FEATURE ARTICLE

The Islamic State Threat to the World Cup

BRIAN GLYN WILLIAMS AND ROBERT TROY SOUZA

A VIEW FROM THE CT FOXHOLE

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FROM THE EDITOR   On June 14, 2018, the FIFA World Cup kicks off in Moscow with host Russia facing Saudi Arabia in the opening match. Brian Williams and Robert Souza warn in our cover article that the massive global media spotlight on Russia during the month-long tournament may incentivize jihadi terrorists to carry out attacks on Russian soil to retaliate for the country's ongoing military intervention against Sunni rebel and jihadi fighters in Syria. Recent years have seen a string of jihadi terrorist attacks and plots in Russia, including the St. Petersburg metro bombing last year, as well as Islamic State plots and attacks targeting soccer venues in Europe. In recent months, propaganda outlets supportive of the Islamic State have released a torrent of threat messages against the tournament. According to Williams and Souza, potential threats include 'self-starters' inspired by Islamic State propaganda, foreign fighters returning from Syria and Iraq, and jihadis operating in the northern Caucasus and Tatarstan.

Our interview is with *New York Times* foreign correspondent Rukmini Callimachi, whose ongoing podcast series Caliphate documents the evolution and crimes of the Islamic State.

Daniel Milton and Brian Dodwell examine a female guesthouse registry obtained from Islamic State territory. The records on about 1,100 women who transited through the facility shed new light on the women who traveled from overseas to join the group, as well as challenge the dominant narrative in many media reports on the subject.

Bennett Clifford explores pro-Islamic State instructional material on the messaging and file-sharing platform Telegram, arguing that the dissemination of know-how on operational and cyber security may be equally as dangerous as instructional material related to carrying out attacks. Christian Jokinen draws on court records to outline the experiences of German foreign fighters who traveled to join al-Shabaab in Somalia earlier this decade. For most of them, the terrorist group turned out to be an unwelcoming host organization.

Paul Cruickshank, *Editor in Chief*

The Islamic State Threat to the 2018 FIFA World Cup

By Brian Glyn Williams and Robert Troy Souza

On the eve of hosting the FIFA World Cup in soccer, the most widely viewed sports event in the world, the Russian Federation is facing a surge in the terror threats linked to Vladimir Putin's involvement in the Syrian civil war. There is increasing concern that terrorists linked to the Islamic State and other jihadi groups will seek to use the month-long global spectator event, kicking off June 14, to carry out high-profile terror attacks. Pro-Islamic State media platforms have launched an unprecedented social media campaign calling for attacks on the tournament. In just the past few years, there have been numerous successful terror attacks and thwarted plots in Russia by terrorists linked to or inspired by the Islamic State. This suggests the group may have the capacity to launch attacks in Russia during the World Cup.

In December 2010, Russia was selected to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Russian President Vladimir Putin was delighted to have landed the prestigious international event.[1] He felt that Russia's image depended upon the World Cup being held safely, and he subsequently spoke to Russian police, saying "[Russia] must hold it at the highest level and most importantly, ensure maximum security for players and fans."[2] Putin himself is set to attend the opening match between Russia and Saudi Arabia to be held on June 14 at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow and clearly has much invested in ensuring a safe and successful World Cup in his homeland.[3]

Russian officials have assured sports journalists that "Russia, by comparison with other championships, will guarantee one of the highest levels of security. In view of the measures taken and the experience of other major championships we will be able 100pc [percent] to ensure order in the stadiums and fan safety."[4]

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Russia has had almost three decades of experience in counterterrorism operations, but such bold promises of 100-percent security would appear difficult to keep in light of the recent Islamic State-inspired attacks that have taken place since 2015 in retaliation of Russia's military campaign against Sunni rebels in Syria. As the World Cup approaches, pro-Islamic State media platforms have launched an unprecedented media campaign designed to galvanize "lone wolves" or "wolf pack" cells to carry out the sort of self-starter, do-it-yourself attacks that have increasingly become the group's trademark. There is also the possibility that hundreds of battle-hardened Russian fighters from Dagestan, Chechnya, Tatarstan, and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia could return to Russia following the collapse of the Islamic State's caliphate, seeking vengeance. Furthermore, there is concern Russians recruited locally into the Islamic State-aligned Kavkaz Velayet (Caucasus Province) could carry out terror attacks during the World Cup.

In response to these threats, Russian security forces have launched a series of raids in the Caucasus region over the course of the last year and have arrested cells throughout Russia. Stringent security measures have also been put in place to protect the World Cup, but it will be difficult to maintain security of the sort achieved during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi as the matches will be held across Russia in 11 cities that are connected by vulnerable travel networks.

The Bear and the Hornet's Nest

At the time Putin received news that Russia had beaten out other contenders to host the 2018 World Cup back in 2010, the Russian president could not have foreseen how embroiled he would become in a Middle East conflict that has taken the lives of over 400,000 people.[5] Due to its intervention in Syria, Russia has in many ways replaced the United States as the primary enemy of global jihadi groups.

In September 2015, the Russian Federation overtly joined the Syrian civil war with direct military action on the side of its embattled client, the Alawite Assad regime in Damascus. As Russian Tupolev 95 strategic bombers leveled Sunni-occupied east Aleppo, killing thousands of Sunnis, and Russian special forces backed by Mil Hind 24 attack helicopters and MiG 29 fighter bombers bolstered Syrian Arab Army offensives against the Islamic State in Palmyra (central Syria) and towns such as Abu Kamal (eastern Syria on the Iraqi border), the crumbling caliphate declared war on the "infidels of Moscow."[6] In a typical threat to Putin in a video aired on the Al Arabiya TV channel, an Islamic State fighter sat in the cockpit of a captured Russian war plane in the Raqqa region with a second fighter warning:

"This message is addressed to you, oh Vladimir Putin. These are your aircraft, which you sent to Bashar, and with the help of Allah we will send them back to you. Remember this. The Islamic State exists, and it will exist and it will expand with

the help of Allah. Your throne is already shaking. It is in danger, and it will collapse when we get to you. We are on the way with Allah's permission."[7]

Putin's rationales for involving his nation in the bloody sectarian war in Syria were varied. When the Arab Spring demonstrations shook the region in 2011, the Russian leader watched as strongmen like Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and Muammar Qaddafi in Libya were overthrown and Islamists and jihadis gained power, just as they had in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. The authoritarian Russian leader feared that his Middle Eastern ally, Syrian Baathist president Bashar al-Assad, would share the same fate and that his fall would bring Islamists and jihadis even closer to Russia's borders. As the Arab Spring spread to Syria and Sunni rebel groups—including the Islamic State and the al-Qa`ida-aligned Jabhat al-Nusra (now Hayat Tahrir al-Sham)—and other more moderate groups, such as the Army of Conquest, seized vast swaths of territory, his fears did not appear to be far-fetched. To prevent a similar outcome in Russia's Middle Eastern client state that was home to Russia's only external warm water port at Tartus, in September 2015 Putin intervened militarily in Syria to bolster the beleaguered Assad regime.

Putin's Levantine venture—informally dubbed by Russian media as Operation *Vozmezdie* (Retribution)—has subsequently been portrayed domestically as an unmitigated success in combating the Islamic State and even protecting the Russian *Rodina* (Homeland) from terrorism. But this has not been the case. While Putin has brought the Assad regime back from the brink of defeat, the Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war has actually escalated the risk of a terrorism blowback at home.[8] Indeed, it has placed his citizens squarely in many jihadis' crosshairs. This comes at a time when the Islamic State's external operations network is attempting to prove its ability to project terrorism abroad, despite losing its territorial caliphate. While the Western media has been focused on terrorist attacks in places such as Paris, Brussels, Manchester, London, and Orlando, there has been far less coverage of the jihadis' concurrent campaign to punish those the Islamic State describes as "Eastern Crusaders" in Moscow.[9]

Russia had previously dealt with an Islamist terrorism threat, emanating from its war-torn northern Caucasus region during the suppression of the Chechen independence wars of 1994-96 and 1999-2007 and the suppression of the multi-ethnic jihadi insurgent group the Kavkaz Emirate in Dagestan from 2008-15.[10] However, since 2015, the jihadi terror threat has expanded from domestically driven Chechen-Dagestani and other Caucasian actors to foreign actors after Russia launched a military offensive against Sunni rebels in Syria. This coincided with leaders from the rump Kavkaz Emirate declaring themselves a *Velayet* (Province) of the Islamic State in June 2015.[11]

Just days after the Russian bombing campaign commenced in Syria in September 2015, 41 Sunni rebel groups in the country—which ranged from the U.S.-backed Division 101 to other powerful groupings such as Ahrar al-Sham, Jaish al-Islam, and Jabhat al-Shamiyah—warned Russia that "any occupation force to our beloved country is a legitimate target." The Islamic State and the al-Qa`ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra issued threats of their own.[12] On October 12, 2015, then head of al-Qa`ida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, released a 21-minute audio message online titled "The Russian Intervention – The Last Arrow," in which he described the Russians as "Eastern Crusaders." He then called

for retaliatory attacks as well as the need for the "mujahideen in the Caucasus to distract" Russia from the war in Syria by killing Russians in their home country.[13]

Just hours after the release of his message, two mortar shells struck the Russian embassy compound in Damascus as hundreds of pro-Assad supporters rallied outside in support of the Russian airstrikes.[14] Not to be outdone, the next day the Islamic State released an audiotape in which its then spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani called for "Islamic youth everywhere [to] ignite jihad against the Russians and the Americans in their crusaders' war against Muslims."[15] In July 2014, Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared "the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of *kufr* (infidel), all being led by America and Russia."[16] This was the first time, to the authors' knowledge, that the Islamic State leader had focused directly on Russia.[17]

Terror Blowback 2015-18

Since these declarations, there have been numerous terror attacks against the Russian Federation by Islamic State-inspired terrorists and other jihadis. Many attacks have been carried out by Caucasus-based insurgents who have simply rebranded their long-running terror campaign as being on behalf of the Islamic State.

The onslaught of terror attacks began on October 31, 2015, when the Islamic State's wing in Egypt's Sinai Desert claimed responsibility for destroying a Russian charter plane flying from the Sinai resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh to St. Petersburg with a bomb, killing all 224 people onboard. In its online magazine Dabiq, the Islamic State posted a picture of the small device it claimed was used to bring down the plane and justified its action as a response to the Russian airstrikes in Syria, which it claimed were "a rash decision of arrogance."[18]

Such threats would continue to be translated into action as Russia increasingly became a primary target of global jihadis. On December 2, 2015, the Islamic State again made clear its intent to inspire attacks in Russia by releasing a gruesome video in which one of its Russian-speaking militants in Syria vowed to unleash murderous attacks on the people of Russia, before beheading a man he alleged was a Russian spy.[19]

These calls for attacks and acts of brutality appear to have inspired self-starter jihadis and Islamist extremists in Russia to imitate their brutality. Initially, most Islamic State-inspired attacks were carried out against Russian security forces in the insurgency-plagued, Muslim-majority southern Russian republic of Dagestan. On December 30, 2015, Islamic State-inspired gunmen opened fire on people standing on the panoramic terrace of the ancient citadel of Derbent in Dagestan, killing one and injuring 11 others. The terrorist group afterward claimed, "With the help of Allah, the warriors of the Kalifate were able to attack a group of Russian special service officers ... killing one officer and injuring others."[20]

In late February 2016, the Islamic State again targeted police officers in Dagestan when a suicide bomber drove a car loaded with explosives into a police checkpoint in the town of Dzhimikent, killing two officers and injuring approximately 10.[21] The attack was claimed by the Islamic State, but it is unclear whether the bomber was a fighter who had returned from Syria or a homegrown lone wolf.[22] Two terrorist acts followed in Dagestan in late March, one an IED attack on a police convoy, and a second a suicide bombing, claimed by the Kavkaz Velayet (The Caucasus Province of the Islamic State) that killed several members of the security forces.[23]

Islamic State-inspired terrorists managed to strike deeper into the Russian heartland. On March 2, 2016, Gulchekhra Bobokulova, a 38-year-old nanny from Uzbekistan, decapitated a four-year-old girl she had been babysitting in Moscow. Bobokulova subsequently claimed that "Allah ordered" her to kill the young girl out of revenge for the Russian military intervention in Syria and made clear she was imitating what she had seen in Islamic State beheading videos.[24]

On June 28, 2016, the threat of jihadi blowback from foreign fighters from the former Soviet bloc in Syria was underscored when a Chechen-led group of Uzbek, Dagestani, and Kyrgyz Islamic State terrorists launched an assault on Istanbul's Ataturk airport, killing 42.[25]

More Islamic State-inspired attacks inside Russia followed. On August 17, 2016, two Chechen extremists wielding axes and firearms attempted to kill two police officers just east of Moscow at a traffic police station on the Schelkovskoe Highway. Both police officers were injured, one severely, but survived. Afterward, the Islamic State released a video of the two attackers, referring to them as "soldiers of the Islamic State," and threatened more Islamic State attacks inside Russia.[26] On October 23, 2016, two men opened fire on a policeman who was checking their car in the city of Nizhny Novgorod, a city in western Russia that will host 2018 World Cup matches. The police officer returned fire and mortally wounded his attackers. The Islamic State subsequently claimed that two of its "soldiers" had carried out the attack.[27]

On November 14, 2016, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) foiled a terror plot to carry out a Paris-style mass casualty attack in malls in Moscow and St. Petersburg, just before it could be put into operation. The conspirators were Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik extremists who wanted "to prove their loyalty" to the Islamic State.[28] No evidence has emerged of Islamic State direction in the plot.

On December 19, 2016, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, Andrey Karlov, was killed at an art exhibition in Ankara. Karlov was several minutes into a speech when a Turkish member of the security detail pulled out a gun, shouted "Allahu Akbhar," and shot him dead. After killing the ambassador, the assassin shouted, "Don't forget Aleppo," before being killed by Turkish special forces.[29]

On April 3, 2017, a suicide bombing was carried out on the St. Petersburg metro between the Sennaya Ploshchad and Tekhnologichesky Institut stations, killing 15 and injuring 45.[30] According to Russian authorities, the attack was carried out by Akbarjon Djalilov, a Kyrgyzstan-born Russian Uzbek national. A second bomb was found in a separate metro station and defused before it could detonate. Russian authorities subsequently accused Abror Azimov, another Kyrgyzstan-born Russian citizen, of training Djalilov.[31] Three weeks after the attack, a mysterious group claiming affiliation with al-Qa`ida, *Katibat Imam Shamil* (Imam Shamil Battalion) claimed responsibility, describing Djalilov as a "knight of Islam" who was dispatched under the directive of al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The previously unknown group, which it should be noted never provided evidence of any kind, would also describe the attack as revenge for Russia's "support" for the "criminal" Assad regime in Syria.[32] In the weeks that followed, Russian authorities apprehended 11 suspects involved with this bombing, all of whom were originally from Central Asia.[33]

On August 14, 2017, a group of three Central Asian Tajiks and one Russian were arrested as they plotted to carry out suicide bombing attacks on markets and crowded places. Interestingly, the

FSB reported, "In the course of an initial investigation it was established that 'terrorist attacks' plots were organized by the leaders and emissaries of Daesh terrorist group in Syria."[34]

On December 16, 2017, the FSB announced that seven suspected followers of the Islamic State had been arrested for allegedly planning to carry out terror attacks in St. Petersburg. The Russian security agency said it received tips on the terrorist cell's activities from the CIA.[35] According to Russian authorities, the cell was plotting a suicide bombing in Kazan Cathedral, home to Russia's most cherished icon, The Lady of Kazan. The terrorists allegedly planned to set off other explosions in the city's busiest areas, on the Islamic State's orders.[36] Russian TV stations ran footage of FSB operatives outside an apartment building detaining a suspect, who was later shown confessing that he had been ordered to prepare homemade bombs rigged with shrapnel.[37] The FSB subsequently said it had also arrested several Islamic State-linked suspects in Moscow, where they were allegedly plotting a series of suicide bombings over the New Year.[38] On December 27, 2017, an improvised explosive device packed with shrapnel with the equivalent of two hundred grams of TNT was set off in a supermarket in St. Petersburg, injuring 10 people.[39] The Islamic State subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack on "Crusader Russia" via its Amaq news agency.[40]

Meanwhile, Islamic State-inspired attacks continued in the Caucasus. On February 19, 2018, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for a shooting attack that left five worshippers dead and five others wounded, including two security personnel, outside a Christian Orthodox Church in Kizlyar City, Dagestan. In the incident, the terrorist opened fire on worshippers with a hunting rifle before being killed by security forces.[41]

On the eve of the FIFA World Cup, to be held in various cities across the western provinces of European Russia, the Russian Federation faces threats from homegrown terrorists from the Caucasus acting in the name of the Islamic State; Russian or CIS nationals who have trained and fought in Syria; terror cells inspired by the Islamic State; and lone wolves who may have been mobilized by online propaganda.[42] It is clear, based on recent history, that there is both a strong motive for the Islamic State and other jihadi groups to attack Russia, and a pattern of attacks in the last three years that shows they have the capacity to inspire further attacks. The Islamic State also may have the capacity to dispatch trained operatives to carry out attacks. While the large majority of plots appear to have involved extremists inspired rather than trained and directed by the Islamic State, there have been plots that authorities describe as having a deeper connection to Syria.[a] For example, on October 15, 2015, a group of 10 terrorists— were arrested for planning to carry out a terrorist attack on public transport in Moscow. The FSB announced that several of those arrested underwent training in Islamic State camps in Syria. It is not clear from Russian media

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a   It should be noted it is difficult to independently verify Russian media reports and claims made by Russian officials. This can make it challenging to assess the nature of the linkages between those arrested for terrorism plots and the Islamic State. While it has been reported that Islamic State cells operating in Russia that have been arrested by the FSB were "managed" or "directed" from abroad by the Islamic State, the authors have found no evidence of Islamic State cells dispatched directly from Syria to Russia. See, for example, Damien Sharkov, "ISIS Cell Preparing Holiday Attacks Using Bombs, Guns and Grenades Arrested, Moscow Police Say," *Newsweek*, December 12, 2017.

reporting if they were sent back by the group with orders to launch an attack or had decided themselves to carry out an attack after returning to Russia.[43]

In light of the above history, it is not surprising that the Islamic State and other global jihadi groups have seen the World Cup as an opportunity to make threats against Russia, galvanize would-be supporters to carry them out, dispatch cells, and spread fear.

Threat to the World Cup

The FIFA World Cup 2018 will be held in Russia from June 14 to July 15, and a total of 64 matches will be held in 12 venues across 11 different cities, including Moscow (which has two host venues), St. Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan, Samara, Saransk, Volgograd, Rostov-on-Don, Sochi, and Ekaterinburg.[44] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko predicted that approximately one million tourists will visit Russia for the event.[45] While the World Cup venues are "hard targets" that are set to be protected with multiple layers of security, there will be no shortage of soft targets that terrorists could hit.

As demonstrated with the 1972 Munich Olympics, the 2013 Boston Marathon, and the November 2015 attack outside the Stade de France in Paris by an Islamic State cell based in Belgium, which also later planned to target the Euro 2016 soccer championships in France,[46] sporting events can be attractive targets for terror attacks. During the Confederations Cup held in Russia in the summer of 2017, the FSB reportedly foiled a jihadi terrorist attack on a high speed train between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The alleged terrorist cell aimed to crash two express trains close to St. Petersburg on July 27.[47]

There are four main terrorist threat vectors for attacks on both hard targets and soft targets. Combined, these four strands point to a significant risk of some kind of terror attack during the 2018 World Cup.

Potential Threats Emanating From Russian and CIS Nationals Fighting in Syria

The northern Caucasus has been a hotbed of jihadi violence ever since Ibn Khattab's small group of Arab mujahideen joined the outgunned Chechen *boyeviki* (fighters) during the first Russo-Chechen War of 1994-96 and grafted the notion of jihad onto what was essentially a war for Baltic-style national independence.[48] When the Russians and their local Chechen proxies—led by the Kadyrov family—brutally suppressed the increasingly 'jihadified' Chechen independence movement in the second Russo-Chechen War of 1999-2007, the epicenter of violence in the region shifted eastward to the neighboring multi-ethnic republic of Dagestan. From there, a multi-ethnic jihadi movement led by ethnic Avars aimed to create a sharia law theocracy stretching across the small Muslim-majority republics of the northern Caucasus known as Kavkaz Emirate (Caucasus Emirate). This group assumed the mantle of the jihad from the Chechens and launched a deadly and still ongoing insurgent terror campaign targeting Russian forces.

This insurgency in the Caucasus was largely suppressed by the time of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, although the insurgents managed to carry out bombings in the town of Volgograd and in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the months leading up to the Games. Following the Russian suppression of the insurgency, there have been allegations that many jihadis from the region were subsequently allowed and encouraged to emigrate to the Islamic State's caliphate in Syria in 2014-15 by Russian authorities who were glad to be rid of this menace.[49] They reportedly did so via so-called "green corridors" with "facilitation, payment, passports" believed to have been approved at senior levels in the Russian government, according to a former Obama administration official quoted by ProPublica.[50] The majority of insurgents who remained subsequently abandoned the Kavkaz Emirate and declared *bay`a* (oath of allegiance) to the Islamic State and renamed themselves the Kavkaz Velayet of the Islamic State (although the Kavkaz Emirate remained
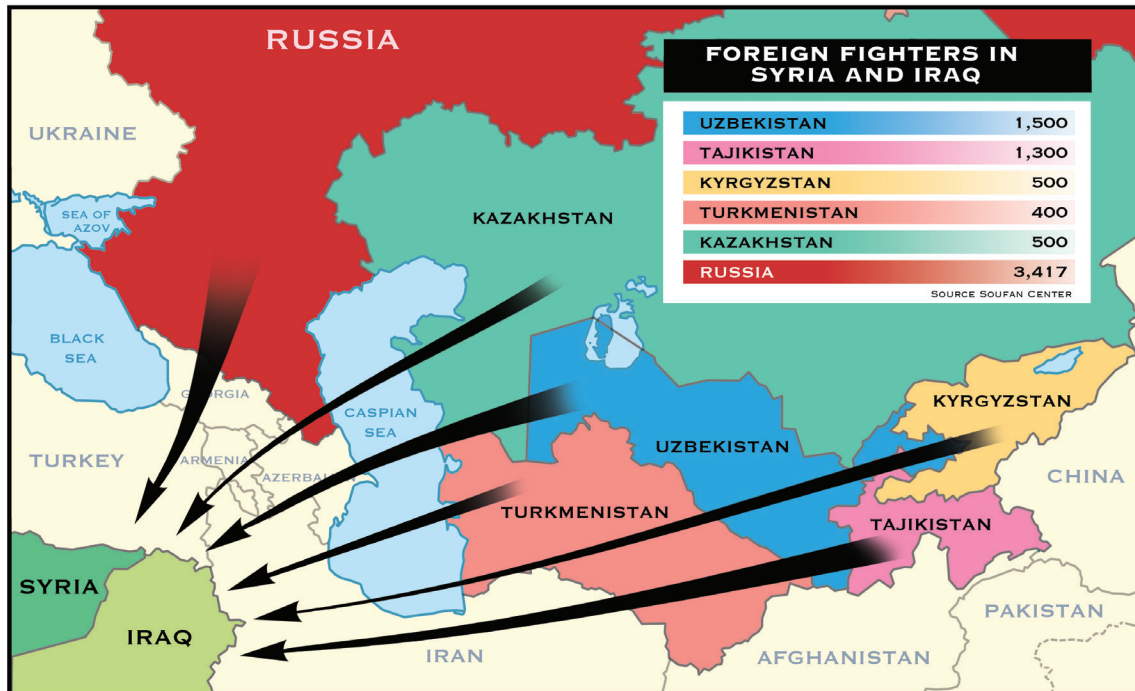
Foreign Fighter Flows to Syria and Iraq from Russia and Central Asia
(Jean-Francois Allaux, MappingISIS.com)

Map of Russia showing venues for the 2018 FIFA World Cup
(Jean-Francois Allaux, MappingISIS.com)

active in parts of Dagestan).

Together, Russia and the countries of post-Soviet Central Asia have seen more of their citizens travel to fight in Syria and Iraq than have any other parts of the world. Although the numbers vary, the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates that roughly 8,500 individuals from Russia and the Central Asian states traveled to join the Islamic State and other jihadi factions in the Middle East.[51 b] More volunteers joined the Islamic State from Russia than from Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, or Jordan.[52] After Arabic and English, Russian is the third most spoken language of the Islamic State.[53]

With the subsequent 2016-18 collapse of the caliphate in northern and eastern Syria, due in part to Russian-backed Syrian Army offensives in Palmyra and the central Euphrates River valley, hundreds of battle-hardened Russian and CIS jihadis with experience in using weapons or making explosives are feared to have returned to the Russian Federation.[54] The Russian and Central Asian fighters from the battlefields of the Middle East pose a significant threat to the World Cup due to their considerable military experience fighting for the Islamic State.[55] While a significant number of returnees have been arrested or put under criminal investigation by Russian authorities, the concern is others have gone undetected and may be running terror cells.[56]

There have also been indications that Central Asian groups

based in Syria have cooperated in overseas attack planning. In August 2016, for example, the Syria-based leadership of the al-Qa`ida-aligned Katibat Tawhid wal-Jihad was allegedly involved in facilitating a vehicle attack on the Chinese embassy in the Kyrgyzstan capital of Bishkek by a Tajik Uighur who had joined the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP).[57]

If this were not worrying enough, the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan has threatened to dispatch terror cells to Russia. An Uzbek Islamic State leader based in Kunduz, northern Afghanistan, identified as Hamza, told Al Jazeera in 2017 that his Afghan-Pakistan wing of the Islamic State known as the Islamic State in Khorasan had organized sleeper cells to attack Russia. One of this group's leaders boasted to Al Jazeera, "We have 4,000 trained fighters at the ready. God willing 2,000 of them will go on the offensive against Russia."[58] This leader also declared, "With God's help, some of our forces have already entered Russia and we plan to send more." Another commander explained their rationale for targeting Russia, stating, "They [the Russians] are at war with us, engaging us on the air and the ground. Russia is the enemy of Islam and the enemy of the Quran. They are trying to wipe out the mujahidin." While it is entirely possible these claims were bluster, they nonetheless reflected the fact that Russia has become a top aspirational target for jihadis. Moreover, the Islamic State in Khorasan has a presence in areas of Afghanistan near the borders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, providing them opportunities to recruit Central Asians who may be able to gain access to Russia.[59]

Russian security forces have broken up a number of cells with a Central Asian nexus. In February 2016, for example, they arrested a terror cell made up of "Russian and Central Asian citizens, led by an Islamic State fighter from Turkey" that was allegedly planning "high

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b   The Soufan Group estimates that about 3,400 foreign fighters traveled from Russia itself to Syria. Thomas M. Sanderson, Olga Oliker, Maxwell B. Markusen, and Maria Galperin, "Russian-Speaking Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria," CSIS, December 29, 2017; "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees," Soufan Center, October 2017.

Northern Caucasus Fighters in Syria and Iraq
(Data Source: Atlantic Council /
Jean-Francois Allaux, MappingISIS.com)

profile" attacks in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Sverdlovsk region.[60] There have been other incidents involving what Russian authorities call Islamic State cells, including one in which security forces "eliminated" an Islamic State terrorist cell in a highway shootout in the southern town of Saratov on March 12, 2018. And as recently as April 17, 2018, Russian security forces broke up what they claimed to be an Islamic State terrorist cell in Rostov. Russia Today reported that "the cell was preparing attacks based on orders it was receiving from the terrorist group Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) in Syria" while the Russian Tass News Agency reported (without providing evidence) that the FSB had arrested an Islamic State cell:[c]

*"Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) has exposed a cell of the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia), whose members were planning to carry out terrorist attacks in the Rostov region upon orders from Syrian emissaries, the FSB press service said. The cell's leader detonated an explosive device and died while being detained, but another three perpetrators were apprehended."[61]

Potential Threat from Jihadis in the Northern Caucasus

There is also a danger that terror cells consisting of jihadi insur-

gents who have remained in the war-torn northern Caucasus region, especially in Dagestan and Chechnya, will try to carry out terrorist attacks. On June 20, 2015, much of the leadership of the Dagestani-led Kavkaz Emirate that did not immigrate to Syria swore an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State and subsumed their movement into that of the caliphate. On June 23, 2015, then-Islamic State spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani named Abu Mohammad al-Qadari the leader of the new regional wing of the Islamic State and congratulated him and "the soldiers of the Islamic State" in the Caucasus. The Kavkaz Velayet was set up to cover the Muslim-majority republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay Balkaria, and Karachay Cherkassia.

These Caucasian jihadis will likely be motivated to heed the Islamic State's calls for terrorism during the World Cup. Before he was killed by Russian forces in December 2016, the Islamic State's leader in the Caucasus, al-Qadari, issued a call for holy war in Russia instead of migrating to Syria. He stated, "We ask that you obey the order of the Caliph ... the Muslims of the Caucasus, that they [should] go out and wage jihad in the Caucasus."[62]

It is important to note that one of the World Cup venues, Sochi, lies close to territory the Islamic State's Caucasus Province aspires to control. Sochi was also the de facto capital of an ancient Muslim ethnic group known as the Circassians who were largely wiped out or driven into exile by the Russians in the 19th century. The town has deep symbolism for jihadis in the north Caucasus who resent "Russian infidels" holding events on what they consider to be sacred soil containing the bones of slain Muslim "martyrs."[63]

While the Russian FSB and Ministry of Interior forces have in recent years, and even more so in recent months, stepped up anti-terrorist operations in the north Caucasian republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, this rugged, undeveloped area is hard to control and essentially remains a war zone. The World Cup venues of Sochi, Volgograd, and Stavropol are close to this insurgency-plagued region, which is awash in weapons, explosives, and extremists. Russian repression has bred resentment, helping pro-Islamic State jihadis recruit in the region.[64]

The most active splinter group from the fractured Kavkaz Emirate remains the Islamic State's Dagestan branch (one of the five sub-provinces of the Islamic State's larger Velayet Kavkaz). The Russian news is full of almost weekly Russian police arrests, gunfights, and assaults on militants in the Dagestani capital of Makhachkala and elsewhere in this mountainous region. In response, terrorists and insurgents from the republic have claimed to have carried out bold *razzias* (raids) on Russian barracks from their bases in the forests of Dagestan.

Before most of its members switched their loyalty to the Islamic State, the al-Qa`ida-affiliated Kavkaz-Caucasus Emirate was responsible for numerous terror attacks in southern Russia since 2007. The terrorist organization carried out complex attacks such as those in Moscow metro and international airport (2010) as well as bombings in Volgograd (2013 and 2015). Its boldest attack was launched on December 2014 when a group of armed militants attacked a traffic police checkpoint outside the city of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. The militants then entered the city and occupied the "Press House" building in the city center and a nearby school. During this brazen attack and a subsequent police storming of the building, which caught on fire, 14 policemen, 11 terrorists, and one civilian were killed.[65] However, a Russian counterterrorist campaign that led to the killing of the Kavkaz Emirate leader Doku Umarov in September 2013 and the killing of several other emirs

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c   It must be noted that to the authors' knowledge, Russian authorities have not provided any evidence that this cell was under the control of the Islamic State. It is worth noting that when Russia first involved itself militarily in Syria, it conflated all Sunni rebel groups with the Islamic State, despite most of the groups having no known connection to the group. It is entirely possible that many of these so-called "Islamic State cells" have no direct links to the Islamic State.

and senior cadres subsequently greatly weakened the group.[66]

Potential Threat of Lone Wolves or "Self-Starters"

There is also the danger that lone wolves, possibly Russian converts to Islam, who have been radicalized by the Islamic State's online messaging (of the sort that has recently inspired Russian Islamist extremists to carry out terror attacks) will heed the Islamic State's recent calls for "soldiers of the Caliphate" to carry out solo or small-group attacks during the World Cup. The Islamic State has been encouraging would-be attackers to strike by any means possible—including with vehicles and knives during the tournament—via its social media channels and via the encrypted messaging platform Telegram.

An unsophisticated attack of this precise sort was recently seen when an Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacked and seriously wounded eight bystanders with a knife and axe on August 19, 2017, in the Siberian town of Surgut.[67] Russian media reported a similar attack with a knife by a suspect who had tried to join the Islamic State was carried out in Stavropol, a city which will host World Cup matches, in May 2018.[68] Russian security officials are worried this sort of *ad hoc* attack is harder to track and prevent than sleeper cell activity.[69]

But should "internet-enabled" terrorists seek to carry out a more elaborate attack using bombs, directions for simple pressure cooker bombs or IEDs of the sort used in the Boston Marathon bombing or the more recent bombing in St. Petersburg are all too easily available online.[70]

Potential Threat of Tatar and Bashkir Jihadis

A fourth vector that is less likely, but possible, lies with Tatar and Bashkir extremists who have carried out low-level terror acts or traveled to fight in Syria and returned. One of the matches will be held in the capital of the Tatarstan republic, Kazan. While the Tatars of Tatarstan and Crimea are largely Sovietized-Russified with an indigenous form of Islam that is not radical, radical strains of salafi Islam (often defined as "Vakhabity" or Wahhabi by Russian authorities) as well as a following for the Islamist group Hizb ut Tahrir have appeared in Tatarstan, and to a lesser degree among the Bashkirs, a fellow Turkic ethnic group living adjacent to Tatarstan in their own republic of Bashkortostan. The most notable act of terrorism was the assassination of the Mufti (Chief Cleric) of Tatarstan and his deputy in 2012 by assassins who were opposed to their crackdown on extremist mosques. After the murder, a group calling itself the Mujahidden of Tatarstan posted a video of themselves with guns standing before the black banner of jihad and promising to punish the "enemies of Allah."[71] Since then, there have been several small scale attacks in the republic, including a rocket attack on a major oil refinery in Tatarstan in November 2013.[72]

It was initially estimated that about 200 Tatars had traveled to Syria to fight in a Tatar *jamaat* (brigade), serving alongside the Chechen unit led by a Crimean Tatar commander named Abdul Karim Krymsky.[73] But a second fighting unit known as Junud al Makhdi led by an emir named Sayfuddin al Tatari was said to have had approximately 400 members who fought alongside Turkish units in the Latakia region of northwestern Syria. (Tatar and Turkish are both Turkic languages.) One of their leaders in Syria stated, "Our strategic aim is to raise the Muslims of Tatarstan and Bahkortstan to go out to jihad, so they would raise the banner of jihad in their native lands and destroy the criminal Putin regime."[74] This raises concern some may return to Russia to launch attacks.

The Islamic State Media Drive to Inspire Attacks During the World Cup

In the past six months, there has been a torrent of postings on pro-Islamic State platforms threatening the 2018 World Cup. In October 2017, for example, the pro-Islamic State Wafa' Media Foundation posted a series of online propaganda posters, one of which depicted a jihadi equipped with a bomb staring at a soccer stadium, emblazoned with the words "O enemies of Allah in Russia. I swear the mujahedeen fire will burn you. Just you wait."[75] In another image that was released on the encrypted app Telegram, which is favored by terrorists, in April 2018, the Islamic State threatened Putin directly, stating "Russia 2018. Putin you disbeliever. You will pay the price for killing Muslims." On the right side of the image, a bearded jihadi was depicted brandishing an AK47 assault rifle, emerging from an explosion in front of a packed soccer arena. The left side of the poster depicted Putin with his entire body trapped in the crosshairs of a jihadi's rifle.[76]

On May 8, 2018, in a poster that was designed by al-Nur Media Center (an Islamic State-linked French media group) and published on Telegram, the terrorists sent a message to aspiring lone wolves and armchair jihadis. The image shows the flags of countries competing in the FIFA World Cup with the French text "Choisis ta Cible" (Choose your Target).[77]

In recent months, the Islamic State has also issued a continuing torrent of disturbing World Cup threats against players, including Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, arguably the greatest soccer players of their generation.[78] One soccer star was depicted kneeling down wearing an orange jumpsuit next to a masked jihadi in Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium, where the World Cup Final is set to take place.[79] In April 2018, the Islamic State produced a graphic depicting a camouflaged terrorist outside of a stadium armed with a gun and explosives.[80]

On May 3, 2018, *Kavkaz Uzel*, a Russian newspaper focused on events in the Caucasus, reported that the Islamic State had ordered its units in Russia to commit terror attacks against the FIFA 2018 targets and in the 11 cities that were chosen as hosts for the World Cup (although details on the source of the claim were not given).[81] Russia's most popular sports website also reported a direct threat to the Russian leader with a headline that read, "Putin you will pay for murdering the Muslims," while another message in English read "Putin you Disbeliever. You will Pay a Price for Killing Muslims."[82]

The drumbeat of threats from pro-Islamic State media outlets continued, with multiple threats sometimes being posted on the same day, as the tournament approached. On May 14, 2018, one of the threat messages put out by pro-Islamic State media groups featured posters depicting Islamic State fighters threatening stadiums with captions in several languages. The next day, a pro-Islamic State media platform provided instructions for supporters in Russia for targeting "infidels" inside and outside the stadiums through tactics such as vehicle attacks, stabbings and shootings.[83]

It should be noted that the sampling of threat messages described above were posted on media platforms supportive of the Islamic State rather than in official communiques or speeches by the group. It is difficult, therefore, to know the degree to which they are the result of a decision by surviving senior members of the group to prioritize inspiring attacks against the 2018 World Cup or a spontaneous effort by propagandists sympathetic to the Islamic State. Their sheer volume, however, suggests they may be part of a concerted effort with some hidden guiding hand.

Pro-Islamic State media platforms have, however, put out many

threats against other venues and events in the past, which failed to provoke attacks—for example, Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations in Times Square at the end of 2017.[84]

Russian Security Precautions for the World Cup

In the light of the previously described history of Islamic State-related terror attacks and more recent online Islamic State calls for terrorism against the World Cup, the Russian FSB (former KGB), MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs), and other security organs have gone on high alert. Russian intelligence agencies have also been active in surveilling towns and mosques in the north Caucasus republics that have been linked to Chechen and Islamic State-Kavkaz Velayet terrorist activities, as well as launching raids and carrying out arrests on terror suspects in other parts of the country. On April 27, 2018, for example, Russian sources reported that the FSB had captured two jihadi terrorists plotting attacks on the Pacific island of Sakhalin and the far western province of Kaliningrad.[85] The rising number of arrests in Islamic State-related terror plots in the lead up to the World Cup is certainly cause for concern and points to the existence of a very real terror threat in Russia. Between January and April 2018, Russia reportedly detained 189 militants and killed another 15 for involvement in terrorist plots. According to the head of the FSB, Alexander Bortnikov, 12 distinct underground terrorist cells were broken up in this short time period.[86]

In one of these instances, on March 11, 2018, the FSB foiled an attempt by jihadis to launch a terrorist attack in Russia's southwest Saratov region. According to the FSB's public relations department, during the incident, members of an "underground terrorist group" opened fire on security personnel after their car was stopped in a search operation. A shootout ensued, and while the FSB did not disclose the number of injuries or deaths, the aspiring terrorists were stopped. At the scene, they found an improvised explosive device of about three kilograms of TNT, a self-made grenade, and Makarov pistols.[87]

The capital has not been immune either. On April 27, 2018, Russia claimed to have thwarted an Islamic State plan to carry out high-profile attacks in Moscow. The FSB said it had cut short the activity of what it called a four-man Islamic State sleeper cell, which was taking instructions from someone in Syria via the Telegram messenger service.[88] Footage and reports of Russian counterterrorism agents arresting alleged Islamic State members have also appeared in Western media, one where a "shooting robot" neutralized the threat from an Islamic State-linked cell in Dagestan.[89]

On May 6, 2018, a man was stopped for a document check in Nizhny Novgorod, a host city for the World Cup, and opened fire on police, injuring three. He then fled to an apartment he had been renting just nine miles from the World Cup stadium before being killed by Russian authorities. The Islamic State subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack via its Xalifat Telegram channel, stating "The attack in Nizhny Novgorod when three Russian policemen were wounded was performed by the warrior of ISIS."[90]

Out of concern over threats such as these, in January 2018, the U.S. State Department urged U.S. citizens to "reconsider" traveling to Russia for the World Cup. It stated, "Terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in Russia. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities. Bomb threats against public venues are common."[91] The British intelligence firm *IHS Jane's* similarly "assesses increased violent risks to visitors in the host cities."[92]

For their part, Russian officials have repeatedly assured fans that the international event will be safe.[93] The head of Russian National Anti-Terrorism Committee, Igor Kulyagin, for example, explained:

> *"We have taken into account the huge experience, accumulated by the National Anti-Terrorism Committee and the security organizations involved in providing security for the Sochi Olympic Games, the Kazan Universiade and other huge events ... Of course, special attention will be paid to providing anti-terrorism safeguards of the infrastructure that will be used for hosting the competition, such as the teams' stadiums, accommodation units and training facilities."*[94]

The head of Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs in St. Petersburg, Sergei Umnov, similarly sought to assuage fears of terror attacks, stating that "on a daily basis, 11,000 people will be working; 4,500 others from attached forces will be operating in the city (St. Petersburg) and help us preserve order. Volunteers, private security firms, and members of public policing organizations have also been engaged."[95]

Russian officials have pointed to the successful security precautions made for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, which became known as the "Security Olympics" for the massive security presence, as a testament to Russia's counterterrorism capabilities. But it is worth noting that the World Cup is a much larger event that will span 11 different cities and 37 pre-game training sites, instead of just one as was the case with Sochi. As already noted, the transportation networks between these cities, including trains, buses, and airplanes, will also be vulnerable to terror attacks of the sort jihadi insurgents from the Caucasus have carried out in the past. The Chechen capital Grozny is set to be the home base for Egypt's soccer team during the tournament. To secure the event in such diverse and dangerous regions, the Russian government has implemented rigorous anti-terror measures, including the following steps:

- Total bans on planes and 'flying devices,' such as drones, around World Cup stadiums
- Controlled and forbidden zones in venue cities
- Stringent ID checks ensuring that the identity of fans is known in advance
- A massive restrictions in sales of arms, explosives, poisons, and narcotic and psychotropic drugs in venue regions
- Closure of factories manufacturing dangerous goods for the duration of the World Cup
- Bans on movements of boats and ships close to stadiums
- Road closure and high security on train and planes transporting teams between match venues[96]

In addition, Russia's Anti-Terrorism Committee announced that all elements of the security system had been put on heightened alert in preparation for the tournament. Security measures have been bolstered, including at airports and transport hubs. Facial recognition technology, which is cross-matched with images of wanted individuals from across government databases and social media, has also been installed on 5,000 CCTV cameras across Moscow.[97] Other host cities have also installed CCTV cameras that plug into this database.[98]

Furthermore, all ticket holders are given FAN-IDs, which have their identification information on them, which is vetted by Russian security services.[99] The Russian Tass News Agency has reported that security will be maintained at the World Cup venues by 14,500 security guards and 16,500 stewards.[100] Also, it has been reported

the stadiums in the 11 cities hosting matches will have high-tech security systems that include super-sensitive metal detectors at all steel-gated entry checkpoints. Fans are set to be searched by guards using handheld scanners and bomb-sniffing dogs, and all bags will pass through airport-style X-ray machines. There will be video surveillance of crowds, and Russian police and stewards will patrol the stadiums and their perimeter.[101] "Electronic warfare assets" will be deployed to protect stadiums from hostile drones.[102]

Conclusion

Despite the '100-percent' guarantees that the 2018 World Cup will be safe, the planned tight security at the venues, and a continuing crackdown by security services on suspected terrorists active on Russian territory, Russia faces a very significant risk of terrorist attack during the tournament.

Just weeks before the World Cup kickoff these dangers were again illustrated by a gun attack on an orthodox church in Grozny, Chechnya on May 19, 2018, by four teenage gunmen from the region which killed three and was claimed by the Islamic State. The casualty count would likely have been higher had the attackers managed to get inside the church and had the security services not quickly intervened.[103] The opening match between Russia and Saudi Arabia is scheduled to take place on the last day of Ramadan. The Islamic State has, in past years, called on its followers to launch attacks during the Islamic holy month, and a surge in attacks has been seen in some years.[104]

Terrorists may feel special incentives in attacking such cities as St. Petersburg, Putin's hometown, and "*al Kafir Musku*" (Infidel Moscow), especially during the match between Russia and Saudi Arabia, which Putin himself will attend. Other towns, such as Sochi, Stavropol, Rostov-on-Don, and Volgograd are located close to the epicenter of a still ongoing terrorist insurgency in the Caucasus. But any attack inside Russia while the world's media covers the World Cup will be seen by the Islamic State or other jihadi groups as a significant propaganda victory over a Russian leader hated by many in the Sunni Muslim world.   CTC

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A View From the CT Foxhole: Rukmini Callimachi, New York Times Foreign Correspondent

By Bryan Price with Mikki Franklin

A three-time Pulitzer Prize Finalist, Rukmini Callimachi has been covering the Islamic State for The New York Times *since 2014. She began reporting on extremism in Africa, where she was posted for seven years as the West Africa correspondent and later the West Africa bureau chief for The Associated Press. Her reporting on the Islamic State and on al-Qa`ida has earned her the George Polk Award, the Michael Kelly Award, and the inaugural Integrity in Journalism Award from the International Center for Journalists.*

The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy, Department of Defense, or U.S. Government.

CTC: You are well known in our community for hunting down primary source documents from jihadis in dangerous places all over the world, from Mali to Iraq. We get an excellent glimpse of what your life is like through your new podcast, Caliphate. In fact, sometimes you are literally minutes behind the jihadis who left this material behind. Can you describe how you even got into this dangerous business in the first place?

Callimachi: Sure. Well, to be perfectly honest, I really just stumbled into it. I started covering terror five years ago when I was the West Africa Bureau Chief for The Associated Press. My beat included a 20-country stretch of West and Central Africa, including the nation of Mali. In 2012, al-Qa`ida's affiliate—known as al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM—took over the northern half of Mali in conjunction with a couple of smaller rebel groups.

Because the jihadists controlled the north, it was deemed too dangerous to go, so I had to do most of my reporting by phone, which is how I think the majority of reporters were covering terrorism. And as somebody who really loves being in the field, that was pretty frustrating for me.

I would call people at the Pentagon. I tried to get meetings at the State Department. I tried to get in touch with the political attaches and defense attaches in the various Western embassies in the region. And I spoke to other analysts who spoke to all of these same people. This was roughly a year after the death of Usama bin Ladin, and the message coming out of Washington was that the head of the snake had been cut off and al-Qa`ida was in disarray, if not decimated. As for groups like the one in Mali, I was told that the fighters had opportunistically taken the al-Qa`ida name and that entities like AQIM had no real connective tissue back to the core.

The lightbulb moment for me came in January 2013 when French forces entered Mali to help local forces take back the country's north. When they liberated the city of Timbuktu a few weeks later, I followed behind them. The next day, I walked into a bank building in the center of Timbuktu, which had been used as the seat of AQIM's *hisba*, or its religious police, and I literally stepped onto documents that had been left behind by the fleeing fighters. In the weeks that followed, I ended up finding thousands of pages of documents that AQIM had left behind, and those documents directly contradicted the narrative I was hearing from Washington.

I was being told that AQIM really wasn't a franchise of al-Qa`ida, and yet there I was, holding a letter from Abdelmalek Droukdel, the head of AQIM, where he is talking about his fealty to al-Qa`ida and specifically to Usama bin Ladin.

There I was holding letters from [Nasir al] Wuhayshi, the general manager of al-Qa`ida and the emir of AQAP based in Yemen, in which he was giving them detailed instructions on how to govern the territory that they held. He was telling them the importance of maintaining the electricity and "keeping the lights on" to prevent the people from revolting against them.

So it really kind of broke open my world because I didn't realize then, what I know now, which of course is that the war on terror is politicized. And intelligence about it is often politicized for political gain. One way it was politicized was to portray bin Ladin's death as the end of al-Qa`ida. It was later politicized to basically miss the rise of ISIS and to depict ISIS as the JV team. And so I realized at that point that there was a real value to going directly to the terrorists themselves.

By that, I mean going to the documents they leave behind, which was also a revelation, because I had no idea that these groups leave such a voluminous amount of paperwork behind.

By going to the terrorists themselves, I also mean interviewing them in jail. In Iraq, in Syria, a handful in Europe, and even one of the defectors in Canada that we are speaking to on the podcast.

And the third way is online, tracking their chat rooms and their channels on Telegram.

Of the three ways, finding the documents is obviously the gold standard, but it is hard. The only way I have been successful in recovering these documents is by embedding with the security forces that are liberating areas that the group controlled. I do it by asking for their help and getting their permission to take the records at the moment of the recovery.

CTC: Now I know that you speak three different languages, but unfortunately for your current line of work, Arabic is not one of them. How do you get around that obstacle in places like Iraq?

Callimachi: In my line of work, I am always working with Arabic translators, and *The New York Times* and I have invested a lot of effort in finding talented Arabic-to-English translators. For example, for the ISIS Files story, every record I used in that reporting went through two translators—a junior translator back in Iraq who gave me the general gist of the document and a senior translator here in New York, who is a retired United Nations interpreter. Our senior translator is himself a native of the Mosul area, so he is able to catch nuances of dialect that might otherwise be missed. The extra layer

of complication is that these documents are not written in just any kind of Arabic; they are what my colleagues call "jihadi Arabic," heavy on religious references and replete with its own, distinct lingo, and you need to find translators who are in tune with that.

This is the protocol that we use for translating the recovered documents. Then in the field, I work with a team of translators and fixers, one for each area of Iraq. So number one, you are never in these places alone. I've always embedded with whatever force was fighting that area to take back that territory. I'm relying on these local forces to keep me safe because, of course, as a reporter you're not armed and you're not a combatant. So the only way to do this is extremely slowly and with a lot of false starts.

For example, I think I spent five weeks in a hotel, waiting for the city of Sinjar to fall in 2015. When Sinjar did fall, it basically fell right around November 13th, which was the day of the Paris attacks. That evening I got a phone call from my desk telling me to rush to Paris. So after weeks and weeks in a hotel and waiting for Sinjar to fall, I think I had one or two bylines to show for that time, and I never found any documents there because I had to leave the same day. But that's my life.

CTC: I'd like to go back to your discussion of recovering the Islamic State documents in Iraq. Your work seems to have sparked somewhat of a debate about the ethics behind removing this type of material from Iraq. Some are questioning whether this practice is justified or not, and critics are saying that you should have never taken these documents out of Iraq in the first place. How do you respond to these critiques?

Callimachi: Right. So first of all, thank you for giving me the chance to talk about this issue. There are three points I'd like to raise. The first thing to understand is my colleagues and I were never alone when we were doing this work. The buildings we were searching were on or near the frontlines. As a foreign correspondent, the only way to access these areas is by being embedded with Iraqi security forces.

And at the beginning of every embed, my team sat down with the commander in charge in order to outline our goals. In these meetings, we clearly explained that we were looking for ISIS documents, and asked for their help both to access the area in question and to find the documents we were seeking. I explained to them that my aim was to use these documents to shed light on the enemy's complexity and organizational depth.

As a result, they would assign one to sometimes as many as four or five soldiers to accompany my team on the battlefield. They led the way into buildings. They showed us where to look, and in several instances, they literally held the garbage bag open for me to help me collect records.

Sometimes they would find things and say "sorry, you can't take this." We didn't have *carte blanche* to take whatever we wanted. Often, we were being taken to buildings that they had already searched and what we were allowed to take were the records they deemed had no intelligence value.

Second, the Iraqis were systematically burning the documents that were left behind. To this day, I don't completely understand why, but the best answer I got was that these ISIS documents were like a dark part of their past and they didn't want that stuff around.

I think there is a part of the conversation that is missed, however, when people get upset about us taking these documents. What peo-

Rukmini Callimachi (New York Times)

ple don't seem to understand is that it wasn't me taking them versus these documents existing elsewhere in Iraq. It was me taking them versus these documents disappearing, either burned, or destroyed or ruined in the elements. That's the real dichotomy.

I think we can all agree that saving these documents has value. And you of all institutions, the CTC, knows intimately the value of these documents in helping us understand these terror groups. *The New York Times* is committed to making these documents publicly available, and we've already starting the search for potential partners in order to create a digital database. My dream is that we are going to be able to create a place online where these documents can be available to all.

CTC: Well, you know where the CTC stands on that issue. That has been the foundational idea behind our Harmony Database for over a decade. Switching gears a little bit, you mentioned another thing that helps your understanding is not just the primary sources but also talking to former, and in some cases current, jihadis. You have interviewed those who have lived in the caliphate and those who have returned to their home countries. In talking to all of these individuals, are there any common characteristics or threads that connect them? Or is the story here that there aren't really any commonalities at all? What is your take?

Callimachi: I have a couple of things to say about that. Number one, since ISIS is famous for the horrific things it has done—like the ghastly videos, which show savage acts of cruelty—I believe that people think that in order to be a member of this group, you are therefore either a psychopath or a bloodthirsty, crazy murderer. We gravitate to the extremes.

But my experience in speaking to them is actually something a little more frightening I think. Sometimes when you're sitting across from them, they come off as rather ... normal, if that makes

sense? Look, of course I'm not a psychologist. I can't do a psychological analysis of them, but they strike you as more normal than abnormal.

The second thing that I think is very hard to talk about in the media is the element of ideology and religiosity. By that, I mean I think we can all agree that this is not a normative form of Islam. This is not a form of Islam that in any way represents how Muslims generally practice their faith around the world. But I think that we lose ourselves when we refuse to accept their expressions of sincere faith.

CTC: Pulling on that same thread, you have interviewed a number of jihadis in prison, and in your podcast, you even interview a Canadian citizen who fought with the Islamic State in Syria and has since returned. And, as far as the listener knows, this individual is flying under the radar of law enforcement. How do you respond to people who say you have a moral obligation to alert law enforcement about these individuals?

Callimachi: More will be coming out in the podcast, but I'll tell you this much. As you mentioned, one of the main characters of the podcast was an individual named Abu Huzaifa al-Kanadi, who we interviewed in Canada. First of all, let me just be clear. When I went into that hotel room, I thought we were going to meet an ISIS fan boy.

I had no idea that this guy had gone as deep as he had gone. My colleague Andy Mills and I were just kind of in shock at the information he shared. I mean, he confesses to murder on tape. And there was no slight of hand; our recording equipment was right there in front of him. Anyway, it did weigh on us very heavily as we left that hotel room, the notion that we just heard somebody's murder confession and that we ourselves are not law enforcement. But this is where, as a journalist, there is a firewall that you just can't cross.

I can't behave, or be seen to behave, like an extension of law enforcement. If I'm seen as an extension of law enforcement, I'm done in this profession. That's when everything ISIS says about us being spies, us being informants, becomes true, right? That said, as a human being, as somebody who cares about the well-being of other people around me, we were concerned.

In fact, we had very long and protracted discussions inside our newsroom to figure out what was the right thing to do, understanding that going to law enforcement couldn't be one of them. You will see sort of a two-part solution to this in ... well ... future episodes of the podcast.

CTC: I see what you did there. Well played, Callimachi, well played. In all seriousness, in your opinion, where is our understanding of the Islamic State lacking? What is it about the organization that we understand the least? Where are we missing the mark here?

Callimachi: Look, I'll tell you the things that I still grapple with, and there are many. I think it's important to recognize that in the end, this is a secret organization. We are always uncovering things about it.

What I find remarkable about ISIS is on the one hand, this is the most micro-managed terrorist organization I think that there is, right? I mean, in the caliphate, you have an emir, and below him

is a deputy emir, and then they have their little platoon. Nobody can move around without a permission slip. If you're wounded, you even need a permission slip to be moved from the battlefield to the hospital for treatment.

So we're talking about total control on the one hand, but on the other hand, this is a group that allowed itself—it seems by design—to encompass an entire online universe comprised of people who are basically acting as online entrepreneurs for them. These are people who are just riffing on the ISIS brand, creating posters calling for attacks in this or that country, doing their own videos, publishing their own how-to guides. And this loose coalition of online sympathizers, which appears to be managed by no one, is also part of ISIS.

I'm very curious to understand if that is something that just *happened*? Or was that thought out ahead of time and always part of their plan? Because as a model for a terrorist organization, in a way, it's brilliant. It's super controlled, but it also allows for the lone-wolf model of terrorism to really run wild.

CTC: Okay, you were in Mali in 2012 and 2013 and Iraq in 2015. If we're interviewing you five years from now, where will you be saying you were collecting documents in 2019? Beyond the obvious culprits, is there a country where you see the threat moving to next?

Callimachi: I think the Sahel is a real tinder box, partially because of how weak the institutions are there and partially because the state has never really exercised control in those areas. Just days ago, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara took another hostage, a German national in Burkina Faso. They have this bank of hostages they are holding in conjunction with the former AQIM, and are presumably making millions of dollars each time one of them is released. That, coupled with the unfortunate event that happened in Niger last October, which I think is spelling the retreat of American forces in that area, looks like a really bad movie in the making.

CTC: Is there anything that our readers should look forward to in some of your upcoming podcasts? Care to give away any spoilers?

Callimachi: Well, I think the thing to brace yourself for is, the person we are following [the Canadian who fought with the Islamic State in Syria and returned home] is going to go really deep into what he did and how it feels to have done what he did. And listeners are also going to find out that he lied to us about key aspects of his story, and the lengths we went to untangle truth from fiction.

CTC: Last question. Throughout my two decades in the military, I have sensed a palpable stand-offishness between the military and the media. I don't think it is unreasonable for either side to have a healthy dose of skepticism about the other. In fact, it would be surprising if this wasn't the case. However, in my opinion, sometimes this lack of trust has been detrimental to the interests of the military. On the other hand, I have seen cases where the media and its interests have suffered due to its distrust of the military. Is there a way to bridge this divide?

Callimachi: You know, I wish our sources would understand how seriously we take the phrase "off the record." It's like a magic wand.

Whenever you wave it, whatever you say next is something that we cannot use unless we find a secondary source to say it. I realize that members of the military view the media with suspicion, but one way to get comfortable is to simply allow reporters in for an off-the-record chat and use that as a way to have a frank discussion. Then we can negotiate later about what is on the record. Instead, what happens is just a complete inability to communicate.   **CTC**

Jihadi Brides? Examining a Female Guesthouse Registry from the Islamic State's Caliphate

By Daniel Milton and Brian Dodwell

The persistent narrative of 'jihadi brides' traveling to Islamic State territory mostly out of a desire for love and adventure has oversimplified understanding of the motivations of an important demographic of the group's members: women. A recently acquired log book from a guesthouse in Syria, however, provides important/revealing information about 1,100 females who transited the location over the course of four months. Analysis of the females' ages, marital status, countries of origin, and other data points from the log book provides an empirical data point suggesting a diverse array of motivations of women who traveled into the Islamic State and contextualizes these findings for practitioners in the counterterrorism field.

The story is certainly worthy of headlines. Young women, wooed by the promise of adventure and romance in a faraway land, evade concerned parents to travel to meet their future spouses, who happen to be members of a terrorist organization. This narrative of young Western females joining and supporting the Islamic State has been supposed by well-publicized cases of young women either attempting to join or successfully joining this organization.[1]

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But how representative are these stories of the broader phenomenon of female participation in the Islamic State? And if the narrative of jihadi brides is not accurate but remains in place, what are the potentially negative impacts on counterterrorism and deradicalization efforts around the world? While an authoritative and final answer to these questions is beyond what this article can offer, it does endeavor to provide an additional data point that calls into question the narrative of women attracted to the Islamic State simply because they were love-struck teenagers hopelessly duped by Islamic State Casanovas. To do this, it examines data on women traveling through Islamic State territory to see if, at a descriptive level, the data supports or undermines this narrative.

First, the authors briefly highlight how the Islamic State's call to build a caliphate created a demand for migration to the conflict zone, not just on the part of military-aged males, but of females as well. Second, they present unique data taken from the battlefield in Syria, in the form of a guesthouse registry that covers a period of four months over an unspecified year and contains over 1,100 entries of females, with basic demographic information about themselves.[a] Third, the authors discuss the counterterrorism and policy implications arising from the examination of this unique data source.

The Call to Build a Caliphate: Not Gender Specific

In June 2014, the spokesperson for what was then known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, declared that the group had met the requirements to establish the caliphate. The group's name consequently changed to the Islamic State. With this announcement, al-Adnani not only called for the pledging of loyalty to the new state, but extended an invitation to come and live in it.[2]

Days later, the leader of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, made a special plea to a wide range of professionals, from doctors to engineers, to join the state as well.[3] What quickly became clear was that this call to come, targeted as it may have been to attract certain individuals and skillsets, was having a broader impact than ever may have been intended—the recruitment and travel of female respondents to the Islamic State's territory in Iraq and Syria. To further encourage travel to the conflict zone, the group created a campaign to facilitate this process, complete with how-to manuals to help would-be travelers, daily logs illustrating the lives of females in the caliphate, and training documents to help prospective citizens understand how to cook, handle weapons, and perform other tasks.[4]

Beyond understanding what steps the Islamic State was under-

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a   Unfortunately, the year of the guesthouse registry is hard to discern from the books themselves. The best guess the authors can hazard is sometime from 2014-2016.

taking to increase the number of females traveling into its territory, researchers also began to examine the demographics of this group of females. This task was made difficult by the fact that robust sources of data on these female travelers was not available. However, within the confines of that limitation, these early research efforts highlighted a variety of factors that explained the decision of females to travel to the conflict zone, ranging from a desire to contribute to the caliphate to a desire to find companionship with like-minded individuals to outright coercion by family members and acquaintances.[5]

However, despite this emphasis on the diversity of reasons for female travel to the conflict,[b] the story of "jihadi brides" quickly became the focus of much of the public discussion.[6] In addition to being poorly informed by the research that did exist, the emphasis on jihadi brides also demonstrated the dangerous habit of "analysis by anecdote," of which one of the most damaging side effects is the possibility that such perspectives hold sway with policymakers and practitioners charged with dealing with the problem. As one scholar put it, the focus on jihadi brides makes the development of counterterrorism measures difficult because "women are often active participants in Islamic State operations rather than just vulnerable, young girls lured with the promise of romance."[7]

These challenges aside, the scope and size of the phenomenon is also something that has not been covered. Although various research efforts have identified a wide range of countries from which the more than 40,000 foreign fighters have originated, very little has been said about the number of women who have transited into Iraq and Syria. One publication in January 2015 put the number at over 550 Western women, while another placed the number of Western women as high as 1,000.[8] Another scholar was quoted in May 2017 as saying that the number of Tunisian women that joined the Islamic State was 700, though it is unclear if all of those had traveled to Iraq and Syria.[9] Regardless of the actual number, it seems clear that there is a dearth of primary source information on the potential scale of the challenge as it relates to women and the Islamic State.

The Data

This article presents a look at a unique set of data that provides greater insight into some of the issues raised above. This data was obtained in Syria and shared by the U.S. Department of Defense with the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point.[c] The source material was a large number of pages from a notebook. Each page contained printed Arabic headers for each of the columns, as well as handwritten entries across the rows of each page. The handwritten entries were in Russian.

Before examining what this series of guesthouse logs show, it is important to recognize that they are not without limitations. Perhaps the most obvious is that the data utilized in this article does not allow the authors to paint a clear picture of what these women were doing in Syria, other than that they stayed at a guesthouse operated by the Islamic State. The documents are much more a snapshot that allows a quick look at the movement of women in, around, and out of Syria.

Another limitation is that this data, other than by implication, does not allow the authors to answer the 'why' question when it comes to the travel of these women. Some may have been committed, others may have been coerced, and others may have been wandering. Indeed, each of these motivations finds some support in the many interviews and reports that been written about female travel into the territory controlled by the Islamic State. Unfortunately, this data does not offer any concrete way of distinguishing between these possibilities.

The Guesthouse Log

The guesthouse log, as the authors refer to it in this article, is a series of printed pages that keep track of the women who apparently spent some time at the facility at which this registry was kept. They are number in the lower right-hand corner of each page sequentially (1-49), suggesting they go together. Each page contains line-by-line entries with each entry representing a woman who came into this particular guesthouse. An example of this can be seen in Figure 1.

While the columns were mostly consistent across all of the pages, there were some differences. For instance, some pages had only one space for the name of the registrant while other pages separated first and last names into separate columns. In other cases, information was placed in columns where the header did not match the information (for example, the country of origin was placed under a column labeled 'remarks'). That said, the following information appeared on the pages:[d]

(a simple ID number of each entry on a page)
Name
Alias
Age
Marital Status
Number of Children
Name of Husband
Location of Husband
Date of Entry
Date of Exit
Country of origin

There were 1,139 entries with some level of information completed, 1,138 of them with either a name or an alias entered. Among the other columns, information was filled out to varying degrees, with some columns such as age and marital status containing more information than other columns, such as the name of husband and date of exit columns, which were filled out more sparingly. In what follows, the authors examine various cuts of this data to see how it informs existing understanding of a previously under-examined aspect of travel into Islamic State territory—that of women coming from around the world.

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b   This despite explicit recognition in early research that "the assumption that females join ISIS primarily to become 'jihadi brides' is reductionist and above all, incorrect." Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, *'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part': Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), p. 5.

c   As is the case with all CTC products involving captured enemy material, once the data was provided by the Department of Defense to the CTC, the analysis was conducted by the CTC alone.

d   In the pages, it is clear that the individual filling out the sheets did so with only moderate attention to the column headings. For instance, country of origin was listed under the 'remarks' column, and the alias of the woman was often listed in the column marked 'country.'

Figure 1: Page from Islamic State Female Guesthouse Registry

Age

Figure 2 provides the age breakdown for the 1,132 women for whom an age was entered. As can be seen, there is a wide distribution of ages. The youngest entrant in the data was 11 years old, while the oldest was 76. The overall mean in the dataset was approximately 29 years old. The wide range of ages is important. As noted previously, much of dialogue about the travel of females into Islamic State territory revolves around young women, but this data reveals a more diverse flow. Only five percent of the women who stayed in this particular guesthouse were 17 years old or younger. If one groups together those who are 21 years old or under, it only accounts for 20 percent of the women.
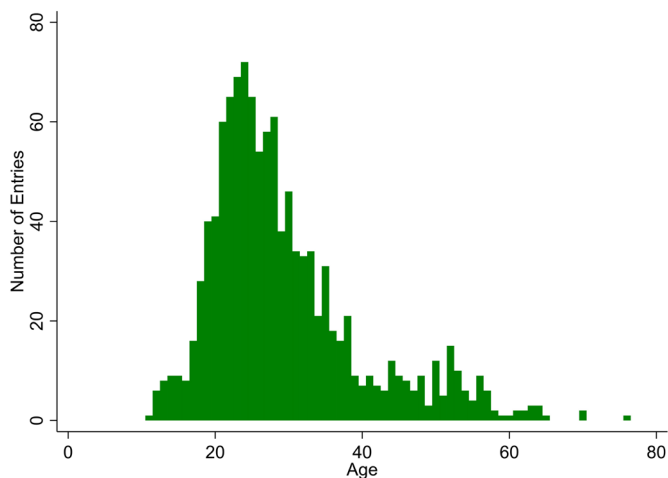

Figure 2: Age Distribution of Women Who Stayed in Guesthouse

This finding is particular interesting when compared to what is known about demographics of the male foreign fighter population that entered to fight on behalf of the Islamic State. Using leaked entry forms for that group of fighters, the average age range was found to be 26-27 years old, or about two to three years younger than for those listed in the female guesthouse data.[10] Indeed, among entering male foreign fighters, about 10 percent of the overall population was 17 years old or younger, or about double what the female guesthouse data reveals.

Marital Status

Figure 3, for which 1,135 of the women had an entry next to their name, shows the breakdown of marital status. Although most of the women had common notations of "married" or "single" next to their names, there were departures from the more common responses. Two women noted their status as "ran away from husband," although the guesthouse book provides no additional details. A smaller number of women listed their status as "divorced."

Among the more common categories, the possibility exists of a couple of intriguing findings. The first is that, of the more than 1,100 women who transited this guesthouse, 77 percent of them were married. This stands in contrast to what was found among the entering male foreign fighters, of whom only 30 percent were married.[11] This asymmetry in marital status raises the possibility of differing motivations for coming to the caliphate. While the fact that a large portion of males were single may indicate that finding a partner might have motivated a non-trivial potion of the men to enter the caliphate and join the Islamic State, the high proportion of married women in the guesthouse would suggest it may not have

been as common of a motivation for women.[e] That is not to say that finding a partner was not a possible motivation for women staying at this guesthouse as 10 percent were listed as single. However, this number pales in comparison to the 61 percent of men who were listed as single among the leaked foreign fighter records.

This point, though intriguing, should not be overemphasized due to two related data caveats. First, it is not known if the women staying at this guesthouse were coming from outside of Syria or whether they were traveling from location to location within the Islamic State's territory. Second, because it is not known if the women staying at this guesthouse came directly from abroad, there is no way of knowing if they were married prior to arriving in Syria. Unfortunately, the few insights into the Islamic State's female guesthouse system available in the open source do not allow the authors to clarify this point.[f]

That said, beyond having potential implications for the motivation of individuals to travel, the marital finding also speaks to a challenging dynamic for women who did make it to the caliphate. Stories have come out of the Islamic State's territory of women being married multiple times to a number of fighters after a previous spouse died in battle or from other causes.[12] This data suggests one possible reason for this practice: there was a shortage of available women to whom Islamic State fighters could be married. Granted, this data does not take into account the availability of locals to whom fighters could be married, but the fact that such a high pro-
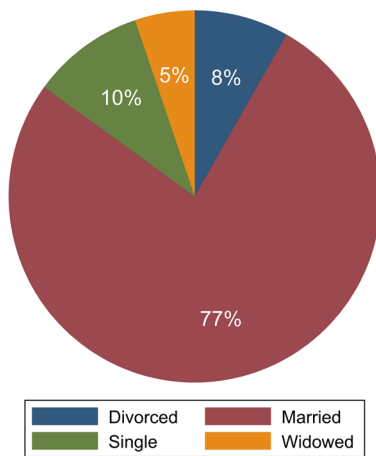
portion of women staying at this guesthouse were married makes this a distinct possibility.

One of the other interesting pieces of the marital status data is the relatively high number of divorced and widowed women who appeared in the dataset. Taken together, 13 percent of all the women who stayed at this guesthouse fell into these two categories, which is more than the number who listed themselves as being single.

Children

In examining the number of children listed for each of the women in the guesthouse registry, it is important to note that that it is not clear whether any or all of the listed children were traveling with the individual who was staying at the guesthouse or whether these numbers also include any children left in their home countries. Given that caveat, Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the number of children listed for the 749 women for whom this column was completed.
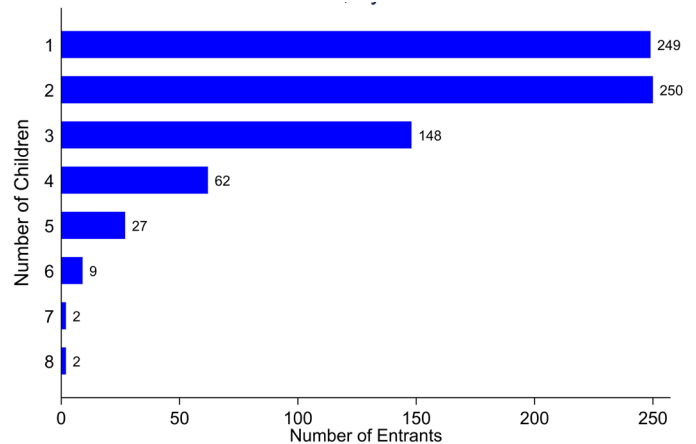
Figure 4: Number of Entrants, by Number of Children Listed

Country of Origin

Overall, the women who stayed in this guesthouse were from 66 different locations around the world.[g] Table 1 breaks down the individual locations from which the women came, as well as the number of women on the guesthouse register per one million citizens in their location of origin.[h]

Before discussing the data in detail, two caveats must be made. First, it is worth reemphasizing what this data shows. It may be the case that it shows the number of female entrants into the Islamic State's territory during this time period, but there is no way to determine that. At the very least, it shows the origins of women who stayed at this guesthouse, for whatever reason, during the time pe-

Figure 3: Marital Status of Women Lodging at the Guesthouse

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e   The interrogation of Umm Sayyaf, wife of a higher-ranking Islamic State official, is said to have revealed the promise of at least one wife as part of the Islamic State's recruitment pitch to males. Nancy A. Youssef and Shane Harris, "The Women Who Secretly Keep ISIS Running," Daily Beast, July 5, 2015. Another scholar pointed out that offering wives to incoming male fighters was "the perfect solution to the so-called 'marriage crisis,'" in which many males in Arab countries remain unmarried because of the high cost. Mia Bloom, "How ISIS is Using Marriage as a Trap," HuffPost, March 2, 2015.

f   References to guesthouses appear in several accounts based on interviews with women who lived within the Islamic State's territory. Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015); Kim Willsher, "'I went to join ISIS in Syria taking my four-year-old. It was a journey into hell,'" *Guardian*, January 9, 2016; Ben Wedeman and Waffa Munayyer, "Bride of ISIS: From 'happily ever after' to hell," CNN, April 26, 2017; Rodi Said, "Islamic State turned on dissenters as Raqqa assault neared," Reuters, June 28, 2017.

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g   Several of the 'countries' listed in the guestbook are non-internationally recognized countries, but instead sub-regions of larger countries. For this presentation of the data, the authors elected to keep these regions separate instead of aggregating them into the larger countries to which they pertain, as the authors felt that this provides a more informative look at the data.

h   The calculation of women per million citizens was made based on the total population in the country of origin in 2015, based on population figures from the World Bank. In the case of provinces and locations within Russia and China, census data was used where possible. Most of the population estimates for Russian territories came from the 2010 population census, which was the last available population census.

riod covered by the log books. Second, the guesthouse register was in Russian. Although it is clear from the diversity in the origins of registrants that the guesthouse was not exclusively for individuals from Russian-speaking countries, one cannot exclude the possibility that individuals from such countries were more likely to stay here than individuals from countries where other languages were spoken more predominately.

With these caveats in mind, the data in Table 1 reveals at least three interesting findings. Perhaps the first is the diversity of locations from which the women staying at the guesthouse came. As mentioned, according to the data for this guesthouse, women from 66 different locations stayed for some period of time in the caliphate. Though this may surprise some, it is consistent with a similar pattern research has shown for male foreign fighters, who have come from an equally diverse array of countries.[13] If this small snapshot of data is any guide, the message of the caliphate appears not to discriminate in its wide appeal based on gender.

The second intriguing finding has to do with the 'top' locations from which the women came. The most common location of origin for the women staying at this guesthouse is Dagestan, with 200 individuals listed in the registry. What is more, Dagestan is also the location with the most women on the registry when taking that location's population into account. The number of women staying in the guesthouse per million citizens of Dagestan is 67.89. In fact, four of the top five locations in terms of the per capita ratio are Russian provinces.

Table 1: Country of Origin of Guesthouse Entrants

Location of Origin	Records (#)	Women per Million Citizens
Dagestan	200	67.89
Turkey	124	1.58
Xinjiang	76	3.48
Tajikistan	73	8.54
Azerbaijan	61	6.32
Russia	61	0.42
Indonesia	54	0.21
Kyrgyzstan	53	8.90
Chechnya	50	39.40
Uzbekistan	44	1.41
Morocco	39	1.12
Kazakhstan	34	1.94
Egypt	31	0.33
France	23	0.35
Tunisia	22	1.95
Germany	15	0.18
Syria	15	0.80
Iran	14	0.18
Sweden	11	1.12
Kabardino-Balkaria	10	11.63
Pakistan	10	0.05
Ingushetia	7	16.99
Australia	6	0.25
Lebanon	6	1.03
Netherlands	6	0.35
Tartarstan	6	1.58
United States	6	0.02
Georgia	5	1.35
Saudi Arabia	5	0.16
United Kingdom	5	0.08
Bosnia & Herzegovina	4	1.13
Iraq	4	0.11
Karacayevo-Cherkessia	4	8.37
Kosovo	4	2.22
Macedonia	3	1.44
South Africa	3	0.05
Trinidad & Tobago	3	2.21
Ukraine	3	0.07
Bangladesh	2	0.01
Belgium	2	0.18
Jordan	2	0.22
Latvia	22	1.01
Libya	2	0.32
Palestine	2	0.42
Sudan	2	0.05
Abkhazia	1	4.15
Afghanistan	1	0.03
Albania	1	0.35
Austria	1	0.12
Belarus	1	0.11
Brazil	1	0.00
Bulgaria	1	0.14
Caucasus	1	N/A
Crimea	1	0.44
Denmark	1	0.18
Guyana	1	1.30
India	1	0.00
Israel	1	0.12
Malaysia	1	0.03
Maldives	1	2.44
Philippines	1	0.01
Slovenia	1	0.48
Somalia	1	0.07
Switzerland	1	0.12
Turkmenistan	1	0.18
Yemen	1	0.04

Other locations that stand out in the analysis are Turkey, with 124 women listed in the log book, and Xinjiang, with 76 women listed. Although the per capita figure for these countries is comparatively small, the absolute number of women is noteworthy. The presence of Turkish women among the Islamic State's was confirmed by an Iraqi court, which recently sentenced 16 of them to death for supporting the Islamic State.[14] However, while Turkey's geographic proximity to the Islamic State's territory makes it a likely origin country, the number of women (whether from Turkey or other locations) staying in the guesthouse raises additional questions more broadly about how effective Turkey's efforts to close the border to travelers were, particularly when it comes to females. The same border policing challenge may exist in the case of women leaving the caliphate, as a recent article noted that many women who lived previously in the caliphate's territory are now back in Turkey, either under arrest or temporarily staying in Turkey while trying to leave.[15]

The third and final finding related to the geographic dynamics in this data can be seen by aggregating the data into regions. To group the data, the authors relied on the United Nations' classification scheme for regions of the world, coding each individual that stayed at the guesthouse into a region based on her country of origin.[16] Figure 5 shows stark differences between regions.

The large number of fighters from the European region is due to the fact that the United Nations considers Russia as part of the region, and Russia and its territories accounted for 340 of the women in Europe. This is certainly consistent with recent reports, one of which cited an estimate of over 700 Chechen women and children as having traveled to Iraq and Syria.[17] Although much smaller in scale, another recent report suggested that Iraq deported to Russia four women and 27 children who the Iraqi government suspected of having ties to the Islamic State.[18] It certainly seems plausible that Russian women formed an important part of the female contingent traveling to the Islamic State's territory.

One of the other key populations of interest is Central Asia, which represents 34 percent of the total number in the Asia region. Recent events such as the use of a truck by an Uzbekistan-born militant to kill eight individuals in New York City and the growing number of Islamic State recruits from Central Asia have attracted more attention to the region.[19] However, there has long been a connection between Central Asia and jihad.[20] Regardless of when it became a problem, it seems clear from this data that the Central Asia problem is not constrained by gender. The contingent of women in the log books from Central Asia is comparatively larger than almost all other sub-regional groups.
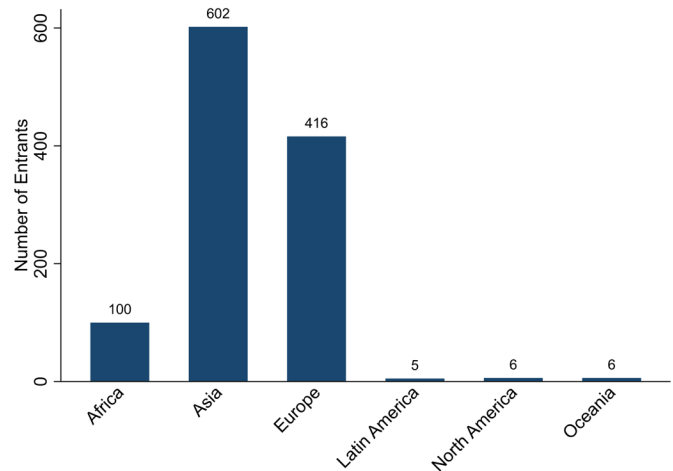

Figure 5: Guesthouse Entries, by Region

The last group worth mentioning is not because of large numbers, but comparative small numbers: those from Western countries. Of the entire dataset of over 1,100 individuals, only seven percent come from Western countries.[i] This is a bit surprising, particularly given the prominent public focus in Western media placed on the travel of Western women to join the Islamic State. At the very least, this seems to suggest that the challenge of female travelers to the Islamic State is much more of a world challenge than it is an exclusively Western challenge.

Of course, there is a possibility that the data is skewed because this guesthouse was more prone to receive travelers from a certain region. It is important to reiterate at this point that the guesthouse registry was in Russian, which likely explains the large number of women from Russia who transited this particular guesthouse. However, anecdotal evidence actually provide some support for the possibility that the data presented above may be an accurate representation of the female population of the Islamic State. In September 2017, Iraq said it was prepared to deport over 1,300 women and children, "most of [whom] came from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Russia."[21] Naturally, this may not be because more women came from these countries, but it could be due to the fact that Western countries have not made the decision on whether to even accept individuals returning from Islamic State-held territory.

Conclusion

This piece began by highlighting what seems to be a common narrative regarding the women who end up in the territory of the Islamic State: they are young, Western women who have been duped into traveling to the caliphate. The data here, limited though it is, paints a far more diverse picture of the types of women who were documented by the group to be transiting in and out of Syria. It seems a stretch to argue that all of these women decided to travel without any knowledge or awareness of what they were doing or the conditions into which they were heading.

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this data is that the

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i   The following countries had at least one entrant and were categorized as Western countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

challenge of dealing with the outflow of individuals from Iraq and Syria who were living in territory controlled by the Islamic State extends far beyond the men and boys who came to fight for the group. Indeed, the log book presented here records more than 1,100 women as having set foot in this single one guesthouse over an approximately four-month period. That said, it needs to be clearly stated that the point of this article is not that all women who transited into the caliphate were members of the Islamic State. Rather, this analysis has shown that these women are a diverse group in terms of age, country of origin, and family status. The motivations for their travel are likely to be similarly diverse.

The magnitude of entries as well as their diversity should give pause to policymakers regarding the potential for long-term issues arising from the diminution of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Women and children, even if not complicit in or contributing to what the organization was doing, will require repatriation and resettlement assistance. Those who were willing participants in the organization will be of special concern to security services. This concern was highlighted anecdotally by a recent article that talked with women who fled Iraq and Syria, but remained committed to the ideals of the Islamic State and the need for future violence.[22] However, the pursuit of any threats that might potentially arise in the future must be balanced against the importance of due process, fair treatment, and the protection of human rights.

There is another important point this article illustrates that is less obvious. The authors acquired the captured enemy material that populated this article from the Department of Defense, which in turn acquired it from the battlefields of Syria. As this article has shown in a small way, and as has been demonstrated more broadly with the publication of a *New York Times* piece featuring materials picked up in the aftermath of conflict, there is much to be learned from what has been left behind on the battlefield.[23] Continued efforts to release and study this material are likely to yield far more important and substantive contributions to the collective understanding of how organizations like the Islamic State fight, evolve, and threaten the world.   CTC

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"Trucks, Knives, Bombs, Whatever:" Exploring Pro-Islamic State Instructional Material on Telegram

By Bennett Clifford

Online supporters of the Islamic State use messaging and file-sharing platforms to communicate internally and share media releases, but also disseminate published operational instructions. A study of 98 pro-Islamic State Telegram channels containing instructional material collected between June and December 2017 finds that while officially produced Islamic State materials in English are relatively scarce, administrators of these channels are undiscerning about the ideological source of the instructional material that they distribute. Thus, they frequently utilize material from outside of the Islamic State's narrow ideological literature base. Moreover, the use of Telegram as a dissemination platform fundamentally changed the form and content of pro-Islamic State English-language instructional material by broadening the scope of available media (photos, images, videos, audio, etc.). While materials that direct followers toward committing attacks remain a great concern for counterterrorism agencies, dissemination of instructions on cybersecurity and operational security may be equally dangerous.

The messaging application Telegram is now the preferred platform of online Islamic State supporters, after replacing mainstream social media applications on the surface web (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram). This demographic utilizes Telegram toward several ends, including as an "information highway" for the distribution of official Islamic State media releases, coordination of supporters' efforts on the surface web, and facilitation of internal communications between supporters.[1]

The bulk of scholarly work to date on Telegram's role in Islamic State recruitment and radicalization focuses on the activities mentioned above rather than the platform's operational aspects.[2] The use of Telegram as a communications interface between networks or cells of Islamic State-inspired or -directed attack plotters in the West, or between these plotters and 'virtual planners' in Islamic State-held territory, elicits a great deal of journalistic focus. These reports intensified following news that the perpetrators of the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks had used the application to communicate with each other.[3] In addition to this cell, attackers in several plots in Francophone countries, the 2016 Christmas market attack in Berlin, and the 2017 Istanbul Reina Nightclub attack all used Telegram to receive instructions from Islamic State external oper-
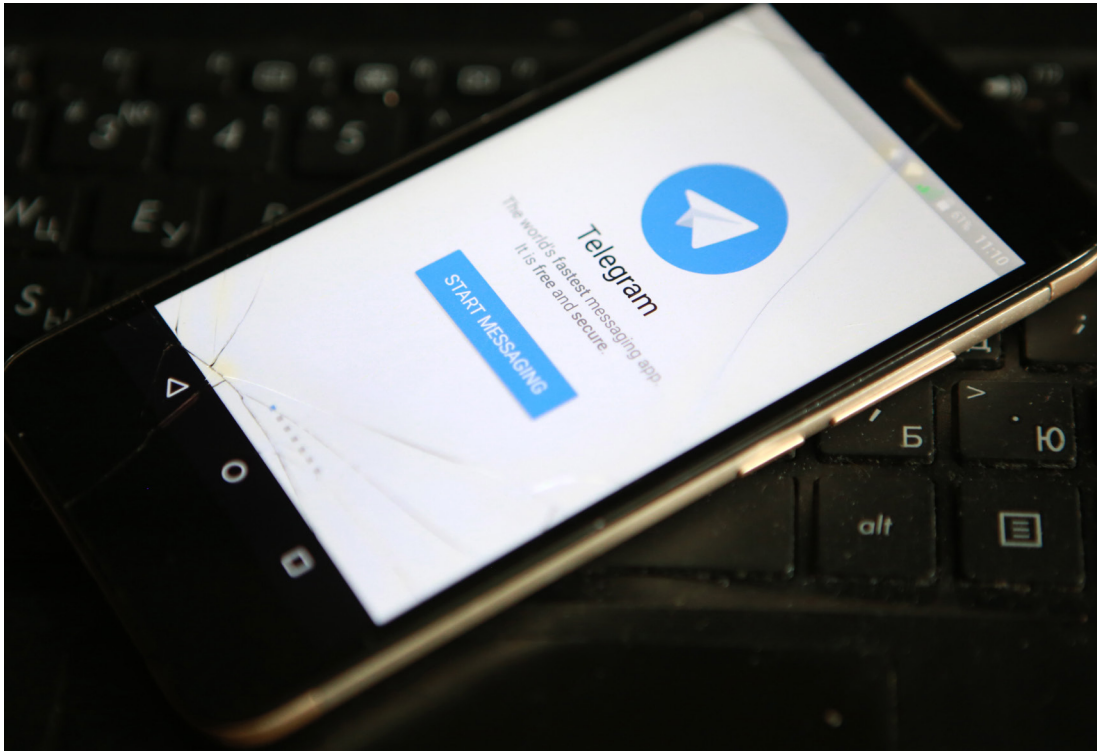
ations officials in Syria and Iraq.[4]

However, other aspects of Islamic State supporters' operations on Telegram remain under-analyzed in both academic sources and journalistic reporting. In addition to direct communications, supporters utilize Telegram's channel and file-sharing features to disseminate instructional material. Defined loosely, instructional material refers to compiled, published, and disseminated information on how to assist terrorist groups successfully and inconspicuously. Through undertaking a preliminary analysis of what sorts of English-language instructional material are published on pro-Islamic State Telegram channels, this article aims to document the diversity of available material and its potential implications for Islamic State supporters' operations in the West.

Background: Online Jihadi Instructional Material

A large proportion of English-language instructional manuals distributed by Islamic State supporters on Telegram are replicas of instructions developed by al-Qa`ida, other jihadi groups, or sources external to the broader jihadi movement. These results show that for channel administrators, pragmatism outweighs ideology in deciding which sources are useful for directing and inspiring English-speaking supporters to commit attacks.

Three interlinked factors shape this preference. First, the Islamic State's central media and external operations divisions do not frequently release official, English-language attack-planning material; what is available focuses on low-tech attacks (stabbings, vehicular assaults, arson, etc.).[5] This is partially a result of the group's priorities in its messaging strategy to English-speaking supporters, which initially focused on foreign fighter recruitment.[6] It was only after foreign fighter travel to Islamic State-held territory became significantly more difficult that Islamic State media releases, propaganda, and instructional material in English shifted away from encouraging supporters to travel, and instead directed them to "stay in place" and commit attacks in their native countries.[7] The harbinger for this shift was a series of speeches by Islamic State spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani from 2014 to 2016, culminating in a 2016 speech in which he argued to Western Islamic State supporters that "the smallest bit of work that you can carry out in [your] countries is far better and beloved to us than any major [operations] here."[8]

As a result of this relatively late-breaking change in its priorities, the Islamic State produced a smaller number of official, English-language instructional manuals than many of its predecessors.[9] The Islamic State did not offer step-by-step attack instructions in its original flagship magazine, Dabiq, which published 15 issues between July 2014 and July 2016.[10] Out of the 13 issues of its successor magazine Rumiyyah, first released in September 2016 and last published in September 2017, only five contained any instructional material.[11] Therefore, despite the Islamic State's encouragement of attacks in the West, officially released Islamic State instructional guides in English remain a shallow resource for

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Telegram, a free cloud-based instant messaging service, running on a smartphone. (Sergei Konkov/ TASS via Getty Images)

aspiring attack plotters.

Additionally, while Rumiyyah contains information about several low-tech attack methods, it eschews instructions for firearm and explosive attacks.[12] This may be due to a perception within the Islamic State's attack planning authorities that the strategic impact of a series of low-tech attacks in the West with minimal planning outweigh single, large-scale attacks which require extensive planning.[13] Organizationally, the Islamic State stands to lose very little in terms of resources and personnel if a low-tech plotter is either disrupted or unsuccessful.[14]

While the Islamic State has produced relatively little original instructional material for terrorist attacks in the West, there is an extensive corpus of instructional material produced by other jihadi groups, which largely maintains its relevance for Islamic State supporters years after initial production. Contemporary jihadis still actively draw from Jihad Recollections (four online magazines produced by the American jihadi propagandist Samir Khan from April to September 2009),[15] al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)'s Inspire (2010-2016, edited by Khan until his death in 2011),[16] and al-Shabaab's Gaidi M'Taani (2012-2015).[17] For jihadis in English-speaking countries, the first two, and particularly AQAP's Inspire, are the most-referenced sources.[18]

Within these publications, the most notorious manual series is "Open Source Jihad," a series of articles released in Inspire.[19] The multi-part installation contains operational instructions for a diverse array of attack methods, including car bombings, political assassinations, and vehicular attacks.[20] It also highlighted rudimentary cybersecurity protocols, including the use of the Asrar al-Mujahideen encrypted messaging platforms.[21]

The Open Source Jihad series is also infamous for one article, "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom," which contained recipes for the low-budget construction of an improvised explosive device

(IED).[22] Nearly a decade after its initial publication in 2010, this manual maintains its relevance among Western jihadis. The 2013 Boston Marathon bombers are among the most notorious users of the Open Source Jihad series, but attackers in various jihadi plots in the United States and Europe since 2010 have also utilized these specific instructions.[23] In December 2017, more than seven years after the release of the first issue of Inspire, Akayed Ullah allegedly attempted to detonate a pipe bomb in a Port Authority terminal in New York City on behalf of the Islamic State, resulting in no deaths.[24] Ullah reportedly told investigators that he constructed the IED based on instructions from an online copy of Inspire; the pipe bomb he built matched the recipe from "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom."[25]

Ullah's alleged plot also highlights a third reason that unabashedly pro-Islamic State, English-language Telegram channels may be so keen to distribute manuals produced by other groups. English-speaking, lone-actor jihadi attackers—the designated audience of these channels—are generally less observant of the subtle differences between competing jihadi groups and their ideologies.[a] English-speaking jihadi plotters frequently adopt "a la carte" approaches to the broader jihadi movement in terms of ideological

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a   As a pertinent example, Omar Mateen, the perpetrator of the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, infamously pledged allegiances at various points in time to the Islamic State, then-al-Qa`ida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, and Hezbollah. See more broadly Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9:4 (2015); Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, and Eva Entenmann, "Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West," Joint Program on Extremism, ICCT-The Hague, ISPI Report (2017); Paige Pascarelli, "Ideology À La Carte: Why Lone Actor Terrorists Choose and Fuse Ideologies," Lawfare, October 2, 2016.

matters, selecting what they see as personally relevant details from a variety of influences that are intrinsically competitive, unbeknownst to them.[26] In this light, attack-planning instructions may be even more easily extractable from the groups that produce them; attackers who seek to maximize damage will utilize any material that helps them achieve this aim, regardless of its author.

These three factors—a relative lack of Islamic State official instructional material, the surfeit of material produced by other groups, and English-speaking jihadis' seeming inability to discern between sources—all encourage English-language, pro-Islamic State Telegram channel administrators to post a wide array of instructional material from inside and outside the jihadi movement. As the following section explains, the choice of Telegram as a distribution network also filters and diversifies jihadi instructional material, or as the Canadian academic Marshall McLuhan put it, "the medium is the message."[27]

Telegram's Role in Distribution of Islamic State Instructional Material

Telegram's internal file-sharing features and the company's approach to its terms of service (ToS) have dramatically altered the methods that Islamic State supporters use to distribute instructional material. Previous academic studies on jihadis' use of Telegram suggest a range of explanations for why it became their preferred platform for media distribution. These studies focus on networks within Telegram, the behavior of Telegram channel users, and the security features within Telegram available for its users.[28] There is no doubt that these factors all have a substantial impact on why jihadis prefer Telegram, and in combination, they explain a great deal about the concentration of online jihadi activity on Telegram. To complement these works, it is important to also consider other critical functionalities available on Telegram and how use of specific digital communications tools drives users toward a specific platform and structure their use.

Telegram boasts file-sharing capabilities (within a channel, users can share an unlimited number of photos, videos, documents, audio messages, up to 1.5GB per file) that few other online messengers provide.[29] By comparison, the previous preferred platform of Islamic State supporters, Twitter, only allows file-sharing up to 512MB and can only support image and video uploads.[30] On other platforms, supporters interested in sharing jihadi material must share files externally using URLs. Some of these file-sharing platforms do not offer encryption, and external file-sharing increases the risk that outside parties can identify a user—not to mention that many external services are far less cavalier about enforcing takedowns and suspensions than Telegram.

Islamic State supporters who seek to distribute instructional material benefit from Telegram's extensive file-sharing services in two substantial ways. First, unlike other sites, they can publish material in a variety of media formats, from .pdf files to photos, videos, documents, audio messages, and download links for computer and mobile phone applications.[31] Supporters continue to share files through external URL links, however, these files can also be housed internally on Telegram. Strategically, supporters can use Telegram simply to send files to large groups of people, but Telegram also allows them to operate "clearinghouses" of material by storing the files on Telegram channels.

Compounding these factors, Telegram has been much slower than other companies to develop and implement ToS that target

jihadi exploitation of file-sharing services. Telegram is generally reluctant to regulate extremist content on its platform, citing concerns about free speech and claiming that governments are inflating the threat of online extremist content.[32] A 2016 joint proposal from the French Interior Ministry and German Federal Ministry of the Interior singled out Telegram for criticism due to the company's lack of regulation and failure to cooperate with governments on counterterrorism investigations.[33] Nevertheless, Telegram's general orientation toward preserving user privacy and free speech has not completely precluded the company from suspending channels that they view as inciting violence. In October 2017, Telegram's founder Pavel Durov wrote in a blog post regarding ToS enforcement, "the line is pretty straightforward … promoting violence and calling for actions that harm innocent people are not OK."[34] To this end, Telegram also maintains an "ISIS Watch" channel, in which it lists the number of channels it purportedly deletes for violating ToS in each day, week, and month.[35]

However, Telegram's methodologies for determining which channels to delete are opaque. The research team observed that channels containing attack-planning guides tend to be removed or deleted at a faster rate than others. To account for this seemingly higher rate, channel administrators frequently create new channels, in some cases multiple at a time. For instance, during the six-month timeframe of this study, researchers collected at least 25 separate iterations of a channel that routinely distributed instructional material and incited violence.[b] Each channel appears to have started from a 'seed' of various .pdf manuals, photos, and videos that were re-posted from a master channel. From there, the administrator(s) updated content by posting on the master channel and re-posting to each channel.

Telegram has changed the landscape of instructional material distribution by developing a platform that combines extensive file-sharing capabilities in multiple file formats with lax regulation. Administrators of pro-Islamic State Telegram channels take advantage of the platform's array of file compatibilities to distribute video, audio, document, and photo versions of instructional manuals. Not only does this media diversity optimize use for Islamic State supporters seeking to implement the instructions, but it also partially inoculates the material from detection by algorithms that are trained to only analyze one type of file for malicious content. As long as the company continues its approach to ToS development, supporters can easily store instructional material within Telegram channels with limited fear of takedowns or suspensions. In sum, these two medium-specific features have revolutionized the way that the Islamic State shares instructions with English-speaking supporters by diversifying the format and method of distribution.

Results: Instructional Material on Pro-Islamic State Telegram Channels

During a six-month timeframe between June and December 2017, researchers collected 98 channels[36] whose primary purpose was the

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b   According to this project's methodology, multiple versions of a channel are considered separate channels, as they have different content and different background information (date created, number of followers, etc.).

dissemination of instructional material in English.[c] These channels represent 16.2% of the Telegram channels collected by the Program on Extremism during the same timeframe.[37] Analytical limitations include available resources and staff, the focus on English-language channels (which comprise only a small percentage of jihadi material released on Telegram), and coding during business hours (Monday-Friday, 0900-1700 EST).

For the 98 channels analyzed in this study, there was an average of 98.7 members per channel. Membership numbers ranged widely, with the most-followed channel boasting over 350 members. Across these channels, supporters shared over 7,560 photos, 536 videos, 300 audio messages, 8,243 files, and 689 URL links. Within these channels, three types of material were most prominent:[d]

Explosives construction: information and step-by-step instructions to synthesize explosive material, improvised explosive devices, and instructions for carrying out an attack using explosive devices

Low-tech attacks: information and guidance about conducting attacks that do not require explosive devices (knife attacks, vehicular assaults and rammings, arsons, train derailments, etc.)

Operational security and cybersecurity: information about avoiding detection while implementing a plot and reducing the risk of apprehension; instructions to avoid monitoring of online activity, including the installation of privacy-maximizing applications and services (virtual private networks, anonymous browsers, 'self-destruct' features, encrypted messaging and e-mail services, etc.)

Explosive construction
Of this material, the category that arguably poses the most immediate, high-impact threat is instructions for constructing explosive devices. Approximately half (45.9%) of the channels analyzed for this article contained this type of information. Many were different versions of similarly named channels, and two "brand names" were especially frequent. One series of channels contained instructional manuals for conducting terrorist attacks, using a variety of methods including stabbings, poisonings, and bombings.[38] On December 6, 2017, an alleged administrator of this channel series, 31-year-old Husnain Rashid, was charged with terrorism offenses in the United Kingdom after allegedly inciting via Telegram supporters of the Islamic State to commit attacks there.[39] In addition, there were several versions of a channel called that depicted itself as an information portal on "science projects" for children, perhaps to avoid detection and suspension for its concerning material. Its first post claims "the friendly lion wants to share knowledge to protect you and your *ashbal* [cubs] ... in our first lesson [we] will show you how to prepare primary explosives. Use proper safety gear. Safety first!"[40]

Across the channels, there are instructions for synthesizing a variety of explosive compounds, including acetone peroxide (TATP), lead azide, potassium chlorate, C-4, TNT, xylitol petanitrate, nitroglycerin, picric acid, and pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN). On several channels, jihadis argue that TATP is the easiest for support-

ers to create—potentially explaining why recipes for TATP appear most frequently and why it is the compound of choice for dozens of militant groups.[41] One recipe for TATP published by "Dr. Khateer" in one issue of Inspire magazine is frequently rebroadcast on pro-Islamic State Telegram channels in full.[42] Channel administrators supplement this recipe, and others, with written instructions, photos, and videos from unnamed sources. In practice, however, Islamic State-inspired plotters with no offline training have found it difficult and dangerous to synthesize TATP—which many militants refer to as the 'Mother of Satan' because of its sensitivity—and even those who produce the explosive compound may not have been able to construct a device that actually works.[e] For example, an Islamic State-inspired jihadi failed to detonate a TATP-based explosive in the Gare Centrale in Brussels in June 2017 because of the shoddy preparation of the explosive.[43] In September of the same year, the Parson's Green Tube bomber in London was also unsuccessful in detonating a homemade TATP "bucket bomb," possibly, according to authorities, because either the device had been improperly assembled or the TATP had been poorly made.[44] While the cell responsible for the August 2017 attacks in Barcelona purchased precursor materials necessary to produce over 200 kilograms of TATP, during the synthetization process they blew up their own bomb factory, forcing them to abandon their bomb plot and launch vehicular attacks instead.[45]

Due to the lack of officially published bomb-making instructions in Islamic State propaganda, these channels usually compile instructions from various sources to add on to information available in previously released jihadi instructional materials. Administrators augment manuals from Inspire with multimedia content depicting user attempts to create explosive devices, as well as instructions from other sources. One channel, for example, re-posted a 1950s U.S. Army manual demonstrating the construction of a booby-trap using a grenade and tripwire. Another utilized a recipe for TNT, which it attained from a "disaster prepper" guide.

Low-tech attacks
Many of these same channels also contain instructions for more straightforward, lower-budget attacks that do not require the construction of an explosive device. They encourage would-be attackers to utilize any means at their disposal or, as one channel puts it in its description, "Trucks. Knives. Bombs. Whatever. It's time for revenge."[46] In this context, it is far easier for channel administrators to remain within the boundaries of officially produced Islamic State material. The series "Just Terror Tactics," which first appeared early in the publication run of Rumiyyah magazine, gives advice on several low-budget attacks, including knife attacks, hostage-taking, vehicular attacks, and arson.[47]

Supporters add to the instructions contained in the Just Terror Tactics series by crowd-sourcing advice and integrating other information, such as human body diagrams for melee attacks, tips on which vehicles to use for rammings, and comparing damage caused by various knives. Additionally, sympathizers distribute open-

c   Some studies on jihadi use of Telegram distinguish between channels (with one poster/administrator) and chatrooms (with multiple posters). Using this delineation, the sample would still include 98 channels and zero chatrooms.

d   For legal and ethical reasons, the author chooses not to re-post images, visual logs, links, or the exact names of currently active Telegram channels.

e   By contrast, Islamic State-directed or trained operatives have successfully constructed and deployed TATP-based explosives, including the Paris, Brussels, and Manchester attackers. Rukmini Callimachi, "How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze," *New York Times*, March 29, 2016; Rukmini Callimachi and Eric Schmitt, "Manchester Bomber Met With ISIS Unit in Libya, Officials Say," *New York Times*, June 3, 2017.

source instructions for the operation of various types of firearms, and marksmanship manuals to complement them. One channel provided instructions on setting up a home-made gun range for the purposes of training with firearms, claiming that going to a public range may elicit unwanted attention from authorities.

Some channels also distribute "operational playbooks," based on successful low-tech attacks carried out by Islamic State supporters in the past. Intended to be learning guides for would-be attackers, these playbooks detail the training, planning, and attack strategies of now-infamous perpetrators like Omar Mateen, the 2016 Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooter, and Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, who drove a cargo truck into a crowd in Nice, France, in 2016, killing 86 and wounding over 400.[48] These playbooks represent a novel attempt to not only lionize the attackers and encourage similar plots, but also assist potential perpetrators in learning from the successes and failures of previous operatives.

Operational security and cybersecurity
While attack planning guides may be the most immediately concerning content shared by Islamic State supporters on Telegram channels, a separate category of material regarding operational security (OPSEC) is more common and can act as a force multiplier. OPSEC information is especially concerning as it assists a wide variety of supporters and operatives across the jihadi spectrum—not only would-be attackers, but also travelers, financiers, and others who provide material support. Additionally, OPSEC guides are more frequent on Telegram channels than attack manuals. In fact, over 70 percent of the surveyed channels had some information directing users in OPSEC measures. These guides include tips on how to avoid spies and government informants, conduct counter-surveillance, and acquire ingredients for attack plots without raising suspicion of law enforcement.

However, a large percentage of these channels also focus entirely on maximizing privacy and security while operating online. For example, a series of channels operates as an application portal, providing the user with a series of download links for various computer programs and mobile device applications. At first glance, there would appear to be nothing explicitly pro-Islamic State about the channel, except for its name and an initial declaration that states the allegiances of the channel administrator. On these channels, a variety of downloads are available, including anonymous browsers, virtual private networks (VPNs), encrypted email services, applications for mobile device security, and built-in account self-destruct features.

Cybersecurity instructions released by Islamic State supporters also include manuals for avoiding ToS enforcement on mainstream social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook. By using these instructions, acolytes can create dozens of accounts, allowing them to quickly rebound from account suspensions and takedowns. They can use Telegram's file-sharing services as a repository for videos and photos that major social media and file-sharing sites frequently remove for violating ToS, and re-upload videos to these sites *ad infinitum* as they are deleted. Recently, in the wake of efforts by social media providers to detect algorithmically the profiles and content of violent extremists, a new round of instructions focusing on how to avoid detection by these algorithms was distributed.[49]

Cybersecurity measures, which are additionally available on Telegram channels that do not contain English-language instructional material point to online supporters of jihadi movements op-

erationalizing methods for avoiding content and account deletion from one platform to the next. Previous research by others on jihadi activity on Twitter and Facebook has observed homologous methodologies for the creation of dozens of accounts under a similar brand.[50] Now, supporters use unique file-sharing features within Telegram to distribute material internally. Many of the Telegram channels that feature attack-planning guides, for example, encourage their followers to immediately download every file from the channel as soon as they join in the chance that the channel is taken down.

If adopted correctly by supporters, these guides may decrease the risk of detection for any English-speaking jihadi operative, regardless of whether they are planning an attack, attempting a financial transaction to support an organization, facilitating travel, or engaging in other illegal behavior. It is an ongoing demonstration of how jihadis adapt in the digital space, acting and reacting to efforts to disrupt their plots and networks.[51] OPSEC and cybersecurity manuals, while not as potentially explosive as their attack-planning counterparts, may be more critical in understanding how Islamic State supporters worldwide conduct their operations.

Analysis: Impacts of Instructional Material on Countering the Islamic State in the West
Mass-casualty attack planning guides that are available online understandably perturb counterterrorism authorities in the West.[52] However, access to instructional material does not always correlate with successful plots. Previous studies of online terrorist instructional material distinguish between *techne*, or having general information or knowledge about how to conduct an attack, and *metis*, having the hands-on training and expertise necessary to do so successfully.[53] Online instructional material certainly made the *techne* of terrorist attacks more accessible, but there is no guarantee that readers will successfully fulfill the instructions. Nor is an online manual a substitute for direct, one-on-one training.[54] Adding to strategic complications, security services worldwide are already aware of information contained in manuals and make significant efforts to detect and apprehend their potential benefactors.[55]

Due to this gap between *techne* and *metis*, the more unsettling instructional manuals distributed by Islamic State sympathizers on Telegram may not be attack-planning guides, but the scores of OPSEC and cybersecurity instructions that are frequently shared. These guides, which are more easily accessible, implementable, and create numerous barriers for law enforcement in tracking violent extremists online, communicate to supporters how to side-step attempts to monitor and detect their activities.[56] While following their instructions may not directly result in casualties, the guides make it easier for attackers to plot attacks without having their plans disrupted, thus potentially increasing the risk of successful mass-casualty attacks. Operational security and cybersecurity instructions remain wide-spread and easier for supporters to carry out.

In addition, the availability of cybersecurity material on Telegram also hampers the fight against the Islamic State and other violent extremist groups online. Internal file-sharing allows Islamic State sympathizers relatively uninterrupted access to multimedia versions of instructional guides, which they can use to re-upload onto the surface web as tech companies attempt to regulate extremist content. The array of media (files, photos, videos, etc.) also decreases the chances that algorithmic indicators utilized by several social media providers can detect their content. Channel adminis-

trators frequently post information and application downloads that assist users in the proliferation of Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other accounts. By using these tools to create multiple accounts at once, Islamic State supporters can maintain a presence on mainstream websites and wither the impact of social media providers' account suspension efforts. Even if one account is suspended, they have access to several more.

Conclusion

As the Islamic State continues to hemorrhage territory in Syria and Iraq, there is little optimism among law enforcement, security services, and analysts in the United States and Europe that the group will cease efforts to direct and inspire attacks in the West.[57] Instructional material in English officially produced by the Islamic State is scant. Nevertheless, English-speaking Islamic State supporters on Telegram seemingly post whichever material aids the efforts of would-be attackers in English-speaking countries with little regard for its ideological sourcing. Telegram's features make it possible for this demographic to diversify the formatting of instructional material by disseminating various media types and establishing a virtual "safe haven" from content removal policies on the surface web.

Therefore, the lack of officially produced, English-language Islamic State instructional material is not an indication that the group's supporters will be uninterested in committing attacks in their home countries. Official and unofficial instructional materials distributed via Telegram directing followers toward low-tech attacks, cybersecurity, and operational security will likely have broad implications for Western counterterrorism authorities for years to come.   CTC

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"Deutsche Schabab:" The Story of German Foreign Fighters in Somalia, 2010-2016

By Christian Jokinen

Somalia became one of the main jihadi destinations for German foreign terrorist fighters in the years 2010-2012. A significant portion of these Somali and non-Somali foreign fighters belonged to a group of al-Shabaab sympathizers that had formed in Bonn before their departure to Somalia. Several of these foreign fighters had kinship ties. For the non-Somali Germans who joined al-Shabaab, Somalia was a secondary option after failed attempts to reach other jihadi arenas. For the majority of those who joined the group from Germany, al-Shabaab turned out to be an unwelcoming host organization, with the majority of German recruits opting to escape Somalia. Recent trials in Germany of these returnees shed new light on their initial mobilization and their experiences in Somalia.

In 2016-2017, Germany prosecuted two separate cases of German foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) returnees from Somalia, shedding new light on the Somali and non-Somali foreign fighters from Germany who traveled in 2010-2012 to join the terrorist group al-Shabaab. Altogether, at least 15 individuals[a] from Germany successfully joined the jihad in the Horn of Africa. Available open sources have enabled the full or partial identification[b] of 12 of these German foreign fighters. While al-Shabaab foreign fighters from the United States, United Kingdom, and Scandinavia have been studied, this study, which draws on public German court documents and media reports, serves as a first attempt to analyze the experience of German al-Shabaab foreign fighters.

In October 2017, a Somali-born German national, identified by German press as 29-year-old Abshir Ahmad A., was found guilty by the Frankfurt Oberlandesgericht (State-level Higher Regional Court) of membership in a foreign terrorist group.[1] In contrast to the majority of the German foreign fighters who traveled to Somalia, of which the majority belonged to a radical network from

Bonn, Abshir Ahmad A. came from Frankfurt, where he became radicalized in 2011.[2] Verbal support for al-Shabaab was followed by travel, and on January 22, 2012, Abshir Ahmad A. flew via London and Dubai to Somalia. After arriving in al-Shabaab-held territory, he underwent a security screening, followed by four months of ideological and paramilitary training in an al-Shabaab training camp, which included instruction in the use of small arms and basic infantry tactics.[3] After training, he was given guard duties, but due to medical problems, he was discharged from active al-Shabaab duty. The verdict in his later trial stated that he had remained active in the terrorist group until around late 2013/early 2014.[4]

Abshir Ahmad A. remained in Somalia for several years before he attempted to return to Germany. On July 4, 2016, he was arrested at Frankfurt airport. During his interrogation, he provided the security authorities with a cover story for his stay in Somalia. Unbeknownst to Abshir A., however, German authorities had already arrested German al-Shabaab fighter Mounir Tebourbi, who revealed that he had met Abshir Ahmad A. in Somalia on several occasions. On October 27, 2017, Abshir Ahmad A. was convicted of terrorism offenses and sentenced to two years and 10 months in prison.[5]

The "Deutsche Schabab" Group

In October 2016, in what was Germany's first counterterrorism prosecution against returning al-Shabaab foreign fighters, the state prosecution office accused five 23- to 31-year-old men of active "participation in a terrorist organization" and "preparation of acts endangering the security of the State." A sixth suspect was accused of attempted participation in these crimes. All men had departed from the city of Bonn to join al-Shabaab in Somalia.[6]

A significant number of the approximately 15 known al-Shabaab fighters from Germany come from the Bonn region (German state of North Rhine-Westphalia). Trial proceedings during November 2016 provide insights into the mobilization of these German jihad-volunteers and their experiences in the ranks of al-Shabaab in Somalia.

The grouping had long been on the radar of German authorities. In 2010, a document of the North Rhine-Westphalian Landeskriminalamt[c] (LKA) drawn up for the state prosecutor's office, and which was leaked to the press, warned that the state had become a "jihadist bastion"[7] and stated that a secretive group of approximately 15 members had been detected in the Bonn region. The group was said to consist of Somalis[d] but also native-born German converts to Islam, calling themselves "Deutsche Schabab," the German al-

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a   In 2015, German authorities assessed that 30 individuals from Germany had at least attempted to travel to Somalia to join al-Shabaab. "15 deutsche Dschihadisten kämpfen in Somalia," *Die Zeit*, May 16, 2015.

b   German media and authorities customarily identify suspected or convicted individuals with only the first letter of their last name. However, some local and international media outlets have not held to this norm, enabling the full identification of some of the German FTFs.

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c   State Criminal Police Office

d   In 2015, the Somali community in Germany was assessed to number around 5,000 members. Larger Somali communities in Europe could be found in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

Shabaab.[e] The LKA suspected that members had very likely provided the terrorist group with financial and material support.[8] The report stated that the imam of a mosque in Bonn-Beuel,[f] "Sheikh Hussein," was the leader and religious authority of the group. It added that members of the group met regularly with him to discuss their participation in the global jihad.[9] It is noteworthy that by 2007, the same radical-Islamist milieu in North Rhine-Westphalia had produced at least 13 jihadi travelers to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.[10] When it came to the pro-Shabaab mobilization, a central figure seems to have been the aforementioned Sheikh Hussein, a then 39-year-old radical preacher of Somali origin, identified in the German media as Hussein Kassim M.[11 g]

Two additional key figures in the grouping supportive of al-Shabaab in Bonn were named in the leaked LKA document: Omar Ahmed Dahir, a physics student of Somali origin from the town of Rheine, and his friend Abdirazak Buh, a Somali-Libyan dual national.[h] In 2008, both men had attempted to join the jihad in the Horn of Africa, but were prevented at the last moment by German police who arrested them as they were about to take off from Köln-Bonn airport. Both were soon released from custody, however, and the state prosecutor's office dropped the investigation against the men due to the lack of evidence.[12] The men had allegedly planned to fly via Amsterdam to Entebbe, Uganda, and continue from there to Somalia.[13]

Another German, though not connected to the Bonn group and who failed in his attempt to reach Somalia, was a radicalized former Bundeswehr non-commissioned officer who has been identified as Sascha B. The 23-year-old convert had been radicalized during his service in the German military.[14] On September 22, 2010, Sascha B. boarded a plane from Frankfurt to Kenya, but his attempt to travel to Somalia ended when Kenyan authorities arrested him near Mombasa and deported him back to Germany.[15]

From Pakistan to Somalia: 2011-2012
These failed attempts to travel to join al-Shabaab were not enough to deter additional attempts by Islamist extremists from Germany to join the jihad in Somalia. The year 2011 became a watershed

one in outbound jihadi travel patterns from Germany as Somalia replaced Pakistan as the top jihadi-travel destination for a period of time before the large subsequent travel flows to Syria. In 2011, German authorities counted six attempts to travel to Pakistan while the number of attempts to Somalia was double this number. In total, there were 12 attempts by Germany radicals to travel to Somalia that year, with four successfully reaching their destination.[16 i]

Those who successfully made the trip in 2011 included Abdirazak Buh, who managed to reach Somalia on his second attempt after traveling via Egypt.[17] Buh was soon followed by Andreas Müller, a German convert to Islam who traveled with his wife and child to Somalia via Kenya in September 2011. Buh and Müller joined an al-Shabaab faction led by Sheikh Ali Mohammed Rage[18] in January 2012.[19]

Müller had grown up in a middle class home in Bonn.[20] He converted to Islam in 1998 and married an Eritrean Muslim woman.[21] His greatest desire was to migrate with his wife to an Islamic country where both could live as "proper" Muslims. This desire took the couple first to Bosnia and later to the UAE, but applications by Müller and his wife for permanent residence permits were declined in both countries.[22] In 2006, the couple became parents. This did not put an end to Müller's desire to emigrate, however. In 2009, Müller, his wife, and his daughter were arrested for illegal entry into Pakistan and kept in jail for six months on suspicion that the family had tried to join jihadis in Waziristan.[23]

Interestingly, the first known jihadi from Germany to arrive in Somalia had also spent time in Pakistan. In early 2010, Emrah Erdogan, a then 23-year-old German-Turkish national,[j] traveled from Wuppertal (in North Rhine-Westphalia) to Waziristan, where he first joined the "Deutsche Taliban Mujahiden" (DTM) and then allegedly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Erdogan was part of a wave of German jihadis to the region who joined Central Asian jihadi groups—like IMU or IJU or their own group, called the "die Deutsche Taliban"—the "German Taliban-movement."

According to court documents, in November 2010 Erdogan phoned the German federal police to threaten that al-Qa`ida was planning attacks in Germany.[24] It is unclear why Erdogan made these threatening calls.

Soon afterward, he decided to leave Pakistan and change battlefields.[25] One possible explanation for Erdogan's departure was that he left his hosts in "bad standing," fearing reprisals resulting from his jihadi hosts for his unauthorized calls to German security authorities.[k]

In February 2011, Erdogan traveled via Iran and Kenya to Somalia, allegedly with a letter of recommendation from al-Qa`ida for his new host organization, al-Shabaab, on a USB memory stick.[26] Using the *kunya* Abu Khattab, Erdogan served as a propagandist and a contact point for individuals wanting to join al-Shabaab in Somalia.[27] It is unclear, if Buh, Müller, or any other of the Deutsche

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e   It is unclear if the group indeed called themselves 'Deutsche Schabab,' as media reporting has suggested, or if this was a name given to the group by German security authorities. The German internal security service Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz echoed this assessment when it stated in its 2013 annual report that the threat of al-Shabaab in Germany was stemming from "individual supporters and sympathizers." "Bundesministerium des Innern (Hrsg.), Verfassungsschutzbericht 2013," p. 253.

f   *Die Zeit* claimed that the Al-Muhsinin mosque served as a meeting point for radicalized individuals, of which some had travelled to Waziristan and joined al-Qa`ida. Christian Denso, "Bonn und sein Islamistisches Milieu," *Die Zeit*, April 30, 2009. In 2010, the local newspaper in Bonn, *General-Anzeiger*, alleged that the mosque had hosted in August 2009 a seminar with preachers that German security authorities had categorized as "extremists." Frank Vallender, "Experten warnen vor Extremisten, die in Beueler Moschee vortragen," *General-Anzeiger*, December 4, 2010.

g   It is noteworthy that while fundraising activity on behalf of al-Shabaab was suspected to take place in the Cologne/Bonn region, in Munich and Augsburg, a significant number of the identified foreign fighters to travel to Somalia came from Bonn. "Die Shabaab-Milizen," Akademie des Verfassungsschutzes, May 2015.

h   According to German press reports, Buh was born in Libya in 1985. "Islamist aus Bonn sprengte sich in die Luft," *Bild*, July 28, 2015.

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i   Here, it is worth noting that travel to Somalia did not mean automatic acceptance into al-Shabaab. Indeed, in several cases the process to join the group took several months.

j   His alias was Salahuddin al-Kurdi or Abu Khattab.

k   Another possible factor for his departure was the death of his brother Bünyamin in a U.S. drone strike a month before on October 4, 2010. Dirk Baehr, "Die Somalischen Shabaab-milizen und ihre Jihadistischen netzwerke im Westen," KAS Auslandsinformationen 8/2011.

Schabab members were in contact with Erdogan before their travel.[l] When Buh and Andreas Müller joined al-Shabaab in early 2012, there was already at least one German foreign fighter in Somalia, which possibly had the effect of pulling newly arriving foreign fighters from Germany into a clique.

Buh had been identified by the LKA in 2010 as a leading member of the Deutsche Schabab. In the spring of 2012, two additional travelers from Bonn arrived in Somalia with their spouses and children: Abdullah Warsame, a 28-year-old Somali with German nationality,[28] and his brother-in-law Steven Naumann, a 26-year-old German convert. The route they took—first flying to Mombasa in Kenya and then with the help of smugglers transiting by road into Somalia—was followed by the rest of the group a few months later.[29]

By the time Warsame and Naumann traveled to join al-Shabaab, Erdogan—who had been in Somalia for about a year and had been jailed by al-Shabaab for some time[30]—had come to the conclusion the country was not at all a welcoming arena for jihadi volunteers and was allegedly trying to discourage Western jihadi volunteers from traveling to Somalia.[31] By 2011, al-Shabaab was past its peak strength of 2009-2010 when it had made territorial gains and witnessed fast organizational growth, following the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia.[32]

Al-Shabaab's emir, Ahmed Godane had become suspicious of the loyalty of some of al-Shabaab's foreign fighters.[33] In an attempt to purge the organization from any opposition to his rule, al-Amniyat, the feared internal security organization of the group, started to isolate, arrest, and assassinate individuals suspected of divided loyalties.[34] Prominent members with personal ties to al-Qa`ida leaders like Ibrahim al-Afghani, a founding member of the organization, were killed.[35] Prominent foreign fighters started to die under mysterious circumstances.[m] Erdogan was one of those caught up in Godane's dragnet. Al-Shabaab suspected Erdogan of being a spy and jailed him.[36] Eventually—it is not clear why—the cloud of suspicion lifted.

He then allegedly went 'operational.' Erdogan was involved in a May 28, 2012, bomb attack against a small shopping complex on Moi Avenue in Nairobi, which injured 30,[37] Kenyan authorities subsequently claimed. According to their account, Erdogan had slipped from Somalia across the Kenyan border early that May and was a member of the attack cell. Erdogan was arrested two weeks later on June 10, 2012, at Daressalam airport in neighboring Tanzania. A week later, he was handed over to German authorities, who put

him on trial. Although involvement in the bomb attack in Nairobi was not proven in court, in January 2014 Erdogan was given a seven-year jail sentence after being convicted for terrorism offenses.[38] The U.N. Security Council's al-Qaida Sanctions Committee subsequently listed the now jailed Erdogan as an al-Qa`ida associate on November 30, 2015.[39]

Yet more Deutsche Schabab members arrived in Somalia in late 2012 and early 2013. Two of Warsame's brothers, the 23 year old Abdulsalam and Abdiwahid Warsame, followed in Abdullah's and Steven Naumann's footsteps to Somalia together with Mounir Tebourbi,[40] a 30-year-old German-Tunisian who also went by the name Aby Yahya.[41] All three had their families with them.

What motivated them? Based on their statements during the court proceedings, for the Warsame family, the motivation to travel to Somalia seems to have been a combination of factors. The oldest brother Abdullah wanted to "live in an Islamic society" after his Umrah pilgrimage to Mecca and had contemplated Egypt as an alternative to Somalia.[42] They instead chose to travel to Somalia as their mother wanted to return there to reconnect with family members in the Kismayo region. While none of the three brothers had performed well in school in Germany or secured a decent income, the worst off seems to have been the youngest brother Abdiwahid.[43] He had dropped out of school altogether and developed a drug addiction.[44] After their older brother had suggested, in a family meeting, migration to Somalia, the younger brothers had gone along with his decision.[45]

During their childhood, the Warsame brothers had been introduced to the idea of jihad and martyrdom by the sermons of a Tunisian imam, Emir Abu Obeida, in a local mosque in Bonn.[46] Abdulsalam testified that he had been prepared to "do his basic military service" in al-Shabaab.[47] All men had watched al-Shabaab propaganda videos before departure.[48] Another member of the Deutsche Schabab grouping in Bonn was the German-Tunisian Mounir Tebourbi. According to German media reports, Tebourbi had dreamed of living in a "Sharia State," as well as martyrdom and paradise before traveling to Somalia.[49] He had come in contact with jihadi circles around the year 2005 when he was studying machine engineering at university at Gummesbach near Bonn.[50] Mounir had first come across unidentified members of the group that metamorphosed into the Deutsche Schabab while playing soccer.[51]

Like the non-Somalis Erdogan and Müller, Tebourbi seems to have viewed Somalia as a secondary option. In 2009, he had attempted to travel to Pakistan to join the German foreign fighters in Waziristan and to fight against ISAF in Afghanistan, but he was forced to return to Germany after making it to the Iranian-Pakistani border.[52]

It remains unclear why the German authorities let some of the Deutsche Schabab members leave Germany. At least Buh, Abdullah Warsame, and Mounir Tebourbi were known to the security authorities for their activity in the jihadi milieu of Bonn before their travel.[53] The explanation might be simple: all the Deutsche Schabab members traveled to Somalia via countries like Egypt and Kenya that could have been seen as plausible tourist destinations, denying the authorities the possibility to prevent their departure from Germany.

Training and Trying Times in Somalia

In 2012, the number of German al-Shabaab fighters reached its peak. Besides Erdogan, Buh, Müller, Abshir Ahmad A., the War-

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l   According to German media reporting, Müller was in contact with Erdogan, but it is unclear when these contacts took place, either before or after Müller's arrival in Somalia. Thomas Scheen, "Deutscher Islamist von Kenianischen Behörden gesucht," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 18, 2015.

m   In June 2011, Comoros-born al-Qa`ida operative and leading member of al-Shabaab Mohammed Harun Fazul took a wrong turn with his car in Mogadishu and was killed at a government checkpoint. It is widely suspected, however, that Fazul's death was orchestrated by al-Shabaab elements. Jeremy Scahill, "The purge – How Somalia's Al Shabaab Turned Against Its Own Foreign Fighters," The Intercept, May 19, 2015. One of the first to be killed by al-Shabaab FTFs from Europe was Bilal al-Berjawi, a British-Lebanese sub-commander within the group who was killed by a drone strike in January 22, 2012. A month later, his companion Muhammad Sakr was also killed under similar circumstances. Raffaello Pantucci and A.R. Sayyid, "Foreign Fighters in Somalia and al-Shabaab's Internal Purge," *Terrorism Monitor* 11:22 (2013).

same brothers, Naumann, and Tebourbi, two additional members of Deutsche Schabab found their way to Somalia around the year 2012: Abdirizak M. H. and Ali Sh.[54]

The trial in Germany of the Warsame brothers, Naumann, and Tebourbi gives a relatively detailed description of how al-Shabaab received it foreign volunteers. After arrival, the five men from Bonn were subjected to an al-Shabaab 'clearinghouse process' in which they were vetted for their trustworthiness. Personal mobile phones and electronic devices were confiscated by al-Shabaab, and the men had to stay isolated in a house, together with other al-Shabaab volunteers from "Kenya, America and Asia."[55] The German volunteers did not stay together all the time. Indeed, it looks as if al-Shabaab may have intentionally split the group up. Three had to stay in a type of quarantine longer than the others, but finally, all five were admitted to al-Shabaab training after giving an oath of allegiance to the emir of al-Shabaab.[56] In 2013, the men received combat training for several months in al-Shabaab training camps, including training in using AK-assault rifles and RPGs as well as guerrilla tactics. After this, the men were posted to man al-Shabaab's defensive positions against government forces.[57] In the spring of 2013, a sixth man from Bonn arrived in Mogadishu with the desire to join al-Shabaab. Omar Ahmed Dahir, a German-Somali, had already once tried to travel to Somalia in 2008 together with Abdirazak Buh.[58] When Buh had made a second and successful attempt to travel to Somalia, in 2012, Dahir had remained in Bonn.

On December 10, 2012, an unexploded bomb was found at the Bonn railway station. A large counterterrorism investigation ensued. Dahir and another individual were arrested the next day after a 14-year-old witness claimed to have seen the men leaving behind the luggage containing the IED. A day later, Dahir was released and publicly cleared of suspicion.[59] The investigation led to another member of the Bonn jihadi milieu, a German convert to Islam, Marco G., who was charged together with three co-conspirators for the failed attack at the Bonn railway station and convicted in April 2017 to life imprisonment.[60]

The episode could have contributed to Dahir's decision to undertake another attempt to leave Germany as four months later—in April 2013—Dahir did indeed reach Somalia. Once in Mogadishu, Dahir met with Abdiwahid Warsame and Mounir Tebourbi who just had graduated from their training camp.[61]

On the advice of both men, Dahir presented himself to the al-Shabaab members responsible for the vetting process at the 'clearinghouse.' However, they suspected Omar Dahir to be a spy and jailed him for five months.[62] During his incarceration, Dahir was reportedly tortured.[63] Luckily for him and untypically, al-Shabaab decided instead of the usual punishment for spying (beheading) to expel him.[64] Kenyan authorities arrested Dahir in July 2014 and deported him to Germany.[65]

After a year, disillusionment settled in among the remaining quintet. The constant squabbles between al-Shabaab commanders, frequent U.S. drone strikes, and especially the "rigid treatment" of foreigners in al-Shabaab demoralized the German group.[66] Contributing to the sense of disquiet, in September 2013 al-Shabaab had assassinated Omar Hammami (alias Abu Mansoor al-Amriki), a prominent public member of al-Shabaab's foreign fighter community.

In August 2014, the remaining members of the Deutsche Schabab group fled with their families to Kenya. In Nairobi, three of the men gave themselves up to German law enforcement author-

ities and were flown to Germany. Abdullah (28) and Abdulsalam Warsame (24) and Steven Naumann (26) were arrested upon their arrival at Frankfurt airport. Their wives and children and Abdullah's and Abdulsalam's mother also returned to Germany.

While Somalia had been a disappointment to the brothers Abdullah and Abdusalam Warsame and their bother-in-law Naumann, not all were willing to turn their back on the jihadi cause. At some point—it is not clear from where—Tebourbi allegedly made contact with a Syria-based American rapper cum terrorist "Duale"[67] (possibly Douglas McAuthur McCain, alias "Duale Khalid," the first American to die (August 23, 2014) while fighting for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria[68]) for advice on how to join the Islamic State. Abdiwahid, the youngest of the Warsame siblings, was willing to continue with Tebourbi to Syria.[69] Interestingly, both men were pictured in an al-Shabaab propaganda video entitled "Mujahedeen Moments 4" and produced by the group's media wing Al-Kataayb Media.[70] Their plan to leave al-Shabaab and change battlefields and join the Islamic State in Syria/Iraq, by traveling first to Turkey, however, ended in Nairobi as al-Shabaab had confiscated their passports.[71] Kenyan security authorities arrested the pair. Both claimed to have been in Somalia on a "humanitarian mission" but to no avail as they were handed over to German security authorities. During their interrogations, both confessed and gave evidence against the other.[72]

In July 2016, the Higher Regional Court (Oberlandesgericht)[73] of Frankfurt sentenced the six to prison terms of up to five years. The longest sentence was handed to the oldest of the brothers, Abdullah Warsame, while the others were sentenced from a two-year suspended jail sentence to four years and nine months in prison.[74]

While disillusionment and discontentment had caused the six-man travel group from Bonn to return to Germany in 2014, not all members of the Deutsche-Schabab took this trajectory. Abdirazak Buh, 29, who had been one of the first to arrive in Somalia, became the first German suicide bomber to blow himself up in Somalia. On July 26, 2015, Buh carried out a VBIED-suicide bombing against the Jazeera Palace Hotel in Mogadishu, killing at least 15 people. Al-Shabaab took responsibility for the attack.[75]

Meanwhile, Andreas Martin Müller (alias Abu Nusaybah) had become somewhat of a *bête noire* to regional security services. Kenya attributed several terrorist attacks in the country to Müller, and in June 2015, the government announced a $100,000 reward for his capture.[76] At some point after joining the jihadi cause in Somalia, Müller seems to have been active in a Shabaab sub-group Jaysh Ayman[n] ("Army of the Faithful") together with a handful of other foreign fighters.[77]

While it is unclear from what point Müller became involved in the unit, one of the attacks Müller was accused to have taken part in was on a Kenyan military base in Buare, Lamu County, on June 14, 2015. The attack made headlines after it was discovered that one

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n   Jaysh Ayman has presented itself as a local movement defending Swahili Muslims and fighting against the Kenyan government. The group has been found responsible for several attacks and cross-border raids in which fighters, among other things, travel across the land border between Somalia and Kenya to target individuals and carry out attacks in Kenya. Andrew McGregor, "How Kenya's Failure to Contain an Islamist Insurgency is Threatening Regional Prosperity," *Terrorism Monitor*, October 27, 2017; Thomas Joscelyn, "American charged with supporting Shabaab, serving in 'specialized fighting force,'" FDD's Long War Journal, January 11, 2016.

of the al-Shabaab terrorists killed was 25-year-old British convert Thomas Evans.[78] Earlier the same year, Evans and Müller had been involved in a deadly al-Shabaab attack against a Kenyan university in Garissa County that left more than 140 people dead, Kenyan authorities alleged.[79] In pictures retrieved from a camera found on Evans' body after the Lamu County attack, Evans and Müller could be seen embracing each other before the attack.[80]

In April 2016, a split took place in al-Shabaab when a group calling itself "Jabha East Africa" announced its loyalty to the Islamic State and gave its *bay`a* (oath of allegiance) to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, recognizing him as the "rightful Khalifa (leader) of all Muslims."[81] This decision by the group, who claimed to represent "all East Africans in al-Shabaab," amounted to a declaration of war against its previous host organization:

> "Sadly, Al-Shabaab has forgotten the resolved needed to work for the establishment of the rule of Allah. Many Kenyans, Tanzanians and Ugandan Mujahideen have been accused without evidence of working against Islam and the Mujahideen. Many have been detained for accepting the declaration of the Khalifah … We in JAHBA EAST AFRICA are telling the Mujahideen in East Africa that Al-Shabaab has now become a psychological and physical prison."[82]

A few months later, in July 2016, "Jabha East Africa," announced on Twitter that Müller had died: "da bros [sic] who beg Al Shabaab to come to Islamic State. May Allah accept him."[83] Combined with this announcement, Jabha East Africa also distributed an old propaganda video featuring Müller.[84] The tweet indicated that before his death, under unknown circumstances, Müller had defected from al-Shabaab to Jabha East Africa. His motive for changing sides could have ranged from ideological (as the announcement seems to have indicated) to personal survival, as the declaration and several other subsequent Jabha East Africa announcements repeatedly made reference to the persecution of non-Somali foreign fighters in al-Shabaab.[85]

Conclusion

With the announcement of Müller's (unconfirmed) death, the longest-serving foreign fighter from Germany in Somalia had been taken off the battlefield. The mobilization of foreign fighters to al-Shabaab from Germany underscores the importance of friendship and kinship ties in the radicalization process and the FTF phenomenon as has been pointed out by several scholars.[86] From the 12 identified German foreign fighters to join al-Shabaab, all but two came from Bonn and had been members of the Deutsche Schabab group and the wider jihadi milieu of Bonn. Interestingly the Warsame-brothers[87] and their family friend Mounir Tebourbi[88] had been living in a neighborhood of Bonn-Tannenbusch,[o] a locality of the city that has seen significant foreign fighter outflows. By 2012, these included several jihadi volunteers who traveled to the Afghan-Pakistan border region and then later a large proportion of the 50 German FTFs who traveled from Bonn to join the Islam-

ic State.[89] This geographical concentration of the German jihadi volunteers is, as such, not unique. Minneapolis also saw waves of departures and in Sweden, Stockholm's Rinkeby, Göteborg, and Malmö became hotspots for al-Shabaab recruitment.[90] However, a slight difference to the U.S. and Swedish experiences can be detected in the makeup of the travelers: almost all of the foreign fighters from the United States and Sweden (and Scandinavia) were ethnic Somalis. In the German case, a significant portion were non-Somalis. This can be explained by the multiethnic makeup of the salafi-jihadi milieu in Bonn.

In addition to the preexisting friendships, another factor binding the group together was kinship. Out of the 12 identified travelers, three were brothers. If the kinship bond is extended to include in-laws, then four out of 12 identified travelers belonged to a single family (the Warsame brothers and their in-law Steven Naumann).

How much was the migration of the Deutsche Schabab to Somalia the result of top-down recruitment? German authorities never pressed charges against the alleged radical preacher of the Deutsche Schabab group, Hussein Kassim M. This suggests authorities were unable to find evidence connecting his alleged radicalization activity and the decision of the members of the group to leave for Somalia.[p]

At least six, and possibly eight, of the al-Shabaab fighters from Germany were of Somali heritage. For the non-Somalis (Erdogan, Müller, and Tebourbi), Somalia was clearly a secondary option, as all three had attempted to reach another jihadi arena before arriving in Somalia. For Erdogan, Somalia became a refuge from U.S. drone strikes (and possibly his jihadi comrades' fury). The fact that several travelers reached Somalia via countries like Egypt and Kenya, countries that could be seen as plausible tourist destinations, may explain why German authorities were unable to prevent their departures to fight jihad in Somalia.

The friendship and kinship factor in mobilization also helps to explain why German foreign fighters—in comparison to the mobilization and travel to join al-Shabaab from Minnesota[q] or some parts of Northern Europe[r]—were late arrivals in Somalia. By 2012, the situation of al-Shabaab had become difficult. It had lost control of Mogadishu in 2011 to AMISOM and was retreating from the high point of its expansion.

Collectively for the German jihadi volunteers, Somalia and al-Shabaab seems to have been a bitter disappointment. At least two

o   According to German media reports, over 45 percent of the 15,000 inhabitants of Bonn-Tannenbusch have a migrant background. Around 40 percent of the inhabitants of Bonn-Tannenbusch live on social welfare payments. The neighborhood has been seen as one of Germany's most active salafi hotspots. Frank Vallender, "Problemviertel Tannenbusch – Nährboden für Salafismus?" *General-Anzeiger*, November 17, 2014; "Bonn-Tannenbusch – Das Deutsche Molenbeek?" WDR, December 3, 2015.

p   German authorities, however, prevented Hussein Kassim M. from becoming a German citizen. Hussein Kassim M. challenged this legally, but lost. By 2014, German media reported that Hussein Kassim M. was no longer serving as an imam. Frank Vallender, "Hassprediger darf kein Deutscher sein," *General-Anzeiger*, May 28, 2014.

q   Traveling to join al-Shabaab from Minnesota started in 2007 and took place over the next two years in several waves. "Timeline: Minnesota pipeline to al-Shabab," Minnesota Public Radio, last updated September 25, 2013.

r   Leading FTFs from the United Kingdom Bilal Berjawi and Mohammed Sakr reached Somalia in 2009. The same year, 10 FTFs from Sweden were reported to have joined a growing contingent of Swedish Somalis fighting in the ranks of al-Shabaab. One of these, Fuad Shongole became a significant leader in al-Shabaab. Raffaello Pantucci, "Bilal al-Berjawi and the Shifting Fortunes of Foreign Fighters in Somalia," *CTC Sentinel* 6:9 (2013); Eva Blässar, "Terroristgrupp rekryterar medlemmar I Sverige," YLE, January 24, 2010; "Sweden rattled by Somali militants in its midst," Associated Press, January 24, 2010. For a profile of al-Shabaab leadership figure Fuad Qalaf, see Nathaniel Horadam and Jared Sorhaindo, "Profile: Fuad Mohamed Qalaf (Shongole)," *Critical Threats*, November 14, 2011.

of the 12 were suspected of being spies and were jailed and physically abused/tortured by the same group they had wanted to join. The growing tensions inside al-Shabaab, and additional tensions within the group created by the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the announcement of its global caliphate, complicated their situation further. Abdiwahid Warsame and Tebourbi looked into possibilities to leave Somalia to join the Islamic State in Syria. Müller seems to have been caught up in the infighting and chose to split from al-Shabaab.

By the end of 2016, out of the 12 German al-Shabaab foreign fighters, seven[s] had returned to Germany and had to stand trial for terrorism offenses. With Buh likely dead and Müller purportedly dead, only two partially identified German foreign fighters—Abdirazak M-H. and Ali Sh.—remain unaccounted for.   CTC

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s   These were Erdogan in 2012; the Warsame-brothers, Naumann, and Tebourbi in 2014; and Abshir Ahmad A. in 2016.

Appendix: Table of German FTF travelers to Somalia

Name	From	Member of Bonn Group?	Arrival in Somalia	Current Status
Abshir Ahmed A.	Frankfurt a.M.	No	January 2012	Sentenced October 2017 to 2 years, 10 months in prison
Omar Ahmed Dahir	Rheine	Yes	April 2013	Sentenced to 2 years suspended prison
Abdirazak Buh	Bonn	Yes	2012	Conducted a VBIED July 26, 2015, and presumed dead
Sacha B.	Unknown	No	Prevented, October 2010	Unknown
Andreas Müller	Bonn	Yes	January 2012	Presumed dead in al-Shabaab/Islamic State feud, July 2016
Emrah Erdogan	Wuppertal	Linked to Müller	February 2011	Sentenced in January 2014 to 7 years prison
Abdullah Warsame	Bonn	Yes	July 2012	Sentenced in July 2016 to 5 years in prison
Abdulsalam Warsame	Bonn	Yes	October 2012	Sentenced in July 2016 to 4 years, 9 months in prison
Abdiwahid Warsame	Bonn	Yes	October 2012	Sentenced in July 2016 to 3 years, 6 months in prison
Mounir Tebourbi	Bonn	Yes	October 2012	Sentenced in July 2016 to 3 years, 9 months in prison
Steven Naumann	Bonn	Yes	July 2012	Sentenced in July 2016 to 4 years, 9 months in prison
Abdirazak M-H.	Bonn	Likely connected to	Unknown	Unknown
Ali Sh.	Bonn	Likely connected to	Unknown	Unknown

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