a plot, but it demonstrated al-Qa`ida's active interest in attacking Australia, which was shared by other jihadi groups. In 2003, security agencies uncovered a plot involving Sydney resident Faheem Lodhi, who had trained with LeT.[21] He had coordinated with French LeT trainee Willie Brigitte and senior LeT figure Sajid Mir, who would become one of the masterminds of the 2008 Mumbai massacre.[22] In September 2004, the Australian Embassy in Indonesia was bombed by an al-Qa`ida-aligned splinter of Jemaah Islamiyah.[23]

The third factor was that radicalization increased within Australia, boosting the potential number of willing participants. This was partly prompted by some foreign fighters, who had left Australia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, returning from Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was also spurred by al-Qa`ida's message being broadcasted globally through online and other means. At the same time, the "War on Terror" became part of Australia's domestic political atmosphere, subjecting Muslims to a degree of political and media hostility, potentially reinforcing al-Qa`ida's narrative of a Western

d Khazaal has also been accused of other activities, but these have not been tested in any court. For example, a Central Intelligence Agency report described Khazaal as having trained with al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan in 1998 and acting as its representative in Australia. Sally Neighbour, "The Australian Connections," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2003.

Armed police during the hostage siege at a cafe in Sydney, Australia, on December 15, 2014 (Saeed Khan/AFP/Getty Images)

war against Islam.[e] Some Australians who had not been involved in jihadism before 9/11 now became involved, manifesting in a series of self-starting terror plots.

One such plot, foiled by Operation Pendennis in 2005, involved two terrorist cells in Melbourne and Sydney who had amassed bomb-making equipment.[24] The plotters pointed to Australia's role in Afghanistan and Iraq and were inspired by the global spread of jihadism, with their leader citing "the bombings in New York and Washington, Bali, Madrid, Jakarta, London and Iraq, as exemplars to be admired and emulated."[25] Some of the terrorists were returned foreign fighters (one member of the Melbourne cell had trained with al-Qa`ida, and some members of the Sydney cell trained with LeT), but several were recently radicalized.[26]

These three factors (increased opportunity through the spread of jihadi theaters, Australia's increased strategic importance, and the rise of local radicalization) contributed to a small but persistent level of jihadi activity within Australia for the first decade after 9/11. Then, the Syrian civil war and rise of the Islamic State escalated the threat further. The Islamic State's initial battlefield successes, its global propaganda, online mobilization, and until recently, the relative ease of traveling through Turkey, made it more difficult for distant countries to remain unaffected.[27]

This created a foreign fighter flow larger than any earlier transnational jihadi mobilization, which Australia became swept up in. According to the most recent public ASIO estimates,[f] there are currently 100 Australians in Syria and Iraq involved with jihadi groups (mainly the Islamic State). In addition, somewhere between 64 and 70 Australian members of these groups have been killed in the conflict. Around 190 people still within Australia are suspected of providing various forms of support, such as funding, facilitating the flow of fighters, and allegedly an attempt to assist the Islamic State with missile technology.[28]

The mobilization drew on earlier jihadi networks. For example, Khaled Sharrouf, who had served prison time for being part of the Sydney cell in the 2005 plot foiled by Operation Pendennis, managed to leave Australia and join the Islamic State.[29] He was joined by Mohamed Elomar, who had had one uncle (Mohammed Ali Elomar) convicted for his role in the Pendennis plot, and another uncle (Hussein Elomar) convicted of terrorism offenses in Lebanon.[30]

e According to the most recent census in 2011, Australia's Muslim population was around 476,000. About 40 percent were born in Australia, with the next most common countries of birth being (in descending order) Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, Indonesia, India, and Saudi Arabia. The majority are Sunni. See Riaz Hassan, "Australian Muslims: a Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia 2015," International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia, 2015. On the post-9/11 experiences of Muslim Australians, see Raimond Gaita, ed., *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2011).

f These figures come from ASIO Director-General Duncan Lewis testifying at the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Estimates hearing on October 18, 2016, and February 28, 2017. Transcripts of the hearings are available at parlinfo.aph.gov.au.

Ezzit Raad, convicted for his role in the Melbourne cell in the same plot, also joined the Islamic State and was eulogized in the Islamic State's online magazine Rumiyah after he died in combat.[31] However, many other Australians involved had no role in these earlier networks. Some individuals made their own journey to the conflict zone, while new jihadi networks formed in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane and reached out to the Islamic State.

A significant proportion of the Australian fighters are reportedly of Lebanese heritage, as the mobilization built on a history of jihadi connections between Australia and Lebanon, along with outrage against the Assad regime's atrocities against Sunni Muslims in the Levant.[32] But many participants, particularly members of these newer networks, had no familial connection to the region and came from a range of ethnicities, including Afghan, Turkish, Somali, and Anglo backgrounds, consistent with the Islamic State's global appeal.[33]

This unprecedented mobilization heightened the threat within Australia. As part of the international coalition against the Islamic State, Australia continued to hold strategic importance. Australia was labeled a target in Islamic State videos, Dabiq magazine, and public messages from Islamic State fighters.[34] In several cases, Australian Islamic State fighters called out to their compatriots to launch violence at home and sometimes directly instigated attacks. Sydney man Mohammad Ali Baryalei left for Syria in 2013 and joined Jabhat al-Nusra, then defected to the Islamic State and allegedly instigated a terror plot resulting in the September 2014 Operation Appleby raids.[35] Sydney woman Shadi Jabar Khalil Mohammad, the sister of the 15-year-old boy who murdered NSW police employee Curtis Cheng, joined the Islamic State and married Sudanese national Abu Sa'ad al-Sudani. After they were killed in a U.S. airstrike, the Pentagon described the couple as "active in recruiting foreign fighters and efforts to inspire attacks against western interests."[36]

Most significant was Melbourne man Neil Prakash, a convert from Buddhism who became Australia's most prominent Islamic State figure.[37] Court proceedings for the 2015 Anzac Plot showed that the Melbourne-based plotter believed Prakash would send him the details of Australian Army personnel to murder.[38] This resembles Islamic State plots elsewhere, such as British jihadi Junaid Hussain's attempt to direct an Ohio-based terrorist to murder a U.S. military employee.[39] However, Prakash does not appear to have sent the list, and the plot ended up targeting police officers.[40] Prakash was reportedly involved in other violent efforts until he was injured in U.S. airstrike in May 2016. He was initially reported killed but was later arrested in Turkey and might be extradited to Australia.[41] The government described him as "actively involved both in recruitment and in encouraging domestic terrorist events … he was the principal Australian reaching back from the Middle East into Australia, and in particular, to terrorist networks in both Melbourne and Sydney."[42]

All in all, the Islamic State's emergence, its successful strategy for mass mobilization, its explicit inclusion of Australia as a target from September 2014 onward, and its use of Australian fighters to reach back to their compatriots at home exacerbated earlier trends and escalated the jihadi threat within Australia.

How the Threat Took its Current Form

While the threat grew in scale, it also changed in form. More plots were occurring, but they were less ambitious. They tended to be small-scale and only occasionally involved trying to make explosives. Instead, they usually relied on blades and non-automatic firearms. One likely reason for this is that propaganda explicitly encouraged it. Since al-Adnani's September 2014 call to arms, Islamic State propaganda has called on its Western-based supporters to act urgently with whatever means available, without having to seek prior permission or engage in long-term planning.[43] Following the Islamic State's exhortations, these sorts of ad-hoc plots have increased throughout Western countries.[44]

However, the current threat landscape has also been shaped by distinct features of Australia's counterterrorism response. After 9/11, the government boosted funding for security agencies, introduced new counterterrorism laws, and created new institutional arrangements. Other measures included restricting access to useful materials, such as limiting the sale of fertilizers that could be used to make explosives. Access to firearms was already limited by gun control measures introduced after a mass shooting in 1996. (A black market for firearms does exist but is not necessarily easy for aspiring jihadis to access.) These measures made ambitious terrorist plots increasingly difficult; communication intercepts played during terrorism trials sometimes revealed frustrated discussions about the difficulty of acquiring guns.[45] Unless the terrorists were well connected to broader criminal or terrorist networks, they needed to either expend time and effort trying to acquire explosives or automatic firearms or act faster by using alternative means. In line with the Islamic State's emphasis on urgency, many plotters resorted to simpler methods.

One particularly important aspect of the security crackdown was efforts to stop suspected jihadis from traveling. Being an island with few exit-points, Australia was in a better position to restrict travel than many other countries. In the first decade after 9/11, ASIO canceled over 50 passports on counterterrorism grounds.[46] Agencies also curbed the activities of facilitators who arranged access to jihadi groups based abroad.[47] These actions helped prevent more extremists from accessing terrorist training and international connections.

Travel restrictions carried their own risks, and on some occasions, the suspects lashed out at authorities. In 2003, one suspect, Zaky Mallah, threatened violence against government officials after his passport application was refused.[48] In 2013, Ahmed al-Ahmadzai, a terror suspect closely watched by authorities and whose passport had been denied, threatened to slit an ASIO officer's throat.[49] Most seriously, this approach risked increasing the likelihood of aspiring foreign fighters turning to mass-casualty terror attacks at home. This became clear with Operation Neath in 2009, when the Victorian JCTT foiled a plan by Melbourne-based men to carry out a mass shooting against an Army barracks in Sydney.[50] Some of the plotters had earlier tried to join the Somali jihadi group al-Shabaab, but they turned their violent focus on Australia after their passports were confiscated.[51]

Security agencies have been aware of these risks but judged them to be worth taking, given the benefits.[52] Restricting travel has both prevented suspects from gaining deadly skills and connections, and upheld international security obligations by stopping them from posing a threat to other countries.[g] Consequently, when the Syr-

g The author agrees with this assessment. See Andrew Zammit, "In defence of ASIO's passport powers," The Strategist blog, December 4, 2014.

ian civil war sparked a renewed foreign fighter mobilization, the government increased these efforts. ASIO canceled 45 passports in the financial year from 2013-2014, 93 from 2014-2015, and 62 from 2015-2016. This was a significant escalation, as they had never before canceled more than 20 in a single year.[53]

Action was also again taken against facilitators. In 2013, the New South Wales JCTT arrested Hamdi Alqudsi, who was later convicted for assisting at least six Australians to join Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and the Islamic State, and attempting to assist a seventh.[54] In 2014, the Queensland JCTT arrested Omar Succarieh, later convicted for assisting a group of Australians who had joined Jabhat al-Nusra.[55] In addition, the newly created Australian Border Force was deployed to airports and tasked with detecting potential jihadis trying to get on flights.[56]

The success in preventing travel likely played a role in the surge of terror attempts. Some of the plotters had been prevented from traveling to join the Islamic State shortly before their attacks. This was the case for Numan Haider, who stabbed two JCTT officers in Melbourne, and Sevdet Besim, who conspired to murder one or more police officers during Anzac Day services.[57] It appears to have also been the case in some of the other incidents, although details are unclear on those that have not yet been through court.[58]

Police have been a prominent target in such plots, which is unsurprising given that Islamic State propaganda has singled out members of security agencies as ideal targets. However, travel restrictions and the largely successful counterterrorism crackdown may have contributed as well. The suspects were often aware they were under police scrutiny, having had their passports taken or friends arrested, so there could be elements of opportunism and personal revenge in their decisions to target police.

However, if travel restrictions have partly prompted the surge in attacks, they have also helped keep the plots poorly prepared. After all, revealing to suspects that they are under surveillance potentially increases their sense of urgency. In addition, such restrictions can leave plotters unable to establish substantial enough connections to the Islamic State to gain terrorist training or logistical support, demonstrated by the absence of known plots involving returned Islamic State fighters.

Partly as a result, Australia has not had to deal with an Islamic State returnee problem on the scale that Europe has. It is currently estimated that around 40 Australians have returned after fighting in Syria or Iraq.[59] Most had returned by early 2013, before the Islamic State was established in its current form.[60] Many potential returnees may have been deterred by the wave of new counterterrorism laws, the public demonstration effect of counterterrorism operations from September 2014 onward, and the knowledge that it is difficult to enter Australia unnoticed. In contrast, the Islamic State has infiltrated a significant number of fighters back into Europe and established substantial underground infrastructure.[61] This has made centrally planned Islamic State plots less feasible in Australia than in countries like France and Belgium.

That said, border controls do not protect countries from virtually planned attacks, where Islamic State operatives in Syria and Iraq communicate with the plotters to provide instructions and encouragement. In the Anzac Day 2015 plot, the Mother's Day 2015 plot, and the February 2015 Sydney plot, the perpetrators received instructions from Islamic State figures abroad.[62] This appears to have also been the case in some of the alleged plots that have not yet been through the courts, such as the Sydney 2014 plot allegedly ordered by Australian Islamic State figure Mohammed Ali Baryalei. Nor do border controls prevent unconnected jihadis from heeding the Islamic State's call to arms. However, they have helped keep Australia's jihadi threat manageable for the time being.

Conclusion

The escalation of jihadi plots in Australia was in many ways an acceleration of earlier trends. Australia once seemed significantly insulated from jihadi threats, but after 9/11, it faced a more global movement, significant local radicalization, and increased strategic importance as a target. This manifested in new foreign fighter flows and terror plots. Then the Syrian civil war and rise of the Islamic State escalated the threat further, as it had in many other countries.

The threat within Australia was shaped by global trends, but also by aspects of Australia's counterterrorism response. One particularly important aspect was the use of travel restrictions, enabled by the difficulty of moving in and out of Australia unnoticed. These travel restrictions proved a valuable counterterrorism tool, making it difficult for Australian jihadis to gain the skills and connections for the types of centrally planned attacks that had caused mass casualties in Europe.

However, travel restrictions do not prevent other types of terror plots, such as ones based on remote instruction or individuals acting at their own initiative. By keeping frustrated jihadis at home, they potentially increase the risk of such plots. This became more apparent after September 2014, when the Islamic State called on its supporters to launch immediate attacks through any available method. Australia was one of many countries in which this call found a receptive audience. Fortunately, the same security crackdown that kept many aspiring Islamic State fighters at home also helped ensure their plots tended to be poorly prepared and closely monitored.

Similar plots can be anticipated in the future, but it should also be kept in mind that the threat can change. Sophisticated plots involving Islamic State returnees and central planning are less feasible in Australia than Europe, given the difficulty of returning discreetly, but cannot be ruled out. In addition, the failure of so many recent plots may lead attackers to turn to newer methods, such as vehicle attacks, as seen in France and Germany. The threat will also be shaped by developments outside Australia, particularly as many Australian Islamic State fighters remain active and could provide instructions to supporters at home. As the Islamic State continues to lose territory in Iraq and Syria, the group is anticipated to escalate its external violence in response, and it has repeatedly shown its ability to adapt and evolve.[63] CTC

Appendix: Jihadi Plots in Australia Since September 2014

This table was compiled from court documents, media reports, and other sources.

VIOLENT INCIDENTS

Date of Event	Event
September 2014	Numan Haider stabbed two Victorian Joint Counter-Terrorism Team officers, then was shot dead.
December 2014	Harun Man Monis used a shotgun to take hostages in Lindt Café in Sydney. The 12-hour siege ended with the deaths of two hostages and Monis.
October 2015	Fifteen-year-old Farhad Jabar used a handgun to murder NSW police employee Curtis Cheng at Parramatta police station, and then was fatally shot. Four alleged accomplices have been charged, some of whom were linked to the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Appleby raids.
September 2016	A man allegedly stabbed a member of the public in Sydney suburb of Minto, allegedly to lure polices officers to be stabbed, and is currently facing trial.

ALLEGED OR PROVEN PLOTS

Date of Main Arrests	Event
September 2014	Alleged plot to use firearms or knives against targets that are currently unclear, by a man arrested under the Queensland JCTT's Operation Bolton. One suspect was charged and is facing trial.
September 2014	Alleged plot in Sydney to murder a random member of the public with a blade and film it. The plotter was allegedly part of a larger cell and received instructions from Syria-based Australian Islamic State member Mohammad Ali Baryalei. The alleged plotter was arrested under the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Appleby and is facing trial.
December 2014 (until March 2016)	Alleged plot to attack government buildings in Sydney. The suspects were arrested over many months in a series of raids that were also part of the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Appleby. Six alleged plotters were charged and are facing trial.
February 2015	Two Sydney men, Omar al-Kutobi and Mohammad Kiad, formed a plot under instructions from an Islamic State member in the Middle East known only as "Rahman." The plan was to firebomb a Shi`a institution and then attack one or more people with a blade. The plot was foiled by the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Castrum. Al-Kutobi and Kiad pleaded guilty and were sentenced in December 2016.
April 2015	Eighteen-year-old Sevdet Besim plotted to kill one or more police officers in Melbourne during Anzac Day (April 25). He received instructions from two Syria-based Australian Islamic State members and a 14-year-old U.K. child pretending to be a significant Islamic State member. The plan was to run over a police officer with a car, grab his/her gun, and start shooting. The plot was foiled by the Victorian JCTT's Operation Rising. Besim pleaded guilty and was sentenced in October 2016.
May 2015	An unnamed 17-year-old plotted an attack involving IEDs to occur in Melbourne around Mother's Day. He received some instructions from British Islamic State member Junaid Hussain. Targets are unclear, but there was discussion of a police station or train station. The plot was foiled by the Victorian JCTT's Operation Amberd. The plotter pleaded guilty and was sentenced in December 2016.
February 2016	Alleged plot involving a Sydney couple planning a knife attack. The two suspects were arrested under the NSW JCTT's Operation Chillon, and one has been convicted and sentenced for refusing to answer questions. Otherwise, both suspects are facing trial on the terrorism charges.
April 2016	Alleged plot in Sydney to carry out a shooting attack on Anzac Day (again). One suspect was arrested under the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Vianden and is facing trial.
May 2016	Alleged plot to carry out a shooting attack against Parramatta court in Sydney. One suspect was charged under the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Sanadres and is facing trial.
September 2016	Alleged plot by a NSW prisoner, for which details are currently unclear. One suspect was charged under the New South Wales JCTT's Operation Broughton and is facing trial.
October 2016	Alleged plot to carry out a beheading attack in Sydney. Two suspects were charged under a New South Wales JCTT operation and are facing trial.
December 2016	Alleged plot to detonate IEDs at popular locations in Melbourne's central business district. Four suspects were charged under the Victorian JCTT's Operation Kastelhom and are facing trial.

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The Taliban Stones Commission and the Insurgent Windfall from Illegal Mining

By Matthew C. DuPée

The estimated value of Afghanistan's mineral and hydrocarbon deposits is more than $1 trillion, but political instability, corruption, and a robust insurgency have resulted in the Afghan Taliban and other jihadi groups penetrating nearly every aspect of the Afghanistan's lucrative extractives industry. The Taliban exploit mining sites in at least 14 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and now earn as much as $200 to $300 million annually, the second-largest revenue stream after narcotics. The Taliban's increased footprint in Afghanistan and their efforts to formalize their role in the mining sector by creating the *Dabaro Comisyoon*, or "Stones Commission," have substantially enhanced their war chest. The Taliban's involvement in Afghanistan's mining sector will most likely continue to grow in scale and complexity for the foreseeable future.

Afghanistan's vast mineral deposits, a complex assortment of metals, industrial minerals, mineral fuels, precious and semi-precious gems, and hydrocarbons—including world-class deposits of iron and copper—is under threat from a horde of illegal mining syndicates, including the Afghan Taliban. The U.S. Department of Defense's Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) previously estimated that Afghanistan's known mineral deposits tops $1 trillion—$908 billion in mineral resources and more than $200 billion in hydrocarbon deposits.[1] While illegal mining activities in Afghanistan have long plagued efforts to create a functioning, licit mining sector, the Taliban have now succeeded in penetrating nearly every aspect of the mining sector. Increasingly, other jihadi groups such as the Islamic State–Khorasan Province (ISIS-KP) have also entered the underground economy of illegal mining, but so far, ISIS-KP's activities are mostly restricted to the limited areas under its control in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar Province.[2] The Afghanistan Anti-Corruption Network (AACN) reported in February 2017 that ISIS-KP and the Taliban earned $46 million last year from illegally extracting talc, a soft mineral used in the manufacturing of cosmetics, from Nangarhar's Khogyani District.[3] Although it was not determined how much ISIS-KP earned out of the $46 million, it demonstrated that like the Taliban, ISIS-KP is diversifying revenue streams and seeking to control territory in order to exploit its natural resources.

The Taliban have been careful not to publicize or even confirm any of their activities in the mining sector, and they often publicly deny any involvement.[4] However, within the Taliban's organizational structure, a fully functioning mining department known as the *Dabaro Comisyoon* ("Stones Commission") manages the taxation of extracted minerals and ores and even issues 'official' Taliban sanctioned mining licenses. The *Dabaro Comisyoon* operates under the authority of the Taliban's *Maali Comisyoon* ("Financial Commission") and reportedly came into existence around 2009 as the Taliban began to experiment in diversifying their revenue streams.[5]

The United States deployed an additional 33,000 troops to Afghanistan beginning in 2009 as part of a "surge" aimed at stabilizing the Afghan government and blunting the Taliban's momentum on the battlefield. The Taliban prepared for the surge accordingly and expanded all efforts to develop and maintain sufficient financial resources. During this time, Pakistani authorities arrested Mullah Abdul Ghani "Baradar," the Taliban's most senior military commander and deputy to then overall Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, during an unprecedented security operation in February 2010.[6] The leadership vacuum resulted in the rise of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, a senior member of the Taliban movement from Kandahar Province who maximized his tribal affiliation as a member of the Ishaqzai to profit from the narcotics trade.[7] He would emerge as the de facto head of the Taliban movement in July 2015 following the confirmation that Mullah Omar had died of natural causes years earlier, possibly in 2013, although Mansour had largely led the Taliban movement since Abdul Ghani Berader's arrest. Mansour, who was killed in an U.S. airstrike in May 2016, and his close confidant and business partner, Mullah Gul Agha Akhund, who also belongs to the Ishaqzai tribe and served as head of the Taliban *Maali Comisyoon*, expanded the Taliban's revenue streams by exploiting the mining sector in Helmand Province among other illicit activities.[8]

The *Maali Comisyoon* oversees and manages the financial flow of many of the Taliban's illicit revenue streams, including mining activities, kidnapping for ransom, and extorting NGOs. The shadowy leader of the *Dabaro Comisyoon* is reportedly a former Taliban media and propaganda figure from Ghazni Province named Ahmad

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Jan Ahmad.[9] [a] Given the Taliban's reluctance to publicize its illicit financial activities, little more is known about structure of the *Dabaro Comisyoon* and its purported leader.[b]

The Scope of Illegal Mining Activities

In October 2016, the U.N. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported that the Taliban remained directly involved in the mining sector "by controlling illegal mining sites, specifically in the south and east of the country, by extorting sums from licensed Afghan mining operations and by acting as a transport facilitator for other illegally extracted natural resources."[10] The Taliban are now involved in the illegal extraction of minerals, ores, and precious and semi-precious stones, and they reportedly own several mining and excavation businesses in southern Afghanistan.

The Taliban have been reaping significant sums from artisanal and illegal mining activities. Though a firm conclusion regarding an actual amount is impossible to ascertain, the Taliban were reported, by the Afghan government envoy to Helmand in June 2016, to earn between $50,000 and $60,000 per day ($18.5 million and $21.9 million per year) from mining and transporting marble in the province.[11] In addition, they were estimated to make as much as $16 million from unlicensed ruby extraction in Kabul as early as 2014[12] and $6 million in 2016 from mining the gemstone lapis lazuli in Badakhshan Province.[13] While those approximations pertain to only three provinces, one Afghan expert on the extractives industry assessed that out of the estimated $2 billion generated overall each year from Afghan mining operations, the Taliban currently stand to earn 10 to 15 percent, or $200 to $300 million.[14] The same source contended that the Taliban's involvement in illegal mining activities had increased significantly since 2012,[15] even in areas that are under government control.[16]

By contrast, the Afghan government reportedly earned only $30 million from mining revenues in 2015, a paltry sum compared to the current estimated revenues of the Taliban from mining.[17]

The Taliban, always keen to adapt to military and political changes on the battlefield, began diversifying revenue streams in 2009 and 2010. The trend became evident in Helmand Province, especially during the lead up to the extensively planned Operation *Moshtarak* ("Together"), which entailed a combined force of 15,000 American, coalition, and Afghan security personnel to retake the town of Marjeh, then the key area for Taliban opium production. Up until February 2010, the Taliban had largely controlled the small agricultural hamlet of Marjeh, and between 60 and 70 percent of local farmers relied upon the illegal opium trade as their main source of income.[18] Anticipating significant financial loss from losing control of Marjeh and its opium economy, the Taliban began paying closer attention to Helmand's lucrative natural resources.

The Taliban, who had long honed the processes of taxing local farmers' 10 percent of their harvest and 2.5 percent on their wealth, probably applied similar measures against local mining firms operating in vulnerable and rural districts. The Taliban's budding entrance into the mining sector is not well documented. The U.N. reported in 2012[19] that the Taliban had earned a combined total of $400 million from a wide array of illicit enterprises, such as taxing local economies including the narcotics trade, extorting businesses and NGOs, and fundraising, but illegal mining activities went unreported until 2013. The U.N. cautiously observed in 2013 that the Taliban had begun to "specifically" target gemstone mining operations, noting that the World Bank estimated that 90 to 99 percent of Afghanistan's gemstones were illegally smuggled out of the country.[20]

A second catalyst for the Taliban's deepening involvement in illegal mining activities occurred after the United States formally ended its combat mission in Afghanistan at the end of 2014. The NATO mission in Afghanistan was renamed Resolute Support and focused on training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Security Defense Forces (ANDSF), which, at that point, assumed responsibility for all security operations. Since the transition, the Taliban have continued to make territorial gains throughout the country. Only about 57 percent of the Afghanistan's 407 districts were considered under Afghan government control or influence as of November 15, 2016, a six percent decrease from the 63.4 percent reported last quarter in late August 2016 and a nearly 15 percent decrease since November 2015.[21] The Taliban controlled 11 of Helmand's 14 districts by August 2016,[22] hence creating a de facto shadow state and allowing the Taliban to further exploit the mining sector, the drug trade, and other illicit commodities. Local media and civil society reporting throughout 2016 identified at least 1,400 illegal mining sites located in at least 14 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces[c]—710 of which are in the Kabul area alone[23]—that are exploited by the Taliban and other insurgents. Overall, there are some 10,000 mineral deposits reportedly located in areas outside of the government's control.[24] In June 2016, a spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Interior acknowledged the challenges associated with illegal mining activities and claimed that the Afghan government had stopped 1,270 illegal mining operations.[25] However, it was unclear when and where those illegal mining operations had been disrupted.

Dabaro Comisyoon at Work in Helmand Province

In the volatile southern province of Helmand, which has nearly collapsed to the Taliban every year since 2014, the illegal cultivation, processing, and trafficking of narcotics has remained a critical financial resource for the Taliban. The Taliban dominate many aspects of Helmand's thriving, multi-billion narcotics industry, which revolves around the illicit cultivation of poppy, which, in turn, is used to produce opium and refined heroin as well as the cultivation of cannabis. This is used to create hashish, a potent marijuana resin. The U.N. estimates that the Taliban earned $400 million from the narcotics industry in 2016.[26] In addition to narcotics, Helmand's mineral resources are now extensively exploited by the Taliban in areas inside and outside of government control.

a Ahmad Jan Ahmad shares a name similar to a former Taliban Minister of Mines, Maulavi Jan Ahmad, who held the position for a short time during the Taliban government era (1996-2001). It should be noted that these are two separate individuals.

b The Taliban rely upon shadow administrations, commissions, and commanders active in rural communities to manage and tax local mining operations and charge taxes for each ton of stone transported from the mining site. The finances are most likely managed by provincial-level Taliban officials, who relay portions of the coffer to the *Dabaro* and *Maali Comisyoons*.

c The provinces include Badakhshan, Bamyan, Ghazni, Helmand, Kabul, Khost, Kunar, Logar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, Panjshir, Parwan, and Wardak.

Slabs of rokhaam *(marble) await further processing at a warehouse in Lashkar Gah City, Helmand Province, on March 6, 2017. These stones are representative of the only two percent of Helmand's overall marble output that can be taxed by the Afghan government and sold to local Afghan markets. The rest is exploited by the Taliban and smuggled to Pakistan. Photograph provided to the author by a source in Helmand Province.*

While the Afghan government's envoy to Helmand reported in June 2016 that the Taliban earn between $18.25 million and $21.9 million per year from mining and transporting marble,[27] sources in Helmand reported in January 2017 that the Taliban most likely earn much more than the government is reporting. The Taliban's taxation of marble differs depending on the color and quality of the stone. The four most common types of marble, known locally as *rokhaam*, are yellow, light green, dark green, and pink. Veins of yellow marble are now uncommon; light green is considered the lowest quality; dark green is the second best; and pink is considered the best quality stone.

The Taliban charge a tax for each truck used to transport the mined stones, and depending on the type of marble being transported, the tax ranges from 25,000 Pakistani rupees ($238.54) to 60,000 Pakistani rupees ($572.49) per ton. Trucks can carry between 7 and 40 tons each, depending on the type of vehicle.[d] The U.N. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported in 2015 that between 2008 and 2014, mining operations extracted 124,000 to 155,000 tons of marble from Helmand each year.[28]

Sources in Helmand also estimated that around 50 trucks are used to smuggle hundreds of tons of marble from Helmand into Pakistan every day, while only two percent of Helmand's extracted marble end up in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, where the marble is further processed and sold.[29] Of the meager two percent of marble that remains in Afghanistan, the government is only able to tax 3,500 afghanis ($33.40) per ton.[30]

In addition to taxing the transport of minerals, the Taliban in Helmand now also charge mining operators for a license to excavate. From the Taliban's perspective, this was a key achievement of the *Dabaro Comisyoon*, helping it to dramatically increase revenues. Some mining operators also pay the government for a license, but many only carry the license issued by the Taliban. The U.N. estimates that there are at least 35 illegal marble mining sites in Helmand, many of which are located in desolate, Taliban-controlled areas of Dishu District.[31]

Taliban officials from the *Dabaro Comisyoon* and *Maali Comisyoon*—who maintain a presence in Khan Neshin District as well as in nearby Baram Chah, a well-known haven for insurgents—smugglers, and traffickers collect the payments and taxes from the mining operations.[32] It is even alleged that some of the excavation companies are owned by senior Taliban commanders, including various family members of Amir Khan Motaqi, a senior Taliban commander in charge of the 'Cultural' Commission.[33] The Taliban shadow governor for Helmand, Mullah Manan, a member of the Ishaqzai tribe, and *Dabaro Comisyoon* official Mullah Mohammad Essa, a Noorzai Pashtun originally from Spin Boldak, Kandahar Province, reportedly run the Taliban's illegal mining operations in Helmand.[34]

The contemporary manifestation of the *Dabaro Comisyoon* is a far cry from the Taliban's past attempts at exploiting local mining operations, many of which were ad hoc or temporary efforts to tax the smuggling of precious stones and eventually industrial

d As of January 2017, the Taliban charged the following taxes for marble extracted in Helmand—Light Green: 25,000 Pakistani rupees (PRs) ($238.54) per ton; Dark Green: 30,000 to 40,000 PRs ($286.25 - $381.66) per ton; and Pink: 50,000 to 60,000 PRs per ton ($477.08 - $572.49).

ores such as chromite. The *Dabaro Comisyoon*, which functions under the authority of the powerful *Maali Comisyoon* (the Taliban Financial Commission), is tasked with streamlining the Taliban's financial intake from mining operations through taxation and the issuance of excavation licenses and through trafficking operations. The *Dabaro Comisyoon* is reportedly also tasked with managing the revenues earned from taxing mining companies and those tasked with transporting the stones throughout the country (and not only in Helmand Province). It also maintains relations with Pakistani businessmen who help facilitate the black-market sale of Afghanistan's illegally excavated natural resources.[35]

Illegal Mining Close to Kabul

Illegal and unregulated mining activities are not only pertinent to isolated rural communities long outside the government's control. The village of Nili, located in Parwan Province—approximately 25 miles from Kabul City and 12 miles from the sprawling U.S. base at Bagram Airfield—is reportedly a hub for the illegal mining of nephrite jade, a decorative stone used in ornaments and jewelry. Taliban insurgents reportedly have controlled mining operations in Nili for most of 2016.[36] The jade is trafficked through the mountains by mules until it reaches Sarobi District, Kabul Province, where it is then transferred to trucks and transported farther east to markets in Pakistan.

Sarobi itself is also illegally exploited for its precious stones, mostly rubies. Taliban insurgents have controlled a mountainous area near the village of Jegdalek[e] in Sarobi District since at least 2012, when reports first emerged indicating that the Taliban had coerced locals to illegally mine the mountains for rubies. One such high-quality ruby extracted there allegedly sold for $600,000 to a buyer in Dubai, UAE.[37] Despite an Afghan security operation codenamed "Iron Triangle" that successfully routed insurgents from several enclaves of Sarobi in 2015, the illegal extraction and smuggling of rubies from Sarobi continued unabated in the summer of 2016.[38] Most of the precious stones illegally extracted from mines in Kabul are smuggled to Peshawar, Pakistan; the rubies are typically sorted for quality and sold in the gem stalls of Peshawar's Namak Mandi market.[39]

Areas located immediately west and southwest of Kabul City paint a similar picture. In 2015, officials in Wardak Province reported that the Taliban effectively tax a lucrative mining site where limestone, an industrial mineral, is extracted.[40] Similarly, the massive coal deposits in Bamyan Province, part of the rugged central highlands and ancestral home of ethnic Hazaras—an historic enemy of the Taliban—have also been exploited by the Taliban despite a large portion of the coal mines being closed in 2013. The Taliban have allegedly taxed every truck of coal extracted from the Kahmard coal site, earning approximately $3,000 per day (approximately $1.1 million per year) in 2015.[41]

Conclusion

Although the Taliban enjoy a diverse array of income generation, reaping hundreds of millions of dollars from the illicit drug trade, kidnapping for ransom, and extortion rackets, they have formalized its exploitation of Afghanistan's natural resources by creating the *Dabaro Comisyoon*. Since its inception, and under the leadership of Akhtar Mansour and his confidant Gul Agha Akhund from 2010 to 2016, the *Dabaro Comisyoon* has emerged as one of the most effective, efficient, and enduring business enterprises associated with the Afghan Taliban.

The Taliban's momentum in penetrating the mining sector has continued uninterrupted over the past several years and will most likely continue to grow in scale and complexity in the near term, especially in areas under total Taliban control. The Taliban are actively engaging in illegally mining activities in at least 14 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, including Kabul. Estimates that the Taliban now earn upward of $200 to $300 million annually from the illegal excavation of various metals, industrial minerals, mineral fuels, and precious and semi-precious gem stones are certainly plausible; however, firm conclusions remain difficult to prove.

The licit prospects of Afghanistan's vast natural resources are fleeting, a sentiment that is slowly seeping from civil society organizations, extractives experts, and Afghan government officials alike. A former senior Afghan official with detailed knowledge of the extractives industry recently told the author, "Afghanistan is a very mineral-rich country, but mining by itself can never result in sustainable development unless there are strong political, legal, and financial frameworks in place to manage this potential—something that needs patience and perseverance in pursuing the right policy. Unfortunately, neither Afghan politicians nor the international donor community seems to have this patience. The mining sector [in Afghanistan], at this point, is bleak."[42]

Despite international involvement to stabilize Afghanistan over the past 15 years, the Afghan government remains vulnerable and continues to suffer from inadequate security, a lack of modern infrastructure, corruption, and belligerent neighbors that undermine Afghanistan's economic potential and directly threatens its physical security. Afghanistan's projected mineral wealth is unlikely to be realized over the next generation, although small-scale artisanal and illegal mining activities will most likely continue to expand in size and scope. The Taliban will inevitably remain at the forefront of Afghanistan's many illegal mining activities, especially in Helmand Province, which has galvanized into the center of gravity for the Taliban's illicit revenue streams. CTC

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