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FEATURE ARTICLE

The Jihadi Threat to Indonesia

KIRSTEN E. SCHULZE

A VIEW FROM THE CT FOXHOLE

LTC Bryan Price

OUTGOING DIRECTOR,
COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

This summer marks the end of an era for us. Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Price, the Combating Terrorism Center's longest-serving director, is retiring after 20 years of service in the Army, the last six at the helm of the CTC.

During that time, he was a tireless champion for the CTC and its staff and cemented its status as one of the leading research institutions in the terrorism studies field. In a conversation with Brian Dodwell, who is taking over as director, LTC Price reflects on his service at the CTC and the essential need for rigorous research to understand the evolving threat landscape.

There is concern that Islamic State-linked terror is on the rise in Southeast Asia. On Sunday, May 13, 2018, three churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, were targeted by suicide bombers comprising one single family of six. The following day, a family of five rode two motorbikes to the entrance of the city's police headquarters where they blew themselves up. The attacks saw the confluence of several trends in jihadi terrorist plotting—an increased reliance on family networks and an increased embrace of women and children in combat roles. In our cover article, Kirsten Schulze outlines the evolving threat from pro-Islamic State militants in Southeast Asia's most populous country.

Dakota Foster and Daniel Milton build on the the CTC's previous analysis on the personnel records of just over 4,100 Islamic State foreign fighters to focus on what the records reveal about the smaller subset of 267 children. David Sterman also analyzes the Islamic State's personnel records to compare and contrast the profile of recruits with previous experience in Libya and Afghanistan. Robin Simcox documents an alleged terrorist conspiracy by an all-female cell guided by an Islamic State cybercoach to plot attacks in the Paris area in 2016.

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CONTACT

Combating Terrorism Center

U.S. Military Academy

607 Cullum Road, Lincoln Hall

West Point, NY 10996

Phone: (845) 938-8495

Email: sentinel@usma.edu

Web: www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/

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Please contact us at sentinel@usma.edu.

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Cover: A handout photo from the government of Surabaya showing a bomb blast at Surabaya Pantekosta Center Church on May 13, 2018, in Surabaya, Indonesia. (Surabaya Government Handout/Andy Pinaria/Getty Images)

The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia

By Kirsten E. Schulze

On May 13, 2018, three churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, were targeted by suicide bombers comprising one single family of six. These are the first suicide bombings involving women and young children in Indonesia, thus marking a new *modus operandi*. They also show an increased capability among Indonesian Islamic State supporters when compared to previous attacks. But this increase is not necessarily indicative of a greater capacity across Indonesia's pro-Islamic State network and the involvement of whole families reflects a broadening participation in Indonesian jihadism rather than a complete departure. The recent upsurge in violence is locally rooted, even if it is framed within the broader Islamic State ideology. The attacks also bring to the fore the role of family networks and the increased embrace of women and children in combat roles.

On Sunday, May 13, 2018, three churches in Surabaya (East Java), Indonesia, were targeted by almost simultaneous suicide bombings, killing 13 and wounding 41. According to Indonesian authorities, TATP (triacetone triperoxide) was used in all three bombings, and they were carried out by one family comprising Dita Oepriarto; his wife, Puji Kuswati; teenage sons, Yusuf Fadhil (18) and Firman Halim (15); and young daughters, Fadhila Sari (12) and Famela Rizqita (9). Later that day, a premature bomb explosion in a house in Sidarjo (near Surabaya), involving another family of six, injured the bomb maker Anton Febrianto and the two younger children, Farisa Putri (11) and Garida Huda Akbar (10), while killing his wife, Puspitasari, and the eldest son, Hilta Aulia Rahman (17). Febrianto was subsequently shot dead by the police.¹ The following day, on Monday, May 14, a family of five rode two motorbikes to the entrance of Surabaya police headquarters where they blew themselves up. Four of the attackers were killed, and three police officers as well as three civilians were injured. The eight-year-old daughter of the suicide bombers, who had no explosives strapped to her, was flung off the motorbike and survived.²

This was the first successful series of Islamic State-inspired bombings in Indonesia since the January 2016 attack in Jakarta's Thamrin business district, which had targeted a traffic police post and Starbucks café.³ It was also Indonesia's first successful suicide bombing by a female and the first bombings carried out by whole

families, including their young children. TATP, the explosives used in the three Surabaya church attacks, is the same sensitive and tricky-to-make high explosive used in major attacks in Paris, Brussels, and Manchester between 2015 and 2017. These bombings indicate both an increase in the capability of Islamic State sympathizers in Indonesia as well as a new *modus operandi*. However, it would be wrong to assume that this increase in capability applies across Indonesia's pro-Islamic State network and to see the involvement of whole families as a complete departure. It is equally incorrect to see this upsurge in Islamic State-inspired attacks as the result of returning Indonesian foreign fighters.

Returning Foreign Fighters?

The church bombings were quickly claimed by the Islamic State through its Amaq News Agency.⁴ Shortly thereafter, Indonesian police chief Tito Karnavian explained that one of the reasons for what he referred to as the activation of terrorist sleeper cells in Indonesia was the pressure on the Islamic State in the Middle East. The attacks by the Western coalition forces had cornered the Islamic State, he suggested, and compelled it to order all its cells everywhere to respond.⁵ The Indonesian police then asserted that the family responsible for the attacks had just returned from Syria.⁶ This allowed for the emergence of a false narrative that the renewed violence in Indonesia, as in parts of Europe, was the anticipated and feared consequence of returning foreign fighters. This narrative was further supported by inflated numbers of Indonesian returnees, which was put as high as 500 by some media sources.⁷

The returning foreign fighter narrative also seemed to explain why these families had been so much more competent in constructing the Islamic State signature TATP bombs than the numerous bomb makers in preceding years, whose bombs exploded only partially or not at all. The targeting of churches also seemed to mirror other Islamic State-inspired attacks on churches in Egypt and Pakistan in 2017.⁸ However, as more information about the family involved in the church bombings started to emerge, the Indonesian police retracted its claim that the family members were foreign fighter returnees from Syria.⁹ In fact, the family had never been to Syria. Neither had the family involved in the premature explosion in Sidoarjo nor the family responsible for the Surabaya police headquarters bombing.¹⁰

The Family Bombers

Little has been made public by investigators about the three families, although some information has become available on the church bombers who lived in a middle class neighborhood of Surabaya. Dita Oepriarto ran an herbal medicines business. The Facebook pictures of his wife Puji Kuswati showed a family not unlike other families with children at play, a family outing white water rafting, and get-togethers with female friends. The women have their heads covered in jilbabs (headscarves) in various colors and styles; their

Dr. Kirsten E. Schulze is an associate professor in international history at the London School of Economics and an associate of the LSE Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre.

faces are unveiled.¹¹ The Facebook posts stopped in 2014, possibly marking a point in the process of radicalization. Dita Oepriarto was described by neighbors who knew him as a “good person,” “friendly” and “refined.”¹² A Christian neighbor said that there had been “nothing strange about the family” and that “they were like other devout Muslims.”¹³ A Muslim neighbor said that they prayed at an “unremarkable local mosque.”¹⁴ However, he also stated that he had heard from the older men in the community that Dita Oepriarto was not “mainstream” as he objected to “secular rituals,” including raising the Indonesian flag and “singing the Indonesian national anthem.”¹⁵ This resonates with comments made by classmates who stated that Dita Oepriarto never felt comfortable with the values advocated by Indonesia’s pluralistic state philosophy of *pancasila*,^a which he believed should be opposed as it was not based on Islamic law.¹⁶

While it is still unclear how these three families met, it is known that they all attended *pengajian* (Islamic studies sessions) together every Sunday in Surabaya.¹⁷ *Pengajian* have been the most common path of radicalization as well as recruitment in Indonesia for all jihadi organizations, including the pro-Islamic State network.¹⁸ These specific, pro-Islamic State *pengajian* that the three families attended were held by *ustadz*^b Khalid Abu Bakr, who already in the 1990s had a reputation as a firebrand cleric skilled at mobilizing Muslims to come to the defense of Islam. Contrary to some media reports, he was never a member of the Indonesian jihadi group Jemaah Islamiyah.¹⁹ After the declaration of the Islamic State caliphate in 2014, *ustadz* Khalid became an Islamic State sympathizer and decided to go on hijrah to Syria in 2016. However, he was arrested in Turkey and deported back to Indonesia in January 2017.²⁰ It is then that, according to local Islamists, he started

holding pro-Islamic State Islamic studies sessions and “started to gather ISIS sympathizers around him.”²¹ Whether or not *ustadz* Khalid is a formal member of the pro-Islamic State group Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) or is an off-structure pro-Islamic State cleric remains unclear so far. However, Indonesian police believe that church bomber Dita Oepriarto was not only a formal member of JAD but in fact headed the Surabaya cell of JAD to which the other two families are also believed to have belonged.²²

The Pro-Islamic State Network in Indonesia

Indonesia’s pro-Islamic State network is extensive as it was grafted onto pre-existing jihadi organizations, including Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), Tauhid wal Jihad, and Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), following the establishment of ISIS in the Middle East.²³

In 2015, JAD was formed as an umbrella organization headed by Aman Abdurrahman, a radical preacher who had previously been involved in establishing a jihadi training camp in Aceh in 2010, for which he was sentenced to 15 years in prison on Nusakambangan Island. He was the leader of an amorphous group formed in 2004 that called itself Tawhid wal Jihad.^c However, he is best known for his translation of the writings of the Jordanian hardline Salafi cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi into Indonesian, and it is as an ideologue that Abdurrahman has been credited with “importing” and “indigenizing” the ideology of the Islamic State.²⁴

JAD is territorially organized across Indonesia into *wilaya* (regions), branches, and cells. These include *wilaya* in Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek), Banten, Central Java, East Java, West Java, Lampung, and Kalimantan as well as a cell in Toli Toli (Sulawesi) and a self-affiliated cell in Medan (Sumatra).²⁵ It is a hierarchical organization in the sense that it is headed by an amir and has command structures at the local level. At the same time, it is also a loose organization that allows branches, cells, and individuals to operate independently from each other. While some directives for operations between 2016 and 2018 have come directly from imprisoned JAD leaders, often relayed through prison visitors, many attacks have been conceived *ad hoc* at the local level.²⁶ What ties them together is a standardized ideological curriculum used in Islamic studies sessions,²⁷ including online *pengajian* groups as well as the shared compendium of bomb-making instructions, which includes the tried and tested pressure cooker bomb instructions from AQAP’s Inspire magazine, the TATP instructions circulated by the Islamic State, and various instructions disseminated by Bahrun Naim (including some for a dirty bomb).²⁸ With respect to the latter, local expertise has determined the degree of capability. Whether a bomb exploded and how much damage it caused was a reflection of the individual bomb maker’s skills, access to materials, and instructions chosen. Thus, while the Surabaya bombs showed a greater capacity than previous JAD bombs, this does not necessarily mean JAD as a whole has increased its military capacity.

JAD is by far the largest and most defining group in Indonesia’s pro-Islamic State network, which also includes the much smaller Katibul Iman—sometimes referred to as Jemaah Ansharut Khilafah (JAK), led by Abu Husna—as well as the Poso-based Mujahidin

a *Pancasila* is Indonesia’s state philosophy based on five principles: belief in one God, nationalism, humanism, democracy, and social justice.

b *Ustadz* is an honorific title for a teacher of Islam.



Southeast Asia (Rowan Technology)

c Abdurrahman continued to lead Tawhid wal Jihad and to translate jihadi material from Arabic to Indonesian while in prison. He maintained a website until recently.

Indonesia Timor (MIT) until the death of its leader Santoso, alias Abu Wardah, in July 2016.²⁹ As a whole, these groups have pursued the local aims of establishing sharia law and Islamic governance in Indonesia. Seeing the Indonesian government, Indonesia's pluralistic nationalist ideology of *pancasila*, and the police as institutionalized idolatry as well as being the main obstacles to achieving an Islamic Indonesia, Islamic State supporters regard the police and the government as the main targets of their violence. Religious minorities such as Christians and Buddhists have also been attacked in the broader context of waging war on all forms of 'unbelief.' It is here where the church bombings fit in.

While the focus of the Indonesian pro-Islamic State network has been domestic, some Indonesian Islamic State supporters also went to the southern Philippines to participate in the battle of Marawi in 2017.³⁰ However, the primary foreign link has been with the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Here, JAD, Katibul Iman/JAK, and MIT had separate connections to the key Indonesian leaders in Syria: Bahrumisyah, the commander of the Indonesian-Malay Katibah Nusantara; Abu Jandal, the former leader of Katibah Masyaariq who was killed in November 2016; Abu Walid, who is believed to be closely connected to the Islamic State's central leadership; and Bahrn Naim, who until his death in November 2017 functioned as recruiter for *amaliyat* (jihadi military operations) in Indonesia.³¹

Indonesian counterterrorism data shows that 779 Indonesians went to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2018. Of these, 103 are known to have been killed. Some 539 Indonesians tried to go to Syria but were deported, mostly from Turkey.^d Another 171 had plans to go but were stopped while still in Indonesia or are currently under surveillance.³² The vast majority of these were recruited through Islamic studies sessions and facilitated by groups in Indonesia's pro-Islamic State network.³³ In January 2016, political analyst Sidney Jones estimated that 45 percent of the Indonesians who went to Syria "were women and children, and not all the adult males were fighters."³⁴ Many were families who went to live in the caliphate, selling all their possessions to get there, without the intention of returning. This, which counters the narrative of returning foreign fighters, is borne out by Indonesian counterterrorism data, which shows only 86 of those who went to Syria and Iraq have returned to Indonesia.³⁵

The relationship between the pro-Islamic State network in Indonesia and Indonesians within the Islamic State in Syria as well as the Islamic State more generally is a complex one that reflects the 'glocal' nature of the Islamic State phenomenon in Indonesia.³⁶ The Islamic State has provided inspiration, ideological justification, and a global narrative in which the local Indonesian narrative is situated. It has also repeatedly issued instructions to the ummah (community) more broadly to carry out attacks. Before the death of Bahrn Naim, there were direct instructions for attacks from Indonesians in Syria such as the instructions to attack a police station, a temple, and church on August 17, 2015, in Solo, the planned attacks on New Year's Eve of 2015,³⁷ and the planned attack on the presidential palace on December 11, 2016, by what would have been Indonesia's first female suicide bomber, Dian Yulia Novi.³⁸ Moreover, the Islamic State has sent money to some pro-Islamic State groups in Indonesia such as MIT to purchase weapons.³⁹ At the

same time, however, the attacks by the pro-Islamic State network in Indonesia are firmly anchored in the local context, drawing upon local grievances, feeding off local debates on what it means to be a good Muslim, and pursuing the same local aims as well as striking at the same local targets as Indonesian jihadi organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Darul Islam had before them.⁴⁰

Glocal Dynamics

Indonesian police chief Tito Karnavian, in his explanation of the motives behind the Surabaya church bombings, stated that at the local level these attacks were connected to the 2017 re-arrest of JAD leader Aman Abdurrahman,⁴¹ who is currently on trial in Jakarta for his alleged involvement in the January 2016 Jakarta attack.⁴²

The church bombings coincidentally marked the peak of an upsurge in local violence. This violence started with a riot of Islamist detainees in the headquarters of the mobile police (Brimob) in Kelapa Dua, Jakarta, on Wednesday, May 8. The riot was ostensibly triggered by one of the inmates not receiving the food his wife had sent. The prisoners killed five police officers and took others hostage, all of whom were eventually released. They also posted pictures of the riots on Instagram and used social media to call for reinforcements. After the police regained control on May 10, during which one inmate was shot and killed, 155 prisoners were transferred to the maximum-security prison on Nusakambangan Island.⁴³

This prison riot, which was not JAD-led or -directed, was followed by further violent actions against the police.⁴⁴ On May 11, a Brimob officer was stabbed by a suspected Islamist extremist near the Brimob headquarters. On May 12, two women, who are believed to have been responding to the appeal for reinforcements, were arrested on their way to Brimob headquarters with scissors with which they planned to stab an official. On May 13—the day of the church bombings and the premature explosion in Sidoarjo—four alleged members of JAD were shot dead by the police in Cianjur. Two other members of this cell were arrested.⁴⁵ They had been planning to attack police stations in Jakarta and Bandung, including the Brimob headquarters.⁴⁶ On May 14, a family drove on two motorbikes to the gate of Surabaya police headquarters where they blew themselves up. On May 16, four men attacked police officers with swords—killing one—after crashing their car into the gate of the provincial police headquarters in Pekanbaru, Riau.⁴⁷

Some analysts have incorrectly linked the Surabaya church bombings to the prison riot at Brimob headquarters, pointing to a call to jihad that went out to JAD members through social media on May 9 asking them to help the prisoners by attacking the police, non-Muslim houses of worship, crowded places, and places where heretics gather.⁴⁸ On Telegram, in particular, members of pro-Islamic State chat groups were exhorted to "Support in your own cities the mujahedeen who caused the riot! Burn the assets of nonbelievers, idolaters, apostates and hypocrites!"⁴⁹

The Surabaya bombings, however, were not directly linked to the prison riot. According to information from within Indonesian jihadi circles, they had been in the making for much longer, already planned before the prison riot broke out.⁵⁰ Counterterrorism expert Harits Abu Ulya has posited that the Surabaya bombings were motivated by revenge against the Indonesian police, who were responsible for the many arrests of Islamic State supporters since January 2016. They were also an attempt to demonstrate that the Islamic State in Indonesia was alive and well.⁵¹ Similarly, political

d This 539 figure is a distinct number. Deportees are counted separately as they did not make it to Syria or Iraq.

analyst Sidney Jones has argued that the family bombings could be viewed as “an effort to keep motivation high precisely because recruitment is declining.” She has further suggested that “now that their energies are no longer focused on getting to Syria, the Islamic State’s supporters in Indonesia may be turning their attention back to waging war at home.”⁵² The Surabaya bombings could thus mark the beginning of more violence in Indonesia.

The then impending month of Ramadan may also have played a role in the timing of this violence. Jihadi organizations have often marked Ramadan with a campaign of violence, spurred by the belief that the rewards are greater and that the path to paradise for those martyred is easier and faster. The Islamic State has followed this pattern with its late spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani calling for attacks during the Islamic holy month in 2015 and urging Muslims “to make it a month of calamity for non-believers” in 2016.⁵³ However, there was already a tradition of attacks during Ramadan among Indonesian jihadis that clearly predated the Islamic State. This was most obvious during the 1998-2007 conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, where attacks were regularly launched during Ramadan in order to ensure success and secure ‘greater rewards.’⁵⁴ The most shocking of these was the beheading of four Christian school girls in 2005, whose heads were then presented as Lebaran (Eid al-Fitr) ‘gifts.’⁵⁵ Attacks on churches also have a history in Indonesia that predates the Islamic State. On Christmas Eve 2000, churches in 11 cities were targeted in near simultaneous bombings. Churches were also destroyed by Muslims during the communal conflicts in Ambon and Poso.

The motive for the Surabaya church bombings was explained in issue 10 of the relaunched Al-Fatihin online magazine. Al-Fatihin was first published during Ramadan 2016 as a newsletter of the Malay-speaking *muhajirin* (emigrants) to the Islamic State.⁵⁶ In this form, it only ever had one edition. On March 5, 2018, possibly as indication of the increased JAD activity to come, it was relaunched as a more local, Indonesia-only but still Islamic State-affiliated, now weekly online publication. Issue 10 of Al-Fatihin magazine appeared the day after the church bombings and the bombings featured as the main article under the title “Kill the idolaters wherever they are.” It took obvious pride in the capability of the ‘soldiers of the caliphate,’ highlighting the three ways these bombings were carried out: by motorcycle, explosive vest, and car. It argued that the differentiation between civilian and military was an incorrect understanding of Islam.⁵⁷ It then discussed at length and in detail the targeting of “kafir Christians” who were performing idolatrous rituals at the time of the bombings. The article asserted that the blood of kafir is halal and that Islam only differentiates between believers and unbelievers, the latter including any Muslim who violates any of the “Ten Nullifiers of Islam” and anyone who defies the word of Allah.⁵⁸ The reason for the Surabaya attacks was to wipe out unbelief, idolatry, and defiance of the word of Allah.⁵⁹

The Widening Participation in Jihad

The Surabaya bombings saw the coming together of three different recent trends in jihadism, in particular in Islamic State-directed or -inspired attacks. These trends are an increased reliance on family or kinship networks, a recent embrace of the participation of women in attacks, and an increase in the use of children. These increases are not coincidental but, as Mohammed Hafez has pointed out, a recruitment strategy involving kinship radicalization. This strategy provides that extra layer of security as “political ideas are infused

with emotional commitments” and “narrative fidelity is enhanced by actual brotherly fidelity.”⁶⁰ In Indonesia, suicide bombings carried out by whole families including young children are a new *modus operandi*. They have been explained by the family wanting to go to paradise together.⁶¹ However, the involvement of families in *amaliyat* (jihadi military operations) in Indonesia itself is not new.⁶² The perpetrators of the 2002 Bali bombings included brothers Ali Ghufron, Amrozi, and Ali Imron. The 2009 Marriot hotel bombing included members of the extended family of Saifuddin Zuhri. Unlike the Surabaya bombings, these bombings were male only. Women in Indonesian jihadi organizations had far more traditional roles, such as wives, mothers, and teachers, but were no less important in tying together and consolidating the organization.⁶³

This does not mean, however, that Indonesian women were not interested in pushing the boundaries of their roles. The emergence of the Islamic State provided Muslim women globally with the means to play a more active role.⁶⁴ The recruitment of females by the Islamic State in order to populate its caliphate, its establishment of the Al-Khansa Brigade, and the use of social media, which leveled the playing field without violating gender separation, allowed women to push the boundaries from *muhajirat* (female emigrants) to *mujahidat* (female fighters), despite initial opposition from the Islamic State toward women combatants.⁶⁵

The Islamic State’s position started to shift in late 2016. Indeed, in December, Al-Naba, the Islamic State’s newsletter, included an article stating that while jihad was not an obligation for women, “if the enemy enters her abode, jihad is just as necessary for her as for the man.”⁶⁶ Battlefield evidence of this shift started to emerge in early July 2017 during the battle for Mosul when a woman carrying a baby walked up to Iraqi soldiers and reportedly detonated the explosives she was carrying. By mid-July, more than 30 women are believed to have been involved in martyrdom operations.⁶⁷ This shift was confirmed in the July 2017 edition of Rumiya magazine, which called upon women to follow the example of Umm ‘Amara, who together with four other women had militarily defended the Prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Uhud.⁶⁸ In October 2017, the Islamic State called upon women to take up arms and to launch terror attacks, declaring it an obligation.⁶⁹

Female Indonesian Islamic State supporters had already been pushing the boundaries considerably.⁷⁰ They were very active on social media, organizing groups as well as encouraging and even recruiting men for jihad. Several played key roles in persuading their families to go to Syria. A small number joined MIT as combatants in the Poso Mountains. Some helped their husbands make bombs. And others volunteered to be suicide bombers.⁷¹ The latter included Dian Yulia Novi who in her deposition stated that she had wanted to carry out a martyrdom operation ever since she started learning about the Islamic State in 2015 through social media.⁷² If she had not been arrested in December 2016, she would have been Indonesia’s first female suicide bomber.

Male children have also featured regularly as Islamic State combatants, even before women joined their ranks. Indeed, Mia Bloom, John Horgan, and Charlie Winter looking at data from January 2015 to January 2016 concluded that “the use of children and youth has been normalized under the Islamic State” and that they were used in the same way that male adults would, without consideration to their age.⁷³ This explains why the article in Al-Fatihin did not pay special attention to the fact that whole families including young children had carried out the Surabaya bombings. They were

all equally ‘soldiers of the caliphate.’

Indonesian children have been part and parcel of the Islamic State project, but until the Surabaya bombings, this participation was restricted to those in Syria and Iraq. Indonesian children joined the *hijrah* as part of their families; Indonesian boys participated in military training as could be seen on Islamic State videos; and at least one of the boys, Hatf (12), who had gone to Syria in 2016, is known to have “died in combat with a French ISIS unit two months short of his 13th birthday.”⁷⁴

Conclusion

For Islamic State supporters in Indonesia rather than in Syria, carrying out *amaliyat* was a way to connect with the broader Islamic State community without having to travel to the Middle East but also to connect with the dispersed pro-Islamic State community across Indonesia. Indonesian *mujahidat*, of course, served an additional tactical purpose as exemplified by the repeated attempts of Bahrin Naim, from his base in Syria, to recruit *akhwat* (sisters) for *amaliyat*—including instructing Dian Yulia Novi to attack the presidential palace in December 2016. He saw the use of *akhwat* as a way to overcome the lack of success in attacks in Indonesia in 2016 and 2017; *akhwat* would be able to avoid detection more easily.⁷⁵ Using families for suicide bombings provides a similar tactical advantage, and becoming a *mujahidin* family provides a similar sense of belonging to both the broader Islamic State community and the Indonesian pro-Islamic State community. The Surabaya family bombings also exemplify the ever-broadening participation in jihad in Indonesia and the shift in jihadism more generally from the exclusive vanguard model to a more populist endeavor. It is thus unlikely that they will remain a one-off.

The push by Indonesian women to be more involved in jihadism combined with the Islamic State’s position that age and now gender are not a barrier to becoming a ‘soldier of the caliphate,’ suggest that it is likely that there will be further *amaliyat* by Indonesian

women. Moreover, the fact that for the pro-Islamic State network in Indonesia the struggle has always been about making the local environment more ‘Islamic’ and targeting those who it believed to be an obstacle to this aim, means that Islamist violence will most likely persist. Such violence will continue to be driven by distinctly local developments. In the next year, three stand out. The first is the fate of JAD leader Aman Abdurrahman, currently on trial in Jakarta, with prosecutors seeking the death penalty. The second is the new counterterrorism legislation, which was passed in the wake of the Surabaya bombings after being under discussion in parliament for more than a year. This will undoubtedly result in further arrests of JAD members, thereby making the police even more of a target of revenge attacks. The third is the Indonesian presidential election in 2019, which pro-Islamic State Indonesian militants may seek to exploit by placing further strains on Christian-Muslim relations or by targeting the ‘*kafir* democracy.’

The final factor to take into consideration is the return of Indonesian foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq. As many Indonesians went to live rather than to fight in the Islamic State caliphate, analysts such as Solahudin have suggested that most have no intention of returning.⁷⁶ That seems to be borne out by the current numbers. Only 86 Indonesians have returned so far, and none of those who joined the Islamic State have been involved in violence in Indonesia. Only one of these 86 perpetrated an attack on a police officer at North Sumatra police headquarters in Medan in June 2017. And he had spent six months training in Syria with the Free Syrian Army (FSA).⁷⁷ While the data on Indonesians who have returned from Syria to Indonesia currently does not give credence to the narrative on the threat emanating from returning foreign fighters, that does not mean that the possibility of such a threat can be completely ruled out. Indeed, only a few highly skilled explosive trainers returning from Syria could make a great difference to JAD’s capabilities. **CTC**

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A View from the CT Foxhole: Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Price, Ph.D., Outgoing Director, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point

By Brian Dodwell

Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Price, Ph.D., is the outgoing Director of the Combating Terrorism Center and a former Academy Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy at West Point. LTC Price is a former aviator and FA59 strategist who has served in a variety of command and staff positions in operational assignments, to include deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in History from the United States Military Academy, a Master of Arts in International Relations from St. Mary's University, and a Master of Arts and Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford University. His research interests include the organizational behavior of terrorist groups, counterterrorism policy, and the effects of leadership decapitation against terrorist organizations.

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: Congratulations on a highly successful six-year run as the director of the CTC. I was thinking we could start by reflecting on those six years. What has been the most surprising or interesting development that you have seen in the terrorism domain in that timeframe? And you can't say the emergence of the Islamic State—too easy.

Price: Well, the emergence of the Islamic State may be too easy of an answer, but that doesn't make it any less true. If I told you in 2012 that the successor organization to al-Qa`ida in Iraq and subsequent rival to the AQ brand was going to govern territory across two sovereign countries, one of which was occupied and supported by the U.S. military for eight years, you would've thought I was nuts. To top that, consider that this organization would then make enemies with powerful states like the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and France, not to mention regional powers like Iran. And yet with all of this counterterrorism attention squarely on it over the years, the Islamic State is *still* a dangerous threat.

But let me give you a surprising development on the positive side. Given how easy it is to obtain guns in this country and coupled with the persistent calls for homegrown jihadis to conduct attacks here in the United States, I'm surprised at how few jihadi attacks there've been in the homeland. We have certainly suffered tragic attacks—Orlando, San Bernardino, Boston, etc.—but I'm pleasantly surprised that we haven't suffered many more. That is a credit to our counterterrorism efforts, an American Muslim community that has bought into the American dream rather than the Islamic State's lies, and in some cases, good luck. But as Bill Parcells used to say, and former CTC Distinguished Chair Michael Sheehan liked to point out, you are what your record says you are. And thankfully, the bad guys have been unable to successfully conduct a strategic attack

against the homeland since 9/11.

CTC: What is your assessment of the global terrorism landscape today? There seems to be a constant debate over how we define and apply terms like winning and losing, defeat and contain. So where do we stand against the jihadi threat?

Price: I hate the word defeat when it is used in a counterterrorism context. I know that sounds odd coming from an Army officer, but we are not talking about taking down another country's military formation. As you've heard me say numerous times, there will be no surrender ceremony with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi or Aymen al-Zawahiri on a U.S. warship to mark the end of the so-called Long War.

Saying we're going to defeat al-Qa`ida or defeat the Islamic State may make us feel good and as though we are serious about combating the threat, but it is hard to defeat an idea. It is even harder to defeat a virulent ideology like the one jihadis are promoting, in part because they don't view defeat like we do in the West. When jihadis lose on the battlefield, they don't internalize the loss and second-guess their socio-political system like our 20th-Century adversaries did. No, when jihadis lose on the battlefield, they blame it on the fact that they were not committed enough, not pious enough, and not dedicated enough. Jihadis are also defining the duration of this game in decades and generations, whereas we want to claim victory at every turn in the short-term.

What concerns me about the current terrorist landscape is the fact that I don't believe we have learned the lessons of the past 17 years. One of the constant refrains we've heard at the CTC over the years, from combatant commanders to cabinet-level officials, is that we cannot kill our way to victory. And yet, we have invested the most resources in killing and capturing terrorists all over the world, often at the expense of other non-kinetic programs. We, of course, need a CT military force that can operate globally, but I believe we can only get marginally better at hunting down terrorists. There is lots of room to improve, however, in the other elements of national power when it comes to the CT fight.

Think about the socio-political and economic conditions that gave rise to the rebirth of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2011. At the risk of oversimplifying a really complex situation, the corrupt and incompetent governance of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq created incredibly fertile ground from which disenfranchised Sunnis in both countries could be recruited. Here we are in 2018, and while the coalition has successfully taken back almost all of the territory the Islamic State used to govern, what has changed in those very same socio-political and economic conditions that were present in 2012-2013? You can make an argument that the future for Sunnis in both countries was brighter in 2012 than it is today. Until that changes, until Sunnis in the region feel as though they have a viable and alternative form of good governance that is better than what the jihadis purport to provide, the outlook



LTC Bryan Price briefs GEN Joseph Votel, commander of U.S. Central Command, at the Combating Terrorism Center. (John Pellino/West Point)

for jihadi violence in the Muslim world is not good.

Since 9/11, some pundits have characterized U.S. counterterrorism efforts as mowing the proverbial grass. Well, as one visitor to the CTC quipped, we have been mowing the grass for so long that our grass clippings are now fertilizing the lawn for more and more grass to grow. At some point, we have to start doing something about the underlying conditions that give rise to jihadi violence. I'm struggling to see what our big advancements in helping vulnerable countries improve their ability to govern are. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that our ability to influence good governance in these vulnerable countries is more limited today than it was when I came to the CTC in 2012.

Beyond jihadi terrorism, I also think we're going to see an uptick in other types of terrorism. We've already seen an uptick in extremist right-wing violence in both the United States and Europe. Since many of Europe's welfare states are already stretched thin in terms of resources, the infusion of hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees fleeing from Syria into Europe is taxing an already stressed system. This has led to populist, nativist policies and political violence in the name of those policies, which plays very nicely into the hands of jihadi propagandists.

I also think we'll see more left-wing terrorism, particularly from environmental groups, as water and other natural resources become scarcer. Finally, we haven't seen the end of ethno-nationalist terrorism either. The fight against the Islamic State has put Kurdish independence on a bit of a back burner in the past couple of years, but the issue has not gone away. Same with political violence in Kashmir.

CTC: And you know I had to ask you a question I've watched you ask of some of the most influential counterterrorism pro-

fessionals in the field: What keeps you up at night?

Price: Worrying about my successor as the director of the CTC. Just kidding. First, nobody will ever have a better answer to this question than our Secretary of Defense, who said, "Nothing. I keep other people up at night."

Other than my wife with my snoring, I don't keep other people up at night, so I will say terrorist exploitation of commercially available technology. Today, terrorists can communicate with other terrorists using commercially available, end-to-end encrypted apps that we have neither the technology nor the legal authorities to crack. That is a very scary thing when you think about it.

Additionally, I'm concerned about terrorists using commercially available drone technology to conduct attacks here in the United States and against our allies abroad. Drone attacks in the United States is a question of when, not if. We've seen what the Islamic State could do in a relatively short amount of time in Iraq and Syria with weaponized drones. The Islamic State has learned a lot through trial and error, and I fear that this steep learning curve will pay dividends at our expense here in the homeland.

CTC: Switching focus to the terrorism studies field, how has the field reacted to the evolution of the threat over the past six years? Where has it performed well and where has it fallen short?

Price: I think we have seen some excellent work in the past six years, to include work by the CTC on a variety of topics. I'm thinking of topics like counter-threat finance, foreign fighters, terrorist propaganda, and terrorist cooperation. I think the field has taken advantage of what data is available, including big datasets like

START's Global Terrorism Database, the gold standard in the field, and Victor Asal's BAAD I and II datasets. There have also been major strides in our understanding of extremism, such as GW's [George Washington University's] Program on Extremism. Another positive trend I've seen over the past six years is that the U.S. government is more interested in what cutting-edge scholars are studying than ever before.

Visionary leaders like General [Joseph] Votel at CENTCOM and Lieutenant General [Austin Scott] Miller at JSOC have empowered their organizations to actively seek out what terrorism scholars are studying, publishing, and thinking. That is a great trend and one that I hope continues.

On the negative side of the ledger, I think there is so much more we need to know about radicalization, de-radicalization, and resilience in societies affected by terrorism. I think we have done a poor job of telling the stories of those who have radicalized and joined the jihad only to leave disillusioned and bitter later on. In my opinion, we've done little to maximize this opportunity.

In addition to these areas, I think another topic ripe for research is counterterrorism effectiveness. What little we know about how and why individuals radicalize dwarfs what we know about which counterterrorism tools are effective, when they are most effective, and why. What is the return on investment you get from one particular CT approach versus another?

CTC: Related to that, where is the biggest need and/or what is the biggest opportunity that is ready to be taken advantage of in the field?

Price: This is a no-brainer. If you consider what an enterprising and entrepreneurial journalist like Rukmini Callimachi [of *The New York Times*] has been able to recover in terms of Islamic State documents, imagine how much information produced by the group is out there that we have yet to strategically assess and evaluate. To give our readers an idea of what I'm talking about, consider that one of the CTC's most high-profile reports, written in 2007, was based on a computer hard-drive recovered by U.S. forces in Sinjar, Iraq, that contained information on 700 foreign fighters. Today, we find 10 times that amount of information on a single cell phone. While that is great in terms of information access, it presents serious throughput problems for our intelligence community.

The biggest opportunity that we have today is exploiting the terabytes of information that groups like the Islamic State produce but which never see the light of day due to over-classification issues. In other words, this kind of material is scooped up every day by friendly forces all over the world, but there are no incentives in place to make this data available to academics who can help to make more sense of it.

No country in the world is better at exploiting captured enemy material for targeting purposes, but there is a lot left on the cutting-room floor that can help aid our understanding of our enemies' strategic trajectory but that we fail to exploit. There have been significant improvements in this area over the past year, but we still have a long way to go.

CTC: In your own research, you have focused on questions surrounding the efficacy of leadership decapitation of terrorist organizations (a shameless plug for your book coming out from Columbia University Press this fall). Without asking you to re-

gurgitate all of that fine work here, how have your findings held up against events of the past couple years? What have been the most significant recent events that have influenced your thinking on this topic?

Price: Leadership decapitation is another topic that we know a lot more about now than we did six years ago. To put my cards on the table, I argue that killing or capturing terrorist leaders ultimately decreases the effectiveness of their organizations and contributes to organizational death. Timing matters, however. Kill or capture the terrorist leader in the first year of its existence, and the group is more than 8.7 times more likely to end than a non-decapitated group. After 10 years, the effect is decreased by half. After 20 years, killing or capturing the top leader may have no effect on the group's mortality rate.

Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with my findings, I hope that, at a minimum, policymakers consider one important takeaway. Because it is so easy to base counterterrorism decision-making on anecdotes and emotion, it is important to analyze the data. While any given policy or CT tool may have negative short-term consequences, it is important to consider the long-term consequences as well. We do this with other types of policy decisions—healthcare, macroeconomics, education. We should do the same with counterterrorism tools and policies.

Take cancer treatments. If we based the efficacy of chemotherapy on the short-term negative side-effects like chronic nausea, hair and weight loss, doctors would have stopped using this treatment long ago. We know, however, through the scientific method, that chemotherapy's long-term benefits often outweigh its short-term side-effects. Killing or capturing terrorist leaders have both short- and long-term consequences; both should be evaluated before determining any tactic's efficacy.

CTC: I want to be sure to give you an opportunity to pat yourself on the back, so which of the Center's accomplishments or what aspect of its evolution are you most proud of?

Price: Our people. I'm most proud of the team and the culture we have created. While I'm tremendously proud of the increased opportunities we've created for cadets and the cutting-edge research that has helped to inform policymakers and practitioners over the years, the greatest source of pride for me is the team at CTC today. We have a group of people that care more about the reputation of the CTC than they care about themselves or even their relationship with the boss, and that is rare.

If I've learned anything in the Army, it is that people are your most important asset. Hire hard, manage easy. Hands down, the greatest source of pride I have today can be found on the CTC website tab appropriately named "Team."

CTC: Finally, which was the more thrilling experience during your time here at West Point: meeting the President of the United States as the CTC Director or calling the Army-Navy baseball game at Fenway Park?

Price: When I came on board at CTC, former CTC Director and current DASD [Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense] COL (Ret) Joe Felter told me to get ready for some amazing opportunities that simply don't exist in the course of a regular Army career. Needless

to say, he was correct.

Yes, I've met the President of the United States. I've testified in front of Congress. At CTC, we've briefed the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Army, numerous combatant commanders, the last five JSOC commanders, and leaders from the CIA, FBI, DHS, and NCTC. I've been invited to speak in Israel, Germany, China, and Iran.

I've been blessed to call games as the color commentator for Army baseball, broadcasting alongside the incomparable "Voice of the Black Knights" Rich DeMarco, at Camden Yards, Fenway Park, and historic Doubleday Field.

However, my most memorable experience actually took place on the same day that I met President Obama. While meeting the President of the United States will always remain a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me, later that day I had the opportunity to officiate a commissioning ceremony for one of my students. It is always a flattering experience when a cadet asks you to perform their commissioning ceremony because it is the physical manifestation for when they go from cadet to officer. It is often held in a place on West Point that has special significance for the cadet, in front of his or her family and friends after graduation. The only two prerequisites are that an officer officiate the ceremony and that the oath of office

take place in front of an American flag.

I was honored when Scott Machcinski asked me to commission him at Trophy Point after graduation. For those that are unfamiliar with West Point, Trophy Point offers arguably the most iconic view of West Point, looking north on the Hudson River towards Newburgh where George Washington had his headquarters during the Revolutionary War. It just so happened that Scott's uncle was also Joe Pfeifer, one of the CTC's most beloved Senior Fellows and FDNY's Chief of Counterterrorism and Emergency Preparedness. His other uncle was Kevin J. Pfeifer, Joe's brother, and one of the 343 FDNY firefighters who died on September 11th.

The flag for the ceremony was no ordinary flag. It was the flag that draped the coffin of Kevin Pfeifer—Scott's uncle, Joe's brother, and a family member that would have most definitely been at that ceremony if not for the events of 9/11. Given the symbolic nature of the flag, the iconic backdrop of Trophy Point, and the company in attendance, this was the most meaningful moment I've had at CTC. It was where Joe Felter's words about the amazing moments being the CTC Director rang truest. To put this into perspective, a few hours earlier, I was shaking hands with and meeting the President, and yet *that* was the second most meaningful experience I had that day. **CTC**

Children at War: Foreign Child Recruits of the Islamic State

By Dakota Foster and Daniel Milton

The Islamic State's recruitment of children is a challenge with no easy solutions. Islamic State foreign fighter records show that foreign children fighters tend to be, as expected, less well-educated, less likely to have good employment, more likely to be students, and less likely to be married than adult foreign fighters. Interestingly, they were slightly less likely to express a preference to be suicide bombers or fighters, arrived later, had a similar amount of self-declared jihadi experience, and came from countries in different proportions than did their older counterparts. Continued research on this important subject, as well the focus of policymakers on the challenges of child returnees, will remain an important part of future counterterrorism efforts.

The group known as the Islamic State rose to international infamy on the back of a number of factors: the attraction of thousands (if not tens of thousands) of foreigners to its ranks, a campaign of grotesque violence perpetrated against a diverse array of individuals, military victories against western-trained security forces, and a wide-ranging media effort both on the ground and online. One strategy employed by the group that garnered a significant amount of media attention was its exploitation of children.

This study is certainly not the first to focus on the Islamic State's use of children. Indeed, scholars and practitioners have conducted

Dakota Foster recently graduated from Amherst College with a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Asian languages/Civilizations. She was also selected as a recipient of a 2018 Marshall Scholarship and will be conducting graduate work at King's College London and Cambridge University. She previously worked as an intern at the Combating Terrorism Center, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Washington Institute.

Daniel Milton, Ph.D., is Director of Research at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. He has authored peer-review articles and monographs related to terrorism and counterterrorism using both quantitative and qualitative methods. His published work has appeared a number of venues, including The Journal of Politics, International Interactions, Conflict Management and Peace Science, and Terrorism and Political Violence.

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a number of studies on how the Islamic State recruits and uses children for a variety of organizational purposes.¹ These works build on a still larger literature that discusses the role of children in warfare around the world.² And even within the Iraq and Syria landscape, the Islamic State is not the only entity that draws in and employs children.³ The contribution of this article is to add a data-driven picture of a subset of children within the Islamic State organization: those who traveled to the conflict zone either alone, with friends, or with family, to join the Islamic State as fighters. This contribution is enabled by an examination of Islamic State personnel documents for individuals entering the caliphate from 2013-2014.

Exploring the Data: Age

This article examines data from the CTC's previous work on the personnel records of Islamic State foreign fighters, which contained just over 4,100 records, but specifically focuses on the smaller subset of children.⁴ It is important to recognize that this data only includes male children, as no females were recorded in this batch of Islamic State personnel documents, whether children or adults.^a For purposes of this analysis, children are defined as those 18 years of age and under.^b To identify the children in the dataset used for this article, two key fields were leveraged: the year of birth of the fighter and the year in which they entered Islamic State territory, with the former subtracted from the latter to arrive at an estimated age for each individual in the dataset. Out of the total dataset of 4,100 fighters, just 267 were 18 years of age or under. Some individuals in the CTC's dataset did not have a year of entry on their personnel record. In these cases, the estimate of 2013 was used, adding an additional 23 individuals to the dataset, for a total of 290 children in the main dataset used for the subsequent analyses.

The age breakdown for these 290 child fighters is shown in Figure 1. While most of the individuals in this dataset are estimated to be right at age 18, there are still a large number of records for those

- a This is despite the fact that there were certainly females aged 18 and under traveling to Iraq and Syria to join the group. The records obtained by the CTC were only for fighters, and women were not recorded in this particular batch of data because they were not going to be assigned a formal fighting role in the organization during this period of time.
- b The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international convention that entered into force on September 2, 1990, defines children as "a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger." The reason this study includes those who are also 18 years of age is because the way in which age is calculated leaves some room for error in the actual age of the entrant. In some cases, someone estimated by the authors' method to be 18 may actually be 17. Given this lack of precision, the authors opted for the more expansive age range to make sure that the dataset was as inclusive as possible. This inclusiveness may result in a slight overestimation of children's employment, education and marital status, so readers should be aware of this possibility in interpreting the results.

under 18, and even some as young as 10. The diminishing number of entrants as the age group becomes younger and younger is to be expected, as these records are for those registered as fighters. There were children of all ages entering Islamic State territory to live, but since these records reflect fighters, they naturally trend toward the older age ranges. It is also important to remember that this dataset generally represents only foreign enrollees into the Islamic State's records and is unlikely to be representative the population of local child fighters. In other words, the data presented here provide interesting insight, but are not intended to be a comprehensive overview of children in the Islamic State.

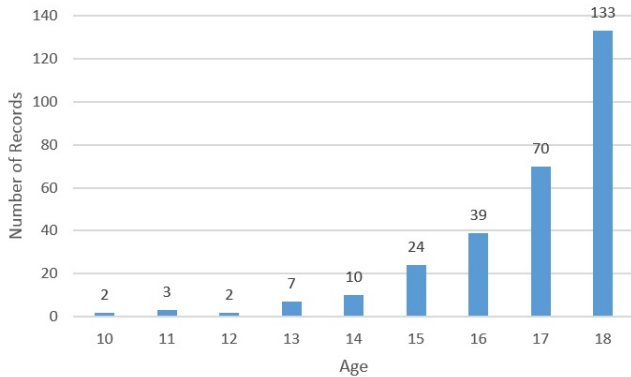


Figure 1: Age Breakdown of Children in Islamic State Personnel Records

Exploring the Data: Country of Residence

The next descriptive marker of interest is the countries of residence for the children in the dataset.^c A total of 278 records contained information on the country of residence, which is shown in Table 1. Beyond simply the number of records pertaining to each country, which is shown in the second column, a number of other columns offer additional context and insight into the dataset. To obtain the percentage of children coming from a particular country, the third column takes the number of children from a country and divides it by the total number of children in the dataset (278). The fourth and fifth columns show the total number of fighters in the data (adults and children) and the percentage of the total representing each country. Finally, the fifth column computes the percentage that children make up of each country's foreign fighter contingent in the dataset.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Islamic State Children Fighters, by Country of Residence

(1) Country of Residence	(2) Number of Children	(3) Percentage of Total Children	(4) Number of Total Fighters	(5) Percentage of Total	(6) Children as Percentage of Country's Total Contingent
Albania	1	0%	18	0%	6%
Australia	3	1%	13	0%	23%
Azerbaijan	2	1%	122	3%	2%
Bahrain	8	3%	28	1%	29%
Belgium	5	2%	25	1%	20%
China	12	4%	167	4%	7%
Denmark	2	1%	14	0%	14%
Egypt	12	4%	194	5%	6%
France	8	3%	128	3%	6%
Germany	9	3%	80	2%	11%
Indonesia	8	3%	79	2%	10%
Jordan	1	0%	57	1%	2%
Kazakhstan	1	0%	35	1%	3%
Kosovo	5	2%	52	1%	10%
Kuwait	2	1%	25	1%	8%
Kyrgyzstan	7	3%	65	2%	11%
Lebanon	3	1%	33	1%	12%
Libya	18	6%	106	3%	17%
Morocco	5	2%	260	7%	2%
Netherlands	2	1%	13	0%	15%
Pakistan	3	1%	15	0%	20%
Palestine	1	0%	19	0%	5%
Qatar	1	0%	10	0%	10%
Russia	7	2%	210	5%	3%
Saudi Arabia	45	16%	797	20%	6%
Sweden	1	0%	14	0%	7%
Syria	34	12%	126	3%	27%
Tajikistan	4	1%	66	2%	6%
Tunisia	19	6%	640	16%	3%
Turkey	36	13%	244	6%	15%
UAE	1	0%	8	0%	13%
UK	5	2%	57	1%	9%
Uzbekistan	6	2%	63	2%	10%
Yemen	1	0%	25	1%	4%

c As noted in the previous CTC reports that rely on the Islamic State personnel records, there are actually two fields that offer some insight into the geographic origins of fighters. The first is the "country of residence" field, which forms the basis of all analyses related an individual's origin in this article. The second, "citizenship," is not referred to in this article and was filled out with much less completeness in the overall dataset. See Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce* for a more in-depth discussion of this issue.

A few results are worth highlighting. First, children are present from 34 different countries. While the fact that children from such a wide range of countries are present in the dataset is concerning, it is also important to remember that the overall dataset contains entries of individuals from 69 total countries. In other words, only 49 percent of the countries in the larger dataset contained a personnel record for a child. While the appeal of this group to children is concerning, it is obviously not as widespread as the appeal of the group overall.

One category of likely interest is the number of children coming from Western countries.^d There are eight Western countries in the dataset, which is 23 percent of the countries present. However, these eight Western countries account for only 12 percent of the children in the dataset. This suggests that although the West does have a problem with children seeking to join and fight on behalf of the Islamic State, it appears to be less significant of an issue than it is for non-Western countries.

The second insight from Table 1 can be observed by comparing the third and fifth columns to see from which countries a disproportionate amount of children are coming when compared to the overall number of foreign fighters in the dataset. For example, consider Turkey. There are 36 children, about 13 percent of the total number of children in the dataset, who list Turkey as their country of residence. In the overall dataset, there were 244 Turkish foreign fighters, which is approximately six percent of the overall number of fighters in the dataset. If the expectation were that the percentage of children from any one country in the data should match the percentage of overall fighters from that same country, the result with Turkey would stand out. About twice as many children appear in the dataset than expected given the overall presence of Turkish foreign fighters in the broader dataset.

Other countries that stand out as having more children than expected are Libya (six percent of the children/three percent overall) and Syria (12 percent children/three percent overall).^e In the case of Syria and Turkey, it is likely that the proximity of the battlefield played a major role in facilitating the entry of children into the Islamic State's hands. An explanation for the inequity between children and adults in the Libyan contingent is harder to explain. Clearly, the chaotic environment in Libya would allow for easier exit of the country by individuals of all ages, but other countries where domestic stability is lacking (Pakistan, Yemen) do not display a similar pattern.

There are also some countries where the number of children is less than expected: Morocco (two percent children/seven percent overall), Russia (two percent children/five percent overall), Saudi Arabia (16 percent children/20 percent overall), and Tunisia (six percent children/16 percent overall). The pattern here is not as clear, although each of these countries has relatively effective security services, which may make it difficult for children to travel to a warzone, even in the company of a parent or adult.

d For purposes of this article, Western countries include Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

e It is not immediately clear why the personnel records of Syrians are included among this particular tranche of what appears to be the Islamic State's foreign fighter files. Perhaps these were Syrians who were displaced when the opportunity to return and join the group arose, or perhaps they had to exit one location in Syrian and re-enter in another.

Finally, the sixth column shows what percentage of a country's overall contingent of foreign fighters is made up of children. The average percentage across all countries that have at least one child in the dataset is 10 percent. When it comes to individual countries, one caveat that is important to keep in mind is that the numbers in column (6) for some countries are more dramatic because of the very small number of fighters overall. That said, there are several countries that seem to stand out. In the case of Syria, 27 percent of the contingent is 18 or under. Other countries with comparatively large contingents of children include Bahrain, Belgium, Australia, Libya, and Turkey. The diversity of countries in this list is a reminder of the broad challenge facing the world, not simply when it comes to preventing foreign fighter travel, but also toward reducing and dealing with the exploitation of children by terrorist groups like the Islamic State. It is not just children from the Middle East who are facing this problem.

While the fact that children come from particular countries is interesting, looking at the descriptive statistics at the country level of analysis hides some interesting nuance. The data contains information about the city from which an individual comes, allowing for a more detailed look at relatively micro-level geographic pockets where these children registering with the Islamic State originate. As shown in Table 2, several cities seem to face a larger challenge when it comes to children joining the Islamic State. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is the city with the most youth overall in the dataset, with 15 children coming from Riyadh. Following Riyadh, the next cities with most children in the dataset are Buraydah, Saudi Arabia (11), Gaziantep, Turkey (10), and Istanbul, Turkey (8).

Table 2: Cities of Residence of Children in Islamic State Entry Records

City	Number of Records	City	Number of Records
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	15	Tripoli, Libya	4
Buraydah, Saudi Arabia	11	Al Busaytin, Bahrain	3
Gaziantep, Turkey	10	Al Muharraq, Bahrain	3
Istanbul, Turkey	8	Baridah, Saudi Arabia	3
Aleppo, Syria	5	Gjilan, Kosovo	3
Darnah, Libya	5	Ha'il, Saudi Arabia	3
Aksu, China	4	Idlib, Syria	3

Alexandria, Egypt	4	Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan	3
Benghazi, Libya	4	London, United Kingdom	3
Cairo, Egypt	4	Makhachkala, Russia	3
Sousse, Tunisia	4		

Exploring the Data: Marital Status

When comparing the marital status of the children in the dataset to the broader Islamic State captured records, the expectation is that the proportion of married individuals should be much smaller among children. This is exactly what the data show. For the 260 children in the dataset for whom a marital status is listed, only 14 (5.4 percent) are listed as having been married. This is compared to a rate of about 33 percent in the larger dataset.⁵ Digging just a bit beneath the surface, the rate of married children among the Islamic State’s fighters may even be lower. One of the children, 10 years of age, is listed as being married on the entry form, which may have been incorrectly entered, especially given that the rest of the 14 married children are all 16 and older, which is more consistent with expectations.

Exploring the Data: Education

When it comes to the education level of the Islamic State children, the expectation would be that, given the younger population, the distribution of educational attainment should be weighted more heavily towards the lower end when compared with the general population of Islamic State fighters. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of educational level for both the children in the Islamic State’s entry records and the general population.

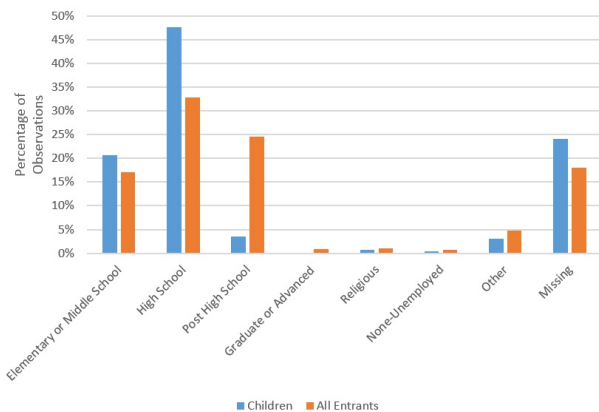


Figure 2: Education Level, Children vs. All Entrants

The data largely conforms to this expectation, with the population of Islamic State children tending to have less education than the rest of the population. While not surprising, this serves as a reminder of two significant points about the children recruited by the Islamic State. First, although education is not a vaccine

against radical ideology as evidenced by the relatively high levels of schooling amongst all Islamic State fighters,⁶ clearly the children are least well equipped from a radicalization perspective to bring greater knowledge to bear against the narrative being pushed by the Islamic State. Second, when considering the challenge of returning fighters, those children that survive the battlefields of Iraq and Syria and are able to return to their home countries will be at a disadvantage. They will have left home with lower education levels, lost anywhere from months to years in terms of their ability to catch up, and gained skills that are not particularly marketable upon their return. Successful reintegration of these children will likely need to address these economic and educational challenges.

Exploring the Data: Employment

Most of the children, like the general cohort of entering Islamic State fighters, can be grouped into a few categories in terms of employment: unemployed, unskilled, low skilled, business or self-employed, student, missing, and all others. The ‘all others’ category is a catch all and includes individuals who claimed to have a media background, work in computers, or in religious fields.⁷ The tabulation for this data appears in Figure 3.

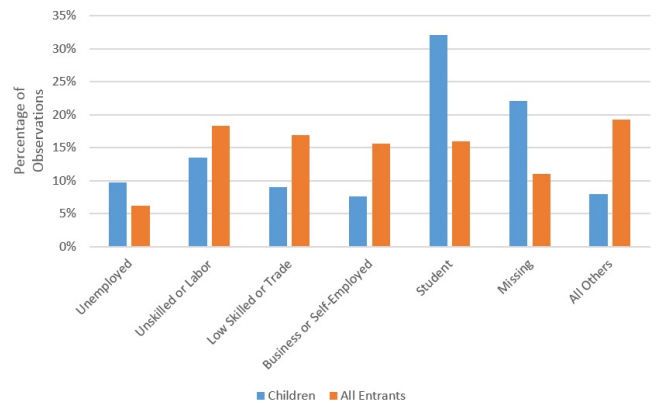


Figure 3: Occupation Categories of Children Compared to Incoming Islamic State Population

Generally speaking, the children in the dataset tend to be unemployed, not answer the question (presumably they are without employment, but not seeking employment either because they are living with their parents or are otherwise cared for), or students. This latter category is where the starkest difference existed between the children and the rest of the incoming foreign fighter population. Children are more likely to respond that they are students than anything else. Though the fact that they are in school is not surprising, it does call to attention the fact that many of them are in a state of discovery and learning, which may make them susceptible to the skilled recruitment pitch of an Islamic State recruiter or the propaganda produced by the group.

Exploring the Data: Jihad Experience

One final category to consider is whether or not any of these children claimed to have participated in jihad before. Of the 290 children in the dataset, 10 percent did not respond, 81 percent said no, and just under nine percent said that they had participated in jihad previously. This number is not very different than the 9.6 rate of prior participation in the overall dataset, which is surprising. The breadth of the experience is also impressive given the age of the children: seven in Libya, five for Jabhat al-Nusra, seven for other

groups in Syria, two in Waziristan, and one each in the “Levant,” Afghanistan, and Lebanon. And, while most of those who claimed prior jihadi experience were 18, one as young as 13 stated that he had prior experience. While it is impossible to verify these claims, the mere possibility is suggestive of a multi-generational fight, as younger individuals continue to be exposed to jihadism.

Exploring the Data: Travel to Iraq and Syria

In the broader Islamic State foreign fighter dataset, about 39 percent of the fighters arrived in 2013, while the remaining 61 percent arrived in 2014. This distribution is slightly different when it comes to the children in the dataset. About 30 percent arrived in 2013, while 70 percent arrived in 2014. In other words, while more fighters in the overall dataset arrived in 2014 than in 2013, this dynamic was even more pronounced among the children in the dataset. One possible explanation is that family travel to the conflict zone increased as the Islamic State took over more territory and the vision of the caliphate, though not realized until the end of June 2014, became clearer to all observers. Another possibility that is not mutually exclusive is that the travel routes to Syria were clearer in 2014 than in 2013, making travel for children easier to accomplish.

There is one oddity related to the timing of the travel of children that bears mention. To see this, the data on when the children entered was broken down by quarters, beginning with the first quarter of 2013 and continuing through the third quarter of 2014. That information, presented in Figure 4, shows a mostly consistent increase in the flow of child fighters into the conflict zone, with one exception. The number of entrants declines very steeply in the first quarter of 2014, before rebounding the next quarter. This decline also occurs for all other fighters in the broader dataset, so it does not seem that it is specific to children. It could be the result of conditions on the ground, but may also be due to decreased record-keeping for other reasons.

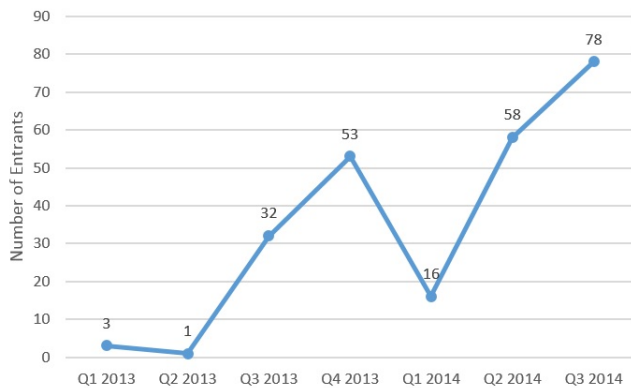


Figure 4: Entries of Children, By Quarter

Given that the children tended to arrive slightly later in the range of time covered in the dataset, it would make sense that they would also have arrived in greater proportions at the border points that were more active in general in 2014: Jarabulus and Tal Abyad.⁸ This expectation is supported in the case of Jarabulus, but not in the case of Tal Abyad.

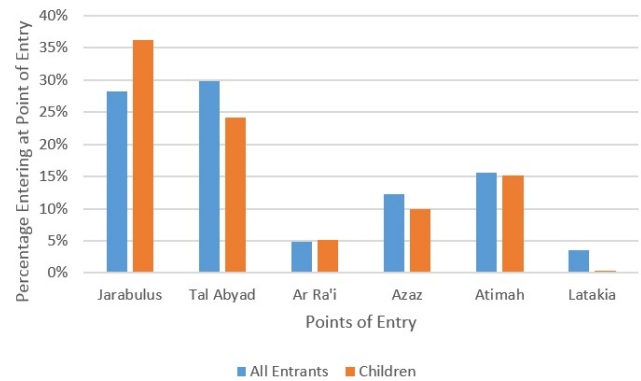


Figure 5: Point of Entry, All Entrants vs. Children

As can be seen in Figure 5, there are two points of entry where the number of entrants is mostly even: Ar Ra'i and Atimah. There are slight imbalances in the number of children entering the caliphate in the rest of the border crossing points. In Jarabulus, a greater proportion of children entered as compared to the proportion of all entrants who came through Jarabulus. However, in Tal Abyad, Azaz, and Latakia, the proportion of children is smaller when compared to all entrants. It is not immediately clear what explains this difference. It is possible that an entry point like Latakia, which experienced back-and-forth conflict during 2013-2014, was avoided by travelers with inexperience in favor of busier and more-well traveled crossing points. Some of the other border crossings did not experience such conflict, but either saw no imbalance between all entrants and child entrants or saw fewer children. Although the differences are small, understanding if and why children traveling into conflict zones choose different routes is an important focus worthy of additional research.

A follow on question to this observation about the more common border entry points for children is whether or not the data can say anything about who the children entered with. Unfortunately, there are few links in the data that specifically articulate whether one traveler knew or came with another. In the notes section of the Islamic State registration form, there are some indications. For example, one form noted that a 17-year-old male was “brought by his father, a former jihadist who was never detected by security services.” Another form simply noted that the child “came with family.” However, it also seems clear that some of the entering children were not with family. The comment section of one form relayed the child “doesn't want to contact his family.” However, most forms are silent on any relationship between the children and their travel companions.

Information on the day the individual entered the caliphate, however, can offer some insights into the travels of the children in the dataset. Together with the border entry point, this data allows for an examination of the possibility of groups of children arriving on the same day, potentially having traveled in the same group.^f

^f Because there is no information on the specific time of day that an individual was checked into the specific border crossing point, it is impossible to say if the children traveled as part of one group or whether they were part of different groups that arrived on the same day. Nevertheless, this data offers a possible look at child group travel habits.

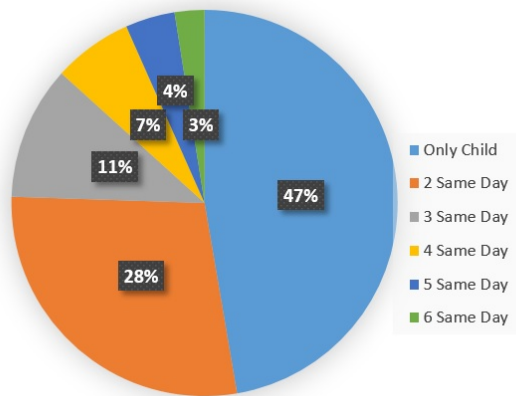


Figure 6: Number of Children Arriving on Same Day and Same Border Entry Point

First, as shown in Figure 6, 47 percent of all children arriving in the caliphate did so on a day when they were the only child crossing the border point. This suggests that the problem of children traveling to and entering the conflict zone during the early part of the Syrian civil war was not just about group travel, at least when it came to groups of children traveling together. A sizable number of children did not travel the final stage from Turkey to Syria with other children.

However, a second point of note is that 53 percent of all children arrived on a day and at a border point where at least one other child entered as well. At initial glance, this raises the possibility of children traveling together from countries of origin to the conflict zone. However, this does not appear to be the case, at least from the perspective of the CTC data on foreign fighters. If children who knew each other in another country traveled together all the way to the border point, then adding the nationality column to our analysis should not greatly alter the breakdown shown in Figure 6. However, when nationality is added to the mix, the percentage of children entering through the same border point on the same day as at least one other child from the same country as them is only 19 percent. This suggests that children arriving from the same country at the same border point on the same day is less common, although it does happen. The leading countries in the dataset that had multiple children show up on the same day are Turkey (4),^g Saudi Arabia (3), Syria (3), Bahrain (2), Tunisia (2), and eight other countries with one occurrence each.^h

Third, about 25 percent of children arrived on the same day and at the same border point as at least two other children. These relatively large groups raise additional questions that further research could address. Are there specific conflict routes traveled by children? Given that children were coming into the conflict zone, did the Islamic State establish special safe houses and routes for some of them? The data here do not answer these questions, but there are clearly research and policy implications emerging from them.

Before moving on, one of the examples cited above indicates that family travel, a child coming with a brother or father, also occurred

in the data utilized here. While the data does not indicate if an individual arrived with others, we can at least see if children were the only arrivals on the border on a given day. Once the broader dataset of adult arrivals is taken into account, a child was the only entrant on four of 465 days on which at least one person entered.

Exploring the Data: Operational Preference

There were three categories under which each fighter could register: fighter, suicide fighter, and suicide bomber. Of those individuals 18 years old and under in the dataset who identified an operational preference, 254 indicated a willingness to be fighters, 13 suicide fighters, and 12 suicide bombers. Overall, 91 percent of the children in the Islamic State's foreign registry files were listed as fighters. This is slightly more than the 89 percent of individuals in the overall dataset who elected to serve as fighters.

While the difference between the children and the rest of the entering population in terms of the proportion of fighters was small (about two percent), the fact that rate of suicide volunteering among children was less than that of adults raises a few interesting possibilities. Was the organization steering children away from suicide roles in order to preserve their long-term value to the organization? Were children more likely to be traveling with parents or others who did not approve of signing up as anything other than a fighter? Or was it simply a fluke? Of course, the organizational preference upon entry does not indicate that an individual would go on to fulfill that role (or not). Preferences may change over time, both on the part of the individual and the organization.

One additional angle explored was to further analyze the data to see if there was an age difference between children who ended up in the different organizational roles. If there were, it might provide some evidence that the group was coercing or enticing children into the most dangerous roles. Any results should be taken with a grain of salt, as there are small numbers of children in the two categories for suicide missions. However, the analysis revealed no statistical difference between the average ages of those who were placed in each operational category.

Conclusion

This article examined the CTC's data taken directly from the Islamic State's registration documents with a specific focus on those documents that identified a child. In doing so, it identified several expected ways in which children registering with the Islamic State as fighters from 2013-2014 differed from the rest of the incoming registrants to the Islamic State: they were less likely to be married, had less education, and tended to have an occupation status of "student" or "unemployed."

This article also highlighted some intriguing findings: the amount of previous jihadi experience was as equally prevalent among the older children as among the rest of the entrants and children entered in greater proportion in 2014 as compared to the proportion of the rest of the traveling population. Additionally, children in this dataset came in disproportionate numbers (compared with the overall number of fighters from a country) from Bahrain, Belgium, Kosovo, Libya, and Turkey.

It has been an unfortunate fact of war that children are often enlisted to fight. Such a phenomenon is not new. In addition to this sad reality is the fact that the children themselves are faced with robbed futures, the terror of participating in brutal conflict, and often a lack of choice in being swept up in the conflict in the

g The (4) indicates that two or more children from Turkey arrived at the border on four separate occasions.

h The eight countries are as follows: China, France, Indonesia, Kosovo, Lebanon, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

first place (or at least of sufficiently developed capacity to make such weighty decisions). In the case of the recruitment of children into terrorist organizations, these tragedies may be magnified even more. The Islamic State has shown a willingness to employ children as suicide bombers, assassins, and propaganda tools. For these children, as well as those who have worked in other capacities with

or lived under the group's control for the past several years, the nightmare is likely far from over. Continued research by scholars and increased attention from policymakers to understand and, to the extent possible, address this challenging issue will be worth the investment. **CTC**

Citations

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- 2 There are numerous books, journal articles, and government reports on this broader subject. For a few examples, see David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Alcinda Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
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- 4 Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State's Foreign Fighter Paper Trail* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2016).
- 5 Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce*.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 The entire breakdown of categories and coding choices is more fully described in the CTC's report that introduced this dataset. See Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce*.
- 8 Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *Then and Now: Comparing the Flow of Foreign Fighters to AQI and the Islamic State* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2016).

The Islamic State's Veterans: Contrasting the Cohorts with Jihadi Experience in Libya and Afghanistan

By David Sterman

From 2013 through 2014, the Islamic State recruited tens of thousands of fighters from all corners of the globe to fight in Syria and Iraq. The vast majority of these fighters were new to jihad, having never taken up arms before. Yet, the Islamic State also drew a select group of recruits for whom Syria would not be their first jihad. This article examines 219 such fighters who reported prior jihadi experience outside of Syria. It finds that the profiles reported by Islamic State veteran jihadis with experience in Libya and Afghanistan, the two top locations from which Islamic State fighters reported prior experience, are substantially different. Veterans of jihad in Libya are the result of localized dynamics while veterans of jihad in Afghanistan represent a more internationalized jihadi contingent.

From 2013 through 2014, the Islamic State recruited tens of thousands of fighters from all corners of the globe to fight in Syria.¹ In 2016, NBC News obtained and reported on a cache of Islamic State personnel files it received from a Syrian man who said he stole a flash drive containing the files from a senior commander in the group.² These files, which NBC shared with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC), provided extensive insights into the Islamic State's recruitment of foreign fighters.

One of these key insights was that the vast majority of the Islamic State's foreign recruits were new to armed jihad. (Islamic State fighters had been asked to report their previous jihadi experience.) An analysis of the Islamic State personnel records by CTC's Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler found that the percentage of fighters who reported prior jihadi experience was "relatively low" at 9.6% and that about a quarter of those who reported previous jihadi experience reported it only in Syria.³

In their analysis of the Islamic State files, Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler note that the top location where Islamic State fighters reported experience outside of Syria was Libya, with about 70 cases, followed by Afghanistan, with about 60 cases.⁴ Beyond these two countries, Yemen, Pakistan, Mali, Somalia, Chechnya, Dagestan, and Gaza were reported, each with 20 or fewer fighters. The initial report, however, did not provide an analysis of the ways in which veterans of jihad in these different regions vary, noting, "it is beyond

David Sterman is a senior policy analyst at New America's International Security Program. He is also the co-author of All Jihad is Local Volume II: ISIS in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, an examination of Islamic State personnel records from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula at the subnational level.

the scope of this initial report to provide a detailed and comprehensive breakdown of the variety groups that the Islamic State's new recruits had access to at this time."⁵

This article provides an initial examination of the Islamic State recruits who reported prior jihadi experience in Libya and Afghanistan—the two top locations where recruits reported prior jihadi experience. It finds that veterans of jihad in Libya tend to have gained their experience as a result of localized conflict dynamics while veterans of jihad in Afghanistan represent a more internationalized veteran-jihadi population.

The findings reported in this article are based on a similar and likely overlapping, though not necessarily identical, set of Islamic State personnel files as those examined by the CTC. The records examined here consist of 3,577 entry records provided to the author by Nate Rosenblatt, an independent Middle East/North Africa consultant and doctoral candidate at Oxford University, which formed the basis for the New America reports *All Jihad is Local: What ISIS' Files Tell Us About its Fighters* and *All Jihad is Local Volume II: ISIS in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula*.⁶

Who Are the Islamic State's Experienced Recruits?

In line with the findings of Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler, the files examined here suggest a fighting force that was relatively new to armed jihad. Among the 3,577 total fighters, 347, or 9.7%, reported some kind of prior jihadi experience. Of these 347 fighters, 219 fighters reported prior jihadi experience that could be identified as having been outside of Syria. These fighters constituted 6.1% of the overall sample.^a

These veteran Islamic State fighters rarely fought in more than one field of jihad beyond Syria itself. Ninety-three percent of veteran jihadis (with experience outside of Syria) reported only one location outside of Syria where they had prior jihadi experience. Thirteen fighters—or 6% of the fighters who reported jihadi experience outside Syria—reported prior jihadi experience in two locations. Five of the 13 fighters who reported two locations of prior jihadi experience reported those locations as Pakistan and Afghanistan, which may be best understood as a single linked field of jihad given the rather porous Afghan-Pakistan border through which al-Qa`ida and the Taliban are known to cross frequently. Another two fighters reported locations that are geographically linked: Gaza and Egypt, and India and Pakistan. Only two veteran jihadis reported experience in three or more prior jihads outside of Syria.

a One hundred and twenty-one fighters reported experience only in Syria, Sham, or with a militant group active in Syria. Seven fighters reported prior jihadi experience, but it was unclear where they developed such experience.

Table 1: Number of Prior Jihads Listed, Excluding Syria

Number of Prior Jihads Outside Syria	Count of Fighters	Percentage of Fighters with Experience Outside Syria
1	204	93%
2	13	6%
3	2	1%

The files examined in this article also provide a similar set of findings regarding the locations where the Islamic State veteran fighters reported prior jihad. Libya was the top-cited location of experience outside of Syria with 64 fighters reporting experience there, followed by Afghanistan where 46 fighters reported experience. As with Dodwell, Milton, and Ressler's data, there is a steep drop-off after these two with the next highest-cited location being Pakistan, with 22 fighters reporting experience there.

Table 2: Locations of Jihadi Experience Outside of Sham

Country or Region	Number of Fighters Reporting Experience There
Libya	64
Afghanistan	46
Pakistan	22
Iraq	17
Gaza	16
Chechnya	11
Yemen	10
All Others (<10 fighters each)	50

The rest of this article examines in detail the set of Islamic State fighters who reported prior jihadi experience in Libya and Afghanistan in order to identify differences between the two contingents of veterans.

Veterans of Jihad in Libya

By far, the most common location outside of Syria where Islamic State veteran jihadis gained their experience was Libya, where 64 fighters reported prior jihadi experience. Islamic State recruits who reported being veterans of jihad in Libya were the product of highly localized dynamics tied to conflicts in Libya. The Islamic State recruited from a Libyan population that had mobilized to fight in the Arab Spring uprising and the subsequent civil war.

Most veterans of jihad in Libya were Libyans themselves. Veterans of the Libyan jihad reported residing in four countries, but 54 of the 64 fighters (84%) who reported prior jihadi experience in Libya reported residing in Libya.

This is unsurprising. Since the Arab Spring reached Libya and escalated into an armed rebellion in February 2011, Libya has been ripped apart by conflict: first, the uprising against Muammar Qaddafi and then, a civil war between competitors for power. Around 300,000 Libyans joined militias during the uprising against Qaddafi.⁷ These numbers are reflected in the Libyan contingent of Islamic State recruits, more than half of whom reported prior jihadi experience with the vast majority reporting such experience only in Libya.⁸

Beyond Libya, the next most common site of residence of veterans of the Libyan jihad was Tunisia, which borders Libya to the west, where seven fighters (11%) reported residing. This likely reflects the close connections between Tunisia and Libya, which contributed to Tunisia being the largest source of foreign fighters who traveled to fight in Libya itself, a flow that existed from the beginning of the Libyan uprising and built upon the nexus between Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya.⁹ An examination of the Islamic State personnel files shows that many Tunisians passed through Libya on their way to fight in Syria. For example, 8.7% of the Tunisians in the Islamic State files examined here reported being recommended to the group by Nouredine Chouchane, who ran a training camp in Libya, and Libya was by far the most common destination to which Tunisian fighters reported traveling.¹⁰

Another two fighters reported residing in Egypt, which borders Libya to the east. Only one fighter reported being a veteran of jihad in Libya and residing in a country that didn't border Libya. That fighter reported residence in Bosnia.

Another sign that veterans of jihad in Libya among Islamic State recruits gained their experience as a result of localized conflicts within Libya rather than an internationalized jihadist mobilization is that only one reported experience outside of Libya (or Syria), with reported experience in Libya, Egypt, and Gaza.

In addition, veterans of jihad in Libya are relatively young compared to other Islamic State recruits. The median year of birth for a veteran of jihad in Libya was 1991. That is two years younger than the median Islamic State fighter among the full set of 3,577 records, who was born in 1989, and four years younger than the median veteran recruit who reported experience in a location other than Syria—born in 1987.

The youthfulness of veterans of jihad in Libya points to two conclusions. First, these veterans are quite similar to the overall population of Libyan Islamic State recruits, which was also relatively young with a median birth year of 1992.¹¹ Second, it means that veterans of jihad in Libya among Islamic State recruits are too young for their reported experience to be a reference to earlier rounds of armed jihadi rebellion in Libya. For example, the median veteran of jihad in Libya recruited by the Islamic State would have been at most seven years old when the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's armed rebellion in Libya's east was decisively crushed in 1998.¹²

Veterans of Jihad in Afghanistan

Afghanistan was the second most cited location where Islamic State recruits reported jihadi experience outside of Syria. Forty-six fighters reported prior jihadi experience in Afghanistan. In contrast to fighters who reported experience in Libya, Islamic State fighters who reported jihadi experience in Afghanistan represent an internationalized jihadi contingent and their jihadi experience cannot be reduced to an outgrowth of conflict in Afghanistan and its mobilization of Afghans.

Veterans of jihad in Afghanistan reported residing in 16 different countries—four times as many as veterans of jihad in Libya reported—suggesting a highly internationalized contingent.

Unlike veterans of jihad in Libya, the majority of whom reported residing in Libya, only three veterans of jihad in Afghanistan reported their residence as being Afghanistan when filling out the Islamic State entry form. Moreover, none of these three fighters appear to be Afghans themselves. One reports being an Iranian citizen; another reports being a Tunisian citizen; and the final in-

dividual did not report a citizenship but used a *kunya*—or *nom de guerre*—ending in al-Kurdi, meaning the Kurd.

Instead, 43 fighters—93% of those reporting experience in Afghanistan—reported residing outside of Afghanistan. The countries these fighters reported residing in can be broken into three categories: those reporting residing in countries that border Afghanistan, those reporting residing in Central Asian countries that do not border Afghanistan, and those from outside the region.

Eighteen of the 43 fighters residing outside of Afghanistan came from bordering countries. These included Iran (8), Pakistan (7), Tajikistan (2), and Uzbekistan (1). Another two reported residence in Central Asian countries that do not directly border Afghanistan—one each in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Together, these suggest that part of the more internationalized nature of veterans of Afghanistan's jihad may be a product of regional foreign-fighter flows from bordering countries and Central Asia.

However, 23 fighters—half of the total set of veterans reporting experience in Afghanistan—report residing in a country outside of the region. These fighters report residence in nine separate countries as follows: Saudi Arabia (9), Azerbaijan (4), Egypt (2), Jordan (1), Kosovo (1), Kuwait (1), Libya (1), Turkey (3), Ukraine (1).

Another sign that Islamic State recruits reporting jihadi experience in Afghanistan represent a more internationalized contingent is that nine of these veterans report prior jihadi experience in more than one country other than Syria. That accounts for more than half of the 15 fighters who reported experience in more than one country other than Syria. In five of these cases, the two countries are Af-

ghanistan and Pakistan, which may simply be a single jihadi front. However, two fighters reported experience in Chechnya as well as Afghanistan—one of whom also reported experience in Pakistan. A third fighter who reported experience in Afghanistan reported experience in Bosnia, and a fourth reported experience in Yemen.

Veterans of jihad in Afghanistan were also far older than veterans of jihad in Libya. Their median year of birth was 1983. That makes the median veteran of jihad in Afghanistan among Islamic State recruits eight years older than the median veteran of jihad in Libya, six years older than the median Islamic State fighter overall, and four years older than the median veteran of a jihad outside of Syria. The older age of many of the Islamic State fighters reporting experience in Afghanistan suggests that they may well be more fully integrated into international jihadi currents.

Conclusion

The differences between Islamic State veterans who reported prior jihadi experience in Libya and those who reported such experience in Afghanistan are not surprising. Afghanistan has been a site of jihad for decades throughout which time it attracted thousands of men from around the world whereas Libya only recently became a site of open jihadi armed struggle. However, the differences illustrate the need to distinguish between distinct populations even when examining a specific variable—for example, whether an Islamic State recruit reports prior jihadi experience. This suggests a need for further disaggregation of data by geography when examining captured or leaked terrorist records. **CTC**

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The 2016 French Female Attack Cell: A Case Study

By Robin Simcox

The Islamic State has inspired dozens of women to attempt terrorist attacks in its name in Europe. One all-female cell allegedly planned several attacks in France over a matter of days in September 2016, including an attempt to blow up gas cylinders near Notre Dame Cathedral. The suspected plotters were largely radicalized online, and social media was integral to both their recruitment and plotting. One of the Islamic State’s ‘virtual entrepreneurs,’ Rachid Kassim, helped guide their activities. Though the alleged plots failed, Kassim exploited the dedication shown by these women to shame males into attempting a subsequent wave of attacks.

The Islamic State has had great success in drawing European women into its ideological orbit, with multiple women plotting to commit attacks in Europe on behalf of the terrorist group. Between January 2014 and April 2018, women were involved in 33 separate plots in five separate countries—most frequently in France, but also Belgium, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom.¹ The first all-female terror cell in this period was disrupted in August 2014; three teenage girls who had connected via social media had discussed a suicide bombing in a synagogue in Lyon, France.² The first female to successfully conduct an attack in this period was Safia S., a 15-year-old German Moroccan in contact with the Islamic State who was jailed for six years for stabbing a police officer in Hanover, Germany.³

This is not a phenomenon unique to the Islamic State, however. One high-profile 2010 example from the United Kingdom saw Roshonara Choudhry, a 21-year-old student, stab a British politician who had voted for the Iraq War. Choudhry was inspired by the teachings of the al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula ideologue, Anwar al-Awlaki.⁴

This article focuses on a female cell that allegedly planned a series of attacks across France in September 2016. It details the plots and the perpetrators’ background, and it shows how despite their plans ultimately failing, they were weaponized by the Islamic State to instigate new plots in the West.

The Guiding Hand

Upon the declaration of a caliphate in June 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi began encouraging *hijrah* to Iraq and Syria. Al-Baghdadi

Robin Simcox is the Margaret Thatcher Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, where he specializes in counterterrorism and national security policy.

proclaimed that, “[t]hose who can immigrate to the Islamic State should immigrate ... Rush O Muslims to your state ... The land is for the Muslims, all Muslims.”⁵

According to the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism at The Hague, around 17 percent of Europeans who traveled to Syria to join militant groups—between 667-730 individuals—were women.⁶ This included teenage girls, such as the schoolchildren from Bethnal Green in East London, who have possibly died there.⁷

However, as governments cracked down on travel and access to Syria became increasingly difficult, the Islamic State tweaked its messaging. Rather than encourage travel, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, the Islamic State’s external operations chief, stated in May 2016 that “the smallest act you do in their lands is more beloved to us than the biggest act done here; it is more effective for us and more harmful to them.”⁸

Vital to facilitating these acts was Rachid Kassim, a French citizen who was one of the Islamic State’s most prolific ‘virtual entrepreneurs.’⁹ Before his death in early 2017,¹⁰ Kassim directed terrorist plots from the caliphate via social media (primarily through the encrypted messaging app Telegram) and was connected to over a dozen known plots in France.¹¹

Among those he guided was an all-female cell consisting of four French women: Inès Madani, Sarah Hervouët, Ornella Gilligmann, and Amel Sakaou.

Cell Member #1: Inès Madani

Inès Madani was born in March 1997 in the suburbs of Paris. She had a poor education, leaving school without qualifications and struggling to find a job.¹² Her father was on the French intelligence radar as a potential radical,¹³ while Madani began to grow more religious in 2013. She unsuccessfully attempted to travel to Syria on multiple occasions¹⁴ and was on Belgian intelligence services’ radar for her role in trying to recruit and facilitate such travel for others.¹⁵

Madani’s family described her as constantly on her phone, and she immersed herself in Islamic State ideology via the internet. Madani was prolific across social media, using Facebook, Periscope, Snapchat, Telegram, Twitter, Viber, and WhatsApp.¹⁶

Madani, who was based in Tremblay—a northeastern suburb of Paris—is suspected of involvement in planning attacks from at least 2015 onward.¹⁷ Shortly after the Islamic State’s coordinated strikes in Paris that November, an undercover journalist who had infiltrated a terrorist cell for a television documentary received a letter outlining plans for some kind of future atrocity. The letter called for suicide bombings and mass shootings in nightclubs or cabarets in Paris, “perverted places that are frequently attended by the disgusting infidels.”¹⁸ It had been passed to the journalist at a Saint-Denis train station by an 18-year-old female courier, and the letter gave instructions from “Abu Souleymane.” While the journalist had not met Abu Souleymane in person, he was supposedly an Islamic State operative who had recently returned to France from Raqqa.



French police forces stand outside a building in Boussy-Saint-Antoine on September 8, 2016, after the arrest of female suspects said to have been planning acts of violence. (Geoffroy Van Der Hasselt/AFP/Getty Images)

After a wave of counterterrorism arrests in the following days, Abu Souleymane made arrangements for the female courier to pass new instructions to the journalist posing as a jihadi. This note called for suicide bombings and asked for a list of ingredients to make suicide vests.¹⁹ At this stage, the journalist stopped his investigation, and Abu Souleymane's identity remained a mystery.

However, French authorities now think that Abu Souleymane was a fiction and that the instigator behind the plot and the set of instructions was actually the female courier—who they now believe was Inès Madani.²⁰

Abu Souleymane was not the only virtual terrorist alter ego Madani is suspected to have created.²¹ She also posted under the name “Abu Omar.” Madani used this identity to connect with another future member of the cell: Ornella Gilligmann.²²

Cell Member #2: Ornella Gilligmann

Ornella Gilligmann, a 29-year-old French national, lived roughly two hours south of Paris in Châlette-sur-Loing. She had a conviction for an act of violence in her youth, and then converted to Islam from Christianity in 2009 after marrying a Muslim man. Gilligmann was radicalized online, listening to salafi sermons and reading about the Islamic State's activities in Syria.²³

In September 2014, she took her three young children and flew with a friend to Istanbul in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to cross into the newly formed caliphate. She was subsequently interviewed by the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI), added to a security watch list, and placed under house arrest.²⁴

In June 2016, Gilligmann met Abu Omar (i.e., Madani) on Periscope, the video streaming app. She fell in love with the online persona she believed to be Abu Omar, subsequently telling police that she was seduced by his “firmness and charisma.” The French authorities monitoring their communications concluded that “Inès Madani is playing Ornella Gilligmann by drawing her into a virtual

love affair.” They noted that “the majority of dialogue concern[ed] sexual fantasies.”²⁵

Madani went to great lengths to maintain this fiction. They were in contact over 4,000 times in August 2016 alone. This online relationship would eventually cause the breakdown of Gilligmann's marriage. Gilligmann explained that, “[Abu Omar] made me believe that my husband did not deserve me, and began to insult him and to contradict him on everything, and especially on religion ... A month later, between July and August 2016, I agreed to marry religiously with Abu Omar by phone.”²⁶

Gilligmann claims to have seen pictures of Abu Omar on Telegram and Periscope and to have spoken on the phone with him on multiple occasions.²⁷ Madani, who admits to having deceived Gilligmann, says that there was a man beside her during these conversations. However, French investigators believe that this, too, is a lie. Madani found images online and created the character of Abu Omar and found a way of disguising her voice during phone conversations with Gilligmann (presumably even during their telephone wedding).²⁸

With Gilligmann and Abu Omar now newly married, Madani used the influence that Abu Omar had over his new wife to allegedly persuade Gilligmann of the need for an attack in France, saying “he” (i.e. Abu Omar) was acting on the instructions from Rachid Kassim, who Madani then introduced to Gilligmann.²⁹

At the end of August 2016, in preparation for the planned attack, French authorities believe that Abu Omar asked Gilligmann to head to Paris and meet a female associate who went by the name of “Um Seyfullah.” This, too, was another pseudonym used by Madani.

Gas Cylinder Plot: Paris

Madani's alleged plan was to store gas cylinders in a car, park it in a place popular with tourists, set them on fire, and cause an explosion. She reportedly discussed the plan with other radicalized

females over social media, including a Belgian convert called Molly B., who was in contact with both Kassim and members of the Madani network.³⁰

Gilligmann and Madani met in Paris (with Gilligmann unaware she was with Abu Omar), allegedly filmed a video pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi, and then sent it to Kassim. On the night of September 3, 2016, French prosecutors contend that Madani placed several gas cylinders and bottles of diesel in a car she had stolen from her father and prepared to strike.³¹

However, it did not go according to plan. Madani did not have a driver's license and admits to "driving very badly," hitting the sidewalk multiple times. They then had to abandon their initial alleged target—the Eiffel Tower—because they were unable to find anywhere suitable to park.³² Instead, they drove on to Rue de la Bûcherie, near Notre Dame Cathedral, where they poured gas on a towel and, French authorities believe, attempted to set it on fire with a cigarette in order to cause the gas cylinders to explode.³³ However, their efforts were disrupted after they thought they saw a police officer approaching. The explosion did not materialize, and the women fled.³⁴ Gilligmann has since claimed that she had attempted to persuade Madani not to carry out this alleged plot and that she deliberately bought diesel gas precisely because she knew it would not explode.³⁵

Cell Member # 3: Sarah Hervouët

Sarah Hervouët, a 23-year-old cleaner who lived in southwest France, had a troubled childhood. She was abandoned by her Moroccan father and began to self-harm as a teenager. Hervouët converted to Islam at the age of 21 (her mother was a non-practicing Catholic), quickly gravitating to the Islamic State's online propaganda. She was affected by images of Muslim children suffering and came to believe that French soldiers in Mali were raping them.³⁶

In March 2015, soon after her conversion, Hervouët attempted to travel to Syria in order to marry a French citizen based there called Abu Saad, originally from Nîmes in southern France and known to have targeted several women for online recruitment.³⁷ However, Hervouët was stopped at the Syria-Turkey border, and French authorities returned her to her mother. In an interview with the press at the time, Hervouët's mother commented that her daughter had suffered "psychological rape" at the hands of her online recruiters.³⁸

Hervouët would be engaged to three different men in the months ahead, two of whom were killed by the police after committing terror attacks. The first, Larossi Abballa, stabbed a policeman and his partner to death in Magnanville in June 2016 in an attack inspired by the Islamic State. The second, Adel Kermiche, took part in the murder of a Catholic priest during Mass in Normandy in July 2016. Kermiche was in contact with Rachid Kassim prior to the attack. A third fiancé, Mohamed Lamine Aberouz, was also on the radar of French security services.³⁹

Town Hall Plot: Cogolin

In late August and/or early September, Hervouët was in contact with Kassim on Telegram, where she posted under the name "Marie Antoinette."⁴⁰ After Abu Mohammed al-Adnani had been killed in a U.S. missile strike near Al Bab in northern Syria on August 30, 2016, Kassim encouraged an attack in France in retaliation.⁴¹ Perhaps sensing a lack of will, Kassim's plan for Hervouët was for her to buy a toy gun and firecrackers, head to the local town hall in

Cogolin, and brandish the fake firearm. It was Kassim's belief—in the wake of the recent attacks France had suffered, including in Nice the month prior—that the sense of panic would be enough for the police to shoot and kill Hervouët.⁴²

Hervouët did as requested. She acquired a fake pistol, wrote a will and a letter explaining that she was seeking paradise, and recorded a video in which she pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi. She titled the video "Operation Abu Mohammed al-Adnani."⁴³

However, Hervouët could not go through with it. She later admitted, "I went to Cogolin Town Hall last week to see how I felt there, and I did not feel well. I went home and vomited. That's when I said I was sorry and I could not do it."⁴⁴

With another plot unsuccessful, Kassim changed tack. At some stage between September 4 and September 7, he told Hervouët he was going to connect her to two associates who were about to launch another operation in Paris. One of these associates was Inès Madani, who was allegedly planning a new attack, hoping to make up for the recent failure of her alleged gas cylinders plot.⁴⁵

Cell Member # 4: Amel Sakaou

In the wake of her unsuccessful bombing attempt on Rue de la Bûcherie near Notre Dame Cathedral in early September 2016, Gilligmann returned to her recently divorced husband and told him about her failed attack.⁴⁶ They then took their children and began to drive to Marseille, but were arrested en route on September 6.⁴⁷ Gilligmann's husband has since been released.⁴⁸ It is not clear what prompted police to make the arrest.

Inès Madani, meanwhile, had retreated to the home of Amel Sakaou, another Kassim associate. A 39-year-old mother of four, Sakaou lived in Boussy-Saint-Antoine, 25 kilometers to Paris' southeast.⁴⁹

Kassim told them to expect a visitor: Sarah Hervouët, who had taken a train north on the evening of September 7th.⁵⁰ French prosecutors allege that Madani and Sakaou were planning to carry out a new attack the next day.⁵¹

Upon arrival, Madani and Sakaou treated Hervouët with hostility and suspicion. They strip-searched her and examined her phone, demanding an explanation as to why she had the phone numbers of two DGSI agents. (These security officials had given Hervouët their phone numbers after her failed trip to Syria.)⁵² Hervouët had brought the fake pistol with her that Kassim asked her to use in the town hall; Madani and Sakaou broke it apart, suspecting that there was a microphone inside. Hervouët's religious commitment was also tested, with the women forcing her to recite suras.⁵³

Despite passing these tests, the women appeared unconvinced. Sakaou warned Hervouët that, in the forthcoming attack, she would have to act first "to prove to them that I am on their side."⁵⁴

Potential Train Station Plot and Police Stabbing: Boussy-Saint-Antoine

What precisely that attack was remains unclear. With Sakaou receiving a telephone call from one of her daughters saying that the nearby Boussy-Saint-Antoine train station contained a heavy police presence, it appears as if this was one potential target.⁵⁵ However, Hervouët says the other two women had also discussed a synagogue, and French officials believed an attack by all three women on Gare de Lyon in Paris could also have been "imminent."⁵⁶ For her part, Madani has claimed that, "[w]e did not really have a project," while Hervouët suggested that the other women "often changed

their minds.”⁵⁷

The three women left Sakaou’s apartment on September 8. According to Hervouët, they decided to steal a car and targeted a white van parked nearby with a man inside. After a brief argument over whether he was Arab (and therefore whether he should be targeted), Sakaou gave Hervouët a knife and told her to act.⁵⁸

Hervouët began stabbing the man. She would later tell French police that, “what I wanted was martyrdom ... What I had to do was kill or hurt someone ... and when I raised my hand to a police officer, he would shoot me.” Yet she also explained that, “I hit towards the shoulder but did not aim at a particular area. I am not a sadist.”⁵⁹

To Hervouët’s surprise, the driver in the van went to pull out a weapon. The police had installed a listening device outside Sakaou’s building having received intelligence (from an unspecified source) that one of its inhabitants was planning a terrorist attack, and Hervouët had unwittingly stabbed an undercover officer monitoring the building.⁶⁰ She fled, telling the other women that he was a member of the police.⁶¹

French authorities swooped. Hervouët and Sakaou were arrested while Madani was shot in the leg after attempting to charge the police.⁶² Found in her handbag was a pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi and a note vowing to “attack you on your territory to attack your spirits and terrorize you.”⁶³ While the police were aware of a potential threat emanating from the address they were monitoring, they were unaware at the time that Madani had been at the Boussy-Saint-Antoine residence and that they had just arrested the perpetrator behind the alleged gas cylinder plot of just days before.⁶⁴

The Aftermath

Madani, Sakaou, Gilligmann, and Hervouët were charged with terrorism offenses in September 2016 and are all awaiting trial. Sakaou has continued ‘the fight’ in prison, having been convicted of assaulting and making death threats against her prison guards.⁶⁵

As for Kassim, all the plots that he instigated had failed badly. However, he sought to leverage this failure by shaming male Islamic State supporters into a new wave of attacks. Shortly after the Madani cell was arrested, Kassim posted on Telegram that “the women, our sisters, went into action ... Where are the men?” Kassim praised the women for stabbing the police, “like mothers in Palestine.” He reiterated, “You have to understand that if these women went into action, it’s because so few men are doing anything ... why are you waiting so long to the point the woman [sic] are overtaking you in terms of honor? ... what is your excuse?”⁶⁶

Kassim’s words resonated with three separate 15-year-old followers, all of whom were reportedly in contact with Kassim and seem to have been inspired by his admonishments. Between September 8 and September 14, 2016, French authorities arrested them all for planning three separate attacks.⁶⁷

Undeterred, Kassim’s plotting continued until he was killed in a U.S. missile strike near Mosul in February 2017.⁶⁸ However, his connections to terrorist planning outlived him. Days after his death, another all-female French cell—this one containing girls aged between 14 and 18—was arrested. They had been discussing plans for an attack on French soil with Kassim.⁶⁹ Then, in September 2017, Islamic State-inspired plotters in possession of explosives were arrested in Paris. They, too, had previously been in contact with

Kassim.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Much about the Madani network was unusual. An all-female cell is still rare,^a and the extent of Madani’s fraudulent activity is extraordinary. Her deception and then seduction of an older woman over the internet was a remarkably calculating act for a teenage girl to pull off. Hervouët having two fiancés commit successful terrorist attacks in two months is also unusual, at least outside the battlefield of the caliphate.

Kassim’s actions were opportunistic, both in his exploitation of Abu Mohammed al-Adnani’s death to inspire the all-female cell and then his exploitation of that cell’s arrest to inspire a new wave of plots among his followers. However, Kassim’s opportunism may have also ultimately hindered his plans. While his quickness of thought helped initiate multiple plots in a short space of time, none of them seems to have been meticulously planned and all, ultimately, failed.

However, much else about the plots is similar to those attempted in Europe in the past (from both a biographical and operational viewpoint). The presence of converts⁷¹ and the clear influence that the internet had on radicalizing the plotters is unsurprising. The use of various social media platforms for planning attacks, accessing extremist material, and connecting to likeminded jihadis is also a constant feature of the Islamic State’s Western recruits.

The fact that those already on the domestic intelligence radar planned these plots is also common, as is how some of these terrorists came to be on the radar: a thwarted attempt to fly to Syria. Indeed, there have also been multiple examples of those prevented from traveling to the caliphate then plotting attacks at home instead.^b This was the case with multiple members of the Madani network.

Despite Kassim’s death and despite the failures of the Madani network, it is unlikely that the Islamic State will abandon either its ‘virtual entrepreneur’ approach or its willingness to use women in terrorist attacks in Europe. Indeed, it is possible that there will be even more female cells in the future, especially since the Islamic State is now actively encouraging female participation in military activities.⁷² In October 2017, in the face of territorial reverses in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State made an explicit call for “female Muslims to fulfill their duties on all fronts in supporting the mujahideen.”⁷³

Counterterrorism officials must, therefore, remain vigilant against both of these pressing threats. **CTC**

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