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About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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ISIL's Political-Military Power in Iraq

By Michael Knights



Kurdish peshmerga fighters inspect the remains of a car that belonged to ISIL after it was destroyed in a U.S. airstrike. - AFP/Getty Images

THE ISLAMIC STATE in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)¹ has the world on edge. Since its nadir in the spring of 2010,² ISIL is considered to have evolved from a terrorist group on-the-ropes to “a full-blown army,” in the words of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Brett

McGurk.³ As the Institute for the Study of War noted, ISIL’s overall strategy of consolidating and expanding its caliphate “fundamentally relies upon military superiority to wrest control of land and cities from modern states.”⁴

An analysis of ISIL’s recent military accomplishments is difficult due to the lack of confirmed facts about much of what has transpired in Iraq, particularly during the hectic months since the collapse of federal security forces in Mosul on June 10, 2014. Questions still remain over the actual contribution that ISIL made to the loss

¹ In June 2014, ISIL declared a caliphate in Syria and Iraq and shortened its name to the “Islamic State.” ISIL was previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq, and prior to that al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), which was led by Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. In February 2014, al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri disowned ISIL.

² Al-Qa`ida in Iraq *amir* Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi and war minister Abu Ayyub al-Masri were killed on April 18, 2010, the most senior of 34 top AQI leaders killed in the spring of 2010 (out of 42 top-tier leaders). See Michael Knights, “Back with a Vengeance: Al-Qaeda in Iraq Rebounds,” IHS Defense, Security & Risk Consulting, February 24, 2012.

³ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Brett McGurk, testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, July 23, 2014.

⁴ Jessica Lewis, “The Islamic State: A Counter-Strategy for a Counter-State,” Institute for the Study of War, July 2014.

of federal control and over the mix of ISIL and non-ISIL forces fighting since June. Nevertheless, using a range of case studies from the Iraqi side of ISIL's area of operations, this article explores what is currently known about the movement from a military standpoint. If ISIL is an army, what kind of army is it and what are its weaknesses?

This article finds that ISIL is a military power mostly because of the weakness and unpreparedness of its enemies. Lengthy shaping of the battlefield, surprise and mobility made its recent successes possible, but all these factors are diminishing. As a defensive force, ISIL may struggle to hold terrain if it is attacked simultaneously at multiple points or if its auxiliary allies begin to defect.

ISIL's Multi-Year Offensive

ISIL's successful offensive since June 2014 can only be understood by situating it in the broader context of its political-military campaigns since the organization "re-booted" under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's leadership on May 15, 2010.⁵ ISIL did not suddenly become effective in early June 2014: it had been steadily strengthening and actively shaping the future operating environment for four years. As Brett McGurk noted in congressional testimony in February 2014, ISIL's planning has been "sophisticated, patient and focused."⁶

The shattering of Iraqi security forces (ISF) in June 2014 is a case-in-point, the result of years of patient preparatory operations. Early in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's tenure, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the current group's forerunner, began targeting pro-government Arabs in a powerful multi-year campaign of assassinations that culminated in al-Baghdadi's "Soldiers Harvest" campaign against on-duty and off-duty security force members from July 29, 2013, to June 2014.⁷ In addition

5 Knights, "Back with a Vengeance," pp. 2-3. Also see Murad Batal al-Shishani, "The Islamic State's Strategic and Tactical Plan for Iraq," *Terrorism Monitor* 12:16 (2014).

6 Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Brett McGurk, testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, February 5, 2014.

7 Jessica Lewis, "AQI's 'Soldier's Harvest' Campaign," Institute for the Study of War, October 9, 2013, pp. 2-4.

to demolitions of soldiers' homes, the first six months of "Soldiers Harvest" witnessed a sharp 150% increase in the number of sophisticated close quarters assassinations of troops manning checkpoints and effective under-vehicle improvised explosive device (IED) attacks on key leaders.⁸

Although the campaign was executed across Iraq, it was particularly focused on Mosul and Ninawa Province, including escalating efforts to cut off Mosul's highway communications with Baghdad.⁹ By June 2014, according to McGurk, "by day [Mosul] would appear normal, but at night, ISIL controlled the streets."¹⁰ When ISIL's offensive began in Mosul on June 6, 2014, the ISF were brittle and comparatively easy to crumble during three days of escalating skirmishes within the city.¹¹

Alongside weakening the opposition, al-Baghdadi also used the years preceding this summer's successes to build the current ISIL force. The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and the Syrian civil war provided ISIL secure bases and a reinvigorated pipeline of suicide bombers. As analysts have noted, ISIL has developed a highly-motivated cadre of quality light infantry forces since 2012, drawing on the combat experiences of urban and mobile warfare in Syria, as well as from the prior combat experiences of foreign jihadists who served in the Balkans and Chechnya.¹² These lessons have been institutionalized and refined in training camps in Syria and, since the first half of 2013, also in Iraq.¹³

8 All insights in this paragraph are drawn from The Washington Institute's Iraq violence dataset. In the most affected province, Kirkuk, quality attacks (involving advanced intelligence preparation, advanced tactics or use of special weapons or suicide devices) rose from 42 per month in July 2013 to 104 per month by May 2014.

9 Lewis, "AQI's 'Soldier's Harvest' Campaign," p. 8.

10 McGurk, July 23, 2014.

11 Ibid. McGurk's statement provides details and a compelling narrative of the crumbling of ISF defenses in Mosul from June 8-10, 2014.

12 Douglas A. Ollivant and Brian Fishman, "State of Jihad: The Reality of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," *War on the Rocks*, May 21, 2014.

13 Robert Scales and Douglas Ollivant noted that a key difference between ISIL and its predecessors in Iraq is that ISIL has "learned to build fighting units and teach weapons and tactics very well." See Robert Scales and Douglas Ollivant, "Terrorist Armies Fight Smarter and

Trained fighters were increasingly shifted from Syria to Iraq from "early 2013" according to McGurk, and new camps were set up on the Iraqi side of the border complete with local anti-aircraft defenses that proved effective at deterring attacks from unarmored

"If U.S. military support for Iraq increases, it will become more difficult for ISIL to achieve tactical surprise using vehicle-mounted raiding forces."

Iraqi helicopters.¹⁴ ISIL attacked Mosul on June 6, 2014, with the main strike force deployed from Syria in a motorized infantry column that included "hundreds" of armed utility vehicles.¹⁵ In all these cases, ISIL reinforcements from Syria joined up with local cells within Iraqi provinces that had already kept up a drumbeat of operations year after year.¹⁶ Based on the estimates from a range of experts,¹⁷

Deadlier Than Ever," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2014. Also see Kenneth Pollack, "Iraq: Understanding the ISIS Offensive Against the Kurds," The Brookings Institution, August 11, 2014.

14 See discussions of new ISIL training camps in Iraq in McGurk, July 23, 2014. Also see discussion of the dangers faced by unarmored Iraqi helicopter sorties over "ISIL camps defended by PKC machine guns and anti-aircraft platforms" in McGurk, February 5, 2014.

15 McGurk, July 23, 2014. Ahmed Ali, Jessica Lewis, and Kimberly Kagan put the number at 150 vehicles with 500-800 personnel in "The ISIS Battle Plan," Institute for the Study of War, June 12, 2014.

16 Alex Bilger, "ISIS Annual Reports Reveal a Metrics-Driven Military Command," Institute for the Study of War, May 22, 2014. The report, based on ISIL's claims, suggests that ISIL carried out an average of 640 attacks per month in 2013, representing the majority of violence in the country. (Counting only the types of attacks that ISIL records, ISIL's claims equate to around 64% of The Washington Institute's Iraq violence dataset in the same period. This seems like an accurate reflection of ISIL's balance of effort within Iraq's insurgency.)

17 The author held conversations with Aymenn al-Tamimi and Aaron Zelin, two scholars on ISIL, and factored in the views of Dr. Hisham al-Hashimi, who has had access to ISIL data captured from the safe house of Abu Abdul Rahman al-Bilawi, al-Baghdadi's military chief of staff for Iraq. See Ruth Sherlock, "Inside the Leadership of Islamic State: How the New 'Caliphate' is Run," *Daily*

the number of fighters directly under ISIL's control within Iraq may have reached as high as 10,000-15,000, "taking into account defections from other groups such as Jamaat Ansar al-Islam, "repentances" of security force members, and pledges of *bay`a* (loyalty)."¹⁸

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's tenure has also seen ISIL develop its own distinctive style of command and control. During the "Breaking the Walls" campaign (July 2012-July 2013), the then-ISI demonstrated and repeatedly exercised its re-centralized command and control system in 20 multi-city synchronized car bombing waves, a sequence of attacks that continued until the end of 2013.¹⁹ The bombings illustrated al-Baghdadi's formula of centralized control but decentralized execution,²⁰ with his command cell setting the date of the attacks but the regional *wilayat* (provinces)²¹ commanders setting their level of participation according to local conditions.²²

Offensive Operations in 2014

Surprise, mobility and shock are the principal characteristics of ISIL offensive operations in Iraq. The group often achieves tactical surprise, whether against the federal ISF or

Kurdish forces.²³ This is attained through rapid approach marches that utilize Iraq's dense, high-quality road network and often culminate in night or dawn attacks.²⁴ The relative compactness of Iraq, where good roads allow large swathes of the country to be traversed in a single day, gives an aggressive force strong ability to concentrate forces at a given point of attack. Mobility and deception allow ISIL forces to achieve local superiority in numbers despite their smaller strength in comparison to state armed forces,²⁵ with aggressive platoon-sized or company-sized²⁶ raiding columns defeating and dislodging successive ISF or Kurdish positions. Probes and feints appear to be common elements in ISIL offensives, often apparently intended to test opposition, bypass solid defenses, and draw away enemy forces from the main target.²⁷ ISIL columns have the mobility to rapidly exploit any thinning of enemy forces, as occurred recently when ISIL struck Jalula on August 10, 2014, a town that Kurdish special forces had previously left to meet an ISIL thrust elsewhere at Makhmour.²⁸ Lacking intelligence analysis skills, wide area surveillance capabilities, or local night vision aids, federal ISF and Kurdish forces are generally not aware of massing ISIL forces until it is too late.

Since the capture of significant stocks of ISF vehicles in June 2014, ISIL often attaches two to five wheeled armored vehicles to such columns for shock effect,²⁹ in some cases causing "tank fear"³⁰ when defending troops are of lower quality or lack anti-tank defenses. An early example of ISIL's

"When seeking to panic and dislodge enemy troops, ISIL almost always begins its local offensives with one or more mass casualty attacks on enemy headquarters and checkpoints."

armored warfare in Iraq was its July 24, 2014, vehicle-mounted raid on the State Company for Pharmaceutical Supplies, five miles behind Kurdish lines northeast of Mosul city. The assault involved several ISIL 4x4 pickup trucks with mounted 12.7mm machine guns and at least three armored vehicles³¹ looted from ISF bases in Mosul. The raid overran the thin peshmerga (Kurdish militiamen) checkpoint screen on Highway 2 and then continued to exploit behind peshmerga lines for an additional five miles after reaching the pharmaceutical factory—a total penetration of 10 miles.³²

ISIL has also employed artillery barrages, although only in a small number of cases (such as the August 3, 2014, attack on Zummar and Kisik, west of Mosul). When ISIL uses artillery, it typically uses single artillery pieces or small arrays of 57mm rocket artillery

Telegraph, July 9, 2014.

¹⁸ Personal interview, Aaron Zelin, August 16, 2014.

¹⁹ Jessica Lewis presciently noted that the ISI emerged from the campaign as "a military organization typified by its operational planning, as opposed to a disrupted and leader-centric terrorist organization." See Jessica Lewis, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part II," Institute for the Study of War, October 9, 2013.

²⁰ This is a U.S. military term. See Curtis E. LeMay, Center for Doctrine Development and Education, Volume I, Basic Doctrine, October 14, 2011, pp. 59-60.

²¹ ISIL's *wilayats* in Iraq currently include: Wilayat Ninawa; Wilayat Anbar; Wilayat Kirkuk; Wilayat Salah ad-Din; Wilayat Diyala; Wilayat Shamal Baghdad (north Baghdad); and the Wilayat Janub (south Baghdad and Jurf al-Sakhr). The author would like to thank Aymenn al-Tamimi for his generous assistance in supporting this article.

²² Accounting for such variations is the aim of Lewis, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part II." The messy character of some multi-city mass casualty waves is very familiar to the author from his own experiences monitoring the daily significant actions in Iraq from within a private security company. Some cells were largely independent, particularly in Anbar, while others consistently undertook attacks early or late.

²³ A good example of ISIL's use of tactical surprise is the attack on Samarra on June 5, 2014. See Kareem Fahim, "In Brazen Strike, Sunni Militants Storm Central Iraqi City," *New York Times*, June 5, 2014. Kurdish forces suffered debilitating tactical surprise at numerous points between August 1-II. See Pollack.

²⁴ One recent Tuz Khurmatu night attack is mentioned in ISW Iraq Team, Lauren Squires, and Nichole Dicharry, "Iraq Situation Report: August 13, 2014," Institute for the Study of War, August 21, 2014.

²⁵ A point made by Pollack.

²⁶ Most ISIL columns seem to comprise 10-30 vehicles, almost all of which are reliable soft-skinned utility vehicles, some carrying heavy machine-guns or anti-aircraft cannons. Tanks and tracked personnel carriers remain rarer, in part due to their lack of long-distance mobility. See personal interview, Alexandre Massimo, August 12, 2014.

²⁷ In retrospect, the opening shot of the June offensive, the Samarra attack, may have been a strategic feint to distract Iraqi government attention and resources, which it did. See Fahim.

²⁸ Personal interview, Kurdistan region security official, August 14, 2014.

²⁹ Personal interview, Alexandre Massimo, August 12, 2014.

³⁰ This is a phrase from the dawn of tank warfare in World War I to denote the dissolving effect on troop morale when soldiers face an armored vehicle that they believe they cannot damage. See David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 222.

³¹ These included at least one M117 Guardian armored security vehicle, one Dzik-3 infantry mobility vehicle, and one MT-LB tracked personnel carrier. See personal interview, Alexandre Massimo, August 12, 2014.

³² *Ibid*.

and mortars—neither of which are particularly effective.³³ On some occasions, heavy barrages have been recorded, notably at Zowiya (where a 500-round barrage was loosely estimated).³⁴

Instead, the heavy weapons most frequently employed by ISIL tend to be its traditional tools—the suicide or remote-detonated car bomb and the suicide vest.³⁵ When seeking to panic and dislodge enemy troops, ISIL almost always begins its local offensives with one or more mass casualty attacks on enemy headquarters and checkpoints. These storming tactics have been practiced and developed from the earliest days of the ISI's rebirth in 2010, when al-Baghdadi's first Ramadan offensive began on June 29, 2010, with the breaching of a police checkpoint in Adhamiyah, allowing the ISI to plant its flag in central Baghdad during daylight hours.³⁶ From the summer of 2011 onwards, these incidents became increasingly common and usually featured car bombs to create chaos and breach barriers, the attempted passage of suicide vest attackers and gunmen (often wearing security force uniforms) into the affected complexes, and hostage-taking to prolong the incident.³⁷

Although such opening gambits usually target one or two buildings with a small number of devices, these attacks are occasionally much larger. On August 11, 2014, ISIL launched an offensive into Jalula that commenced

with an armored vehicle suicide car bomb on a peshmerga headquarters, killing more than 20 peshmerga fighters, and a second tanker truck suicide device in the town center, followed by individual suicide vest bombings on 12 checkpoints by fighters wearing Kurdish-style uniforms.³⁸ Unsurprisingly, this onslaught shattered peshmerga morale and the town was lost.

ISIL also uses various types of exemplary violence, what Robert Scales and Douglas Ollivant termed “strategic killing,” to spook their military adversaries and drive out civilian

“In many defensive environments, ISIL may prefer to work in areas with few civilians, perhaps because of their accentuated fear of local uprisings and informers.”

populations.³⁹ During the initial ISIL advance in June, the movement used social media (i.e., mainly Twitter) to spread the word that ISIL columns would give no quarter to resisters but that security forces could register and repent to guarantee their safety.⁴⁰ Exemplary killings of around 100 security force members were conducted at Tikrit on June 11, 2014, and they were widely publicized.⁴¹ ISIL has also prosecuted a determined campaign of ethno-sectarian cleansing in areas that

33 Personal interview, Kurdistan region security official, August 14, 2014.

33 Personal interview, Kurdistan region security official, August 14, 2014.

34 Mohammed al-Dulaimy and Hannah Allam, “Witnesses Describe How Islamists Leveled Sunni Village as a Warning,” McClatchy Newspapers, July 11, 2014.

35 ISIL has significant numbers of suicide operators and car bombs to utilize in such attacks. Due largely to the influx of foreign fighters attracted by the Syrian jihad, suicide operations have risen from an average of six per month in Iraq in 2010 to an average of 43 in 2013. Car bombings rose from 10 per month in 2010 to 71 per month in 2013. See Michael Knights, “The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq,” testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, December 12, 2013. For the full testimony, see www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/KnightsTestimony20131212.pdf.

36 Government reinforcements were targeted with a series of roadside bombs. The attack, in which 23 security personnel were killed, generated widespread publicity. See Knights, “Back with a Vengeance,” p. 3.

37 Ibid.

38 Personal interview, Alexandre Massimo, August 12, 2014.

39 Scales and Ollivant, “Terrorist Armies Fight Smarter and Deadlier Than Ever.”

40 McGurk stated: “The fall of Iraq's second largest city to ISIL was combined with a social media campaign indicating that ISIL columns would soon be heading down the Tigris River Valley to Baghdad with no mercy for anyone who resisted.” See McGurk, July 23, 2014.

41 Sarah Leah Whitson, “Iraq: ISIS Abducting, Killing, Expelling Minorities: Armed Group Targeting Christian Nuns, Turkmen, Shabaks, Yazidis,” Human Rights Watch, July 19, 2014. Massacre videos were also released at the close of the Soldier's Harvest campaign on July 30, 2014. See Damien McElroy, “Islamic State Jihadists Issue 30-Minute Killing Spree on Video,” *Daily Telegraph*, July 30, 2014.

it controls, removing Shi'a Turkmen, Yazidis, Shabaks, Christians and even Sunni Muslim Kurds from its new territories. Most communities have been warned to leave, then targeted with progressive levels of violence including large-scale kidnap-murder sprees and car bombings that escalate over a two to three week period.⁴² ISIL is also purposefully blocking the flow of water and electricity to areas where minorities have been purged, apparently to deter resettlement of these areas.⁴³

ISIL's Defensive Capabilities

For an organization that has benefited so greatly from exploiting mobility, the defense of fixed terrain presents a challenge. As J.M. Berger explained, “the calculus of holding territory has now changed. Prior to the pronouncement [of the caliphate], [ISIL] could have fallen back to its previous domain along the border of Iraq and Syria with little loss of face.”⁴⁴ Now, as Jessica Lewis added in a separate article, “to validate its statecraft, [ISIL] must further demonstrate that its physical stronghold is defensible, or at least prevent rival militaries from attacking it.”⁴⁵ As a prior *CTC Sentinel* piece argued, ISIL has “the tiger by the tail” now that its urban strongholds have to be defended.⁴⁶ Yet in

42 To give examples from the Shi'a Shabak community east of Mosul, ISIL started its campaign with a double suicide car bombing in the Shabak town of Khuzna Tappah area on June 6, the opening day of the Mosul uprising, followed by another suicide car bombing in Khuzna Tappah on June 26. In Bazwayah, a Shabak town of 3,500 residents, 105 people were abducted between June 10 and July 18. An ISIL force of 60 vehicles entered the Shabak town of Umarkan on July 2, burned down the local Shi'a shrine and a partially constructed mosque, and also confiscated cars, weapons and more than 100 head of cattle. All 250 Shi'a Shabak families in the village fled immediately. All material garnered from open source news reporting. A good collation of new reporting and first-hand views can be found in Whitson.

43 ISIL has cut off the water supplies to numerous minority villages in the Ninawa Plains by controlling the Salamiyya and Rashidiyya pumping stations on the Tigris River, and has done so in the siege of Amerli also. ISIL also prevents gridded power from reaching minority villages. See Whitson. Also see Michael Knights, “Iraq's City of Orphans,” *Foreign Policy*, August 14, 2014.

44 J.M. Berger, “Gambling on the Caliphate,” *Intelwire* blog, June 29, 2014.

45 Lewis, “The Islamic State: A Counter-Strategy for a Counter-State,” p. 11.

46 Michael Knights, “The ISIL's Stand in the Ramadi-

the face of weak initial counterattacks by the ISF, ISIL has shown itself to be fairly adept at defense, revealing some of the most interesting aspects of its recent military evolution into a hybrid army.

ISIL's defensive playbook starts with the energetic consolidation of a defensive "crust" on the outer edges of newly-occupied areas in places where an ISF or Kurdish counterattack could be expected. ISIL has used its rough-and-ready field engineering skills to quickly create extensive earth berms and ditches mirroring the enemy's own hastily-erected frontier defenses.⁴⁷ After capturing Jalula on August 11, ISIL bulldozers immediately blocked key counterattack routes that the Kurds might use, emplacing numerous roadside bombs along these arteries.⁴⁸ They further created a denied flank on the Diyala River by destroying the Jalula-Kalar road bridge, a common ISIL tactic to shape local geography to impede counterattacks or reinforcement by enemy forces.⁴⁹ Flooding of lowlands is another known tactic for denying terrain to the ISF.⁵⁰ Small numbers of well-sited heavy weapons are deployed, with anti-armor defense augmented with single hull-down T-55 or T-62 tanks, recoilless rifles, shoulder-fired anti-tank weapons, and, less frequently, guided anti-tank missiles.⁵¹ Extensive

booby-trapping is undertaken in locations that are considered likely to be retaken by security forces.⁵²

ISIL's engagement with local stakeholders and militants is perhaps the most critical aspect of its defensive arrangements. Following the defeat of al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the ISI by the Sahwa (Awakening forces), ISIL may recognize that local populations are as great a threat to its holdings as any external adversary. As noted previously, ISIL seeks to drive out any non-Sunni, non-Arab populations from its areas. This seems to be driven by ideological justifications and by more venal considerations (such as widespread looting of villages and ransoming of kidnap victims),⁵³ but such purges also have the effect of creating depopulated zones. In many defensive environments, from the largely emptied Falluja city to new gains such as Suleiman Beg, ISIL may prefer to work in areas with few civilians, perhaps because of their accentuated fear of local uprisings and informers.⁵⁴

Where populations are present, ISIL is keen to overawe them and create a collaborative framework for the defense of such areas. As Iraq insurgency expert Aymenn al-Tamimi noted, ISIL raiders quickly raise their banners over key administrative and security headquarters and other landmarks to

generate and disseminate images that compound the sense that they control areas.⁵⁵ The movement issues basic instructions via billboards, leaflets and speakerphone or mosque speakers.⁵⁶ In most places, ISIL does not issue—or at least does not police—the extensive Shari`a law city charters that it has introduced in its heartland cities, Raqqa and Mosul.⁵⁷ Instead, its interactions are practical and focused on regime security: former ISF must register themselves and repent, commencing an evaluation process whereby such individuals may be recruited, taken as hostages or killed. ISIL usually already has some background in the area after years of studying and interacting with local communities, so its regime security measures are often well-informed.

As well as receiving individual pledges of allegiance, ISIL frequently absorbs whole networks of militants into its ranks in what might be termed as a mergers and acquisitions approach, with like-minded Salafist groups like Jamaat Ansar al-Islam being the simplest to convert.⁵⁸ Existing Salafist groups, along with General Military Council forces associated with Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN) and other militants, contribute the core defensive manpower in ISIL-dominated areas.⁵⁹ ISIL is adept at aligning with tribal needs, such as by plugging into the anti-Kurdish sentiments of Arab tribes around Jalula or allowing Arab tribes to harvest the ripe wheat fields of displaced Shi`a Turkmen farmers at Amerli.⁶⁰ As Aymenn al-Tamimi explained, in time these allied groups become more and more closely aligned with ISIL, transitioning from "backing the winning horse" to deeper ideological

Falluja Corridor," *CTC Sentinel* 7:5 (2014).

47 Isabel Coles, "Purge of Minorities Re-draws Iraq Map," Reuters, July 24, 2014.

48 "Peshmarga Mobilize to Restore Jalawla and 'ISIL' Detained a Local Official," Shafaaq News, August 12, 2014. The United States used airpower to destroy a number of "IED emplacement belts" around Mosul Dam on August 16-18, 2014. See one of these operations referenced at "U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near the Mosul Dam," U.S. Central Command, August 18, 2014.

49 In general, bridge demolition has been a widespread part of ISIL's tactical repertoire. See "ISIL Destroys 63 Bridges in Iraq This Year," al-Shorfa, August 7, 2014.

50 For commentary on Falluja's regulating dam, see Knights, "The ISIL's Stand in the Ramadi-Falluja Corridor."

51 For a sample of the kind of light anti-tank weapons reaching Iraq, see "ISIS Deploys Croatian Weapons Against The Iraqi Army," Brown Moses Blog, March 8, 2014. The entry shows RBG-6 grenade launchers, M60 and SPG-9 recoilless rifles, as well as RPG-22 rocket and M79 Osa launchers. For information on guided missiles, see Charles Lister's August 9, 2014, tweet, "ISIS ATGM

use is increasing in #Iraq."

52 ISIL uses unmanned car bombs, bicycle bombs and explosives-rigged houses. See Ruth Sherlock and Carol Malouf, "Islamic State Booby Traps Massive Iraqi Dam Which Could Kill Thousands if Breached," *Daily Telegraph*, August 18, 2014.

53 Personal interview, Yazidi civilian, August 12, 2014. Also see Whitson. There are widespread scattered references in most ISIL ethnic cleansing stories to ways that ISIL members make money at the sidelines of militant operations, through kidnap, looting, cattle rustling and bribery. As such, fighters appear to be poorly paid—just \$41 per month compared to \$150 for a laborer, according to RAND's Patrick B. Johnston—they have significant incentive to moonlight in this manner. See Johnston quoted in Al-Dulaimy and Allam.

54 Although there are numerous rumors of human shields being present at ISIL locations, these persons, if they exist, do not seem to deter Iraqi fliers from undertaking strikes. That could change if U.S. airstrikes continue to intensify and human shields become more useful. For an example, see "ISIS Prevents Saadia Residents from Leaving and Uses Them as Human Shields Against Air Strikes," Shafaaq News, August 7, 2014.

55 "Update On Iraq's Insurgency: Interview With Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi," Musings on Iraq blog, July 1, 2014.

56 Ibid.

57 Personal interview, Kurdistan journalist, August 17, 2014.

58 Personal interview, Aymenn al-Tamimi, August 12, 2014.

59 In Falluja, the author has a full seven months of case study material showing how ISIL starts gently, but steadily degrades rival groups with which it has partnered, in this case Hamas al-Iraq. See Knights, "The ISIL's Stand in the Ramadi-Falluja Corridor."

60 Personal interview, Kurdish official from Tuz district, August 15, 2014.

radicalization, adding that “the longer they put off breaking with [ISIL], the more difficult it will become.”⁶¹ Where tribal groups have stood up to ISIL, they have prompted an extremely aggressive reaction, most notoriously at Zowiya (located at the junction of the Tigris and Lesser Zab rivers), where a tribal revolt was brutally put down with the aid of unusually sustained mortar fire and rampaging ISIL troops on July 7, 2014.⁶²

When ISF or Kurdish forces attack areas that ISIL has claimed, the movement has been quick to support the locals with specialized capabilities. Experienced ISIL anti-armor teams have achieved some spectacular results when tank-stalking. For instance, in Humayrah, near Ramadi, an Iraqi Army probe was decimated on April

“The enfeebled state of the ISF has magnified ISIL’s reputation and confidence, temporarily masking its own weaknesses and vulnerabilities.”

20, 2014, with the loss of an entire mixed platoon of T-62 tanks and MTLB armored vehicles.⁶³ In Tikrit, ISIL led a spectacular series of ambushes and suicide bombings against hasty and ill-conceived efforts by the Iraqi Army to take the town on July 16, 2014.⁶⁴ At Jalula, ISIL has been fighting a gritty street-by-street battle against Kurdish special forces, armor and artillery, and ISIL led the powerful local counterattacks that restored all the lost neighborhoods to insurgent control on August 11, 2014.⁶⁵ An August 8 effort to relieve the besieged

town of Amerli was stopped dead by a single well-positioned ISIL-crewed T-55 tank, which shot up a convoy of 250 Shi`a militiamen mounted in utility vehicles.⁶⁶

ISIL’s Key Traits and Vulnerabilities

Although ISIL has undoubtedly done much to shape its own operational environment, it has nonetheless been lucky to face ill-prepared opponents in Iraq. The enfeebled state of the ISF has magnified ISIL’s reputation and confidence, temporarily masking its own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. ISIL is still riding a wave of military successes, but its opponents are recovering and drawing upon increasing international support. Its offensive power has tended to diminish as it approaches majority Shi`a or Kurdish-populated areas.⁶⁷ Momentum has tremendous value in war, but it is fragile, and ISIL may be forced to gradually surrender the strategic initiative in Iraq, as it has done on individual Iraqi battlefields such as Kirkuk, which held against ISIL thrusts in mid-June,⁶⁸ and Makhmour, which was retaken from ISIL on August 10.⁶⁹ The group’s leadership is clearly comprised of talented deliberate planners, capable of crafting far-sighted political-military campaigns that are resilient enough to survive the deaths of their progenitors.⁷⁰ Yet the pace of the war against ISIL is accelerating, and the group’s ability to continually shape and control the conflict will be sorely tested. Although they may boast a deep bench of talented individuals following years

of prisoner releases, prison breaks and recruitment, leadership casualties will nonetheless complicate their ability to hold the initiative in the future.

Mobility and surprise have allowed ISIL to punch well above its weight in offensive operations, but these advantages may also be diminishing. If U.S. military support for Iraq increases, it will become more difficult for ISIL to achieve tactical surprise using vehicle-mounted raiding forces. Already the distinctive signature of such attacks

“Yet the pace of the war against ISIL is accelerating, and the group’s ability to continually shape and control the conflict will be sorely tested.”

has wrought disaster for ISIL attacks. In Tuz Khurmatu, for example, ISIL convoys sought to penetrate the city using night movements on August 9 and August 13, but were detected by the U.S. military, which provided Kurdish artillery with the coordinates required to blunt the attacks.⁷¹ Many islands of government or Kurdish control are being consolidated as launch-pads for future operations under the watchful gaze of U.S. intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets.⁷² ISIL will undoubtedly try to retain the initiative with strategic gambits, but attacking is becoming harder for the movement. This may cause it to fall back on older approaches such as the largely dismantled storming attacks and suicide vest operations used in Jalula on August 11 and in other “commuter insurgencies” such as Ramadi and Baghdad.⁷³

61 Personal interview, Aymenn al-Tamimi, August 12, 2014.

62 Al-Dulaimy and Allam.

63 Knights, “The ISIL’s Stand in the Ramadi-Falluja Corridor.”

64 Alissa Rubin and Suadad al-Salhy, “For Iraq, Debacle in Tikrit as Forces Walk Into Trap Set by Militants,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2014.

65 “20 Peshmerga Killed and Wounded in Suicide Attack in Jalawla, Diyala Province,” NINA Agency, August 11, 2014.

66 Knights, “Iraq’s City of Orphans.”

67 Pollack.

68 Isabel Coles, “On Edge of Kirkuk, Peshmerga Prepare to Fight Again for Kurdistan,” Reuters, June 19, 2014. The Kurds fought hard near Mullah Abdulla power station to prevent an ISIL exploitation toward Kirkuk city.

69 “Iraqi Kurds Retake 2 Towns from Militants, Helped by U.S. Airstrikes,” CBS News, August 10, 2014. Large numbers of other articles cite examples from Zummar, Mosul Dam, and the Ninawa Plains. For a selection, see Jessica Lewis, Lauren Squires, and Nichole Dicharry’s reporting from August 13-17, 2014, at www.iswiraq.blogspot.com.

70 For commentary on the May 2014 death of Abdul Rahman al-Bilawi, al-Baghdadi’s military chief of staff for Iraq, see Sherlock. ISIL’s senior military commander, Haji Bakr, was likewise killed in northern Syria in early January 2014. See Bill Roggio, “ISIS Confirms Death of Senior Leader in Syria,” *The Long War Journal*, February 5, 2014.

71 Personal interview, Kurdish official from Tuz district, August 15, 2014.

72 These include the Baiji oil refinery and numerous facilities at Haditha; the Iraqi base at Tikrit air base (the old Forward Operating Base Speicher); areas of Sinjar and Mosul; and key government and air transportation sites in Baghdad.

73 The “commuter insurgency” refers to an urban fight in which insurgents travel in each day, like suburban commuters, from support zones on the outskirts. Coined by U.S. forces in Iraq, the concept is explained further in

Defense may also become harder for the group as the ISF and Kurdish forces escalate their offensive operations. Drawing together the views of various experts, ISIL seems to have a Tigris valley-based offensive strike force (visible at Mosul, Tall Afar, and Tikrit) plus ancillary strike forces in the western Euphrates valley bordering Syria and another around Jalula and adjacent parts of the Hamrin mountain range. Yet these mobile elements are probably small, numbering less than 3,000 fighters, while the majority of ISIL's defensive manpower, tied to specific areas, is made up of new recruits and allied movements.⁷⁴ Although ISIL has momentum and these allies seem solidly behind the group, if the military tide begins to turn, particularly whilst the cement is still setting on ISIL's relationships, there could be a dramatic reduction in the group's effective strength. Already ISIL is being forced to relinquish multiple towns—Makhmour, Saadiyya, Muqdadiyah, Zummar, Bashiqa, Bartella, Qara Qosh—and the pace of operations is accelerating.⁷⁵ If the ISF and Kurdish forces undertake selective offensive operations on a widening number of battlefields, the ISIL-led defense will undoubtedly become stretched, particularly if its ability to move and mass counterattacking forces is limited. ISIL could morph back into rural insurgents operating largely outside the cities once again.

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David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 142.

⁷⁴ See aforementioned conversations with Aymenn al-Tamimi and Aaron Zelin, plus the views of Dr. Hisham al-Hashimi, via Sherlock.

⁷⁵ For a selection, see Jessica Lewis, Lauren Squires, and Nichole Dicharry's reporting from August 13-17, 2014 at www.iswiraq.blogspot.com.

A Deeper Look at Syria-Related Jihadist Activity in Turkey

By Stephen Starr

TURKEY IS UNIQUE in its decision to permit foreign and opposition fighters to traverse its southern border to the Syrian battlefield. As early as June 2011, Turkey allowed refugees into its territory, including civilians who quickly turned to violent methods to combat Syrian government forces in northern Syria.¹ Within months of the outbreak of the Syrian revolt in March 2011, the Justice and Development Party (AKP)-led Turkish government called for the end of the rule of President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.²

Almost three years later, the wheel has come full circle and Turkey itself has become a source of legions of militants—increasingly fundamentalist and sectarian in ideology—seeking to fight in the combat zones of Syria and Iraq against domestic government forces.³ Although still a small fraction of the overall foreign fighting force now in Syria,⁴ a growing number of Turkish citizens are electing to travel to Syria to fight against the al-Assad regime. Some support the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, an entity that has become de facto ever since jihadists from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) declared one in June 2014.⁵

This article looks at the motives of Turkish nationals who travel to Syria to fight against government forces. Based on interviews with a would-be Turkish combatant and an individual familiar with the actions and insights of Turkish

jihadist fighters, this article finds that Istanbul is an important meeting and transfer hub and that Turkish fighters and Islamic fundamentalists regularly come into contact with foreign fighters before traveling south to fight in Syria and Iraq. It describes a selection of Turkish fighters known to have fought among opposition groups and outlines the Turkish government's position on the movement of fighters to and from Syria.⁶

Recruitment of Turkish Fighters

Better known as a transit country for foreign fighters seeking to travel to Syria, Turkey is increasingly becoming a source of fundamentalist fighters. A Turkish newspaper reported in June 2014 that, according to the families of fighters, 163 Turks have joined ISIL and are believed to be fighting in Syria.⁷ Other reports, based on Turkish intelligence data, claim that the figure is far higher, with close to 600-700 Turks joining ISIL.⁸ The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation estimated that between 63 and 500 Turkish fighters were operating in Syria out of an estimated 11,000 total foreign fighter contingent as of December 2013.⁹ More recent assessments suggest similar figures.

Young men in areas close to the Syrian border are particularly susceptible to recruitment and indoctrination. A 27-year-old Turkish man claimed that ISIL offered payments of \$100-\$200 per month to fight in Syria.¹⁰ In May 2014, for example, a 14-year-old boy from Ankara and five friends left Turkey to join ISIL fighters in Syria. A month later, he was found at a Syrian border crossing with serious injuries sustained

⁶ This article does not discuss the role of nationalist Kurdish fighters of Turkish citizenship fighting in Syria, nor does it discuss Turkish nationals fighting on the side of the al-Assad regime. For more details on this, see Stephen Starr, "The Renewed Threat of Terrorism to Turkey," *CTC Sentinel* 6:6 (2013).

⁷ Fevzi Kizilkoyon, "Families Say 163 Turkish Citizens Have Joined ISIL," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 27, 2014.

⁸ "Report: Around 700 Turks Joined ISIL," *Today's Zaman*, June 27, 2014.

⁹ "ICSR Insight: Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise Among Western Europeans," The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, December 17, 2013.

¹⁰ "Cihada' giden Turkler konustu," *Gercek Gundem*, July 10, 2014.

¹ Martin Chulov, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: 'People See the Regime is Lying. It is Falling Apart,'" *Guardian*, June 9, 2011.

² Sebnem Arsu, "Turkish Premier Urges Assad to Quit," *New York Times*, November 22, 2011.

³ Jamie Dettner, "Growing Unease Over Turkish Jihadists in Syria," *Voice of America*, October 8, 2013.

⁴ According to Reuters, "U.S. intelligence agencies estimate around 7,000 of the 23,000 violent extremists operating in Syria are foreign fighters, mostly from Europe." See Timothy Gardner, "U.S. Concerned Foreign Fighters in Syria are Working with Yemenis," *Reuters*, July 13, 2014.

⁵ "Sunni Rebels Declare New 'Islamic Caliphate,'" *aljazeera*, June 30, 2014.

while fighting.¹¹ Recruitment centers are believed to exist in provinces across Turkey's southeast.¹²

Radical Turks are thought to have recruited more than 200 local men in Adiyaman, a city of 217,000 people.¹³ Adiyaman is considered one of the largest suppliers of Turkish jihadist fighters in Syria¹⁴ and is located 85 miles from the Syrian border and 130 miles from the important transit border

“The recruitment of Turks has been recognized by Turkish authorities as a serious concern.”

town of Kilis. The province of Adiyaman is home to a refugee camp with a population of around 10,000 Syrians.¹⁵ Thousands more Syrians are thought to live in private accommodation across Adiyaman and neighboring provinces that border Syria.¹⁶ “Nobody tells these people to go and fight [in Syria],” an alleged recruiter told Reuters in November 2013. “Most of them meet up in groups of three or five people and make their own decisions to go.”¹⁷

The recruitment of Turks has been recognized by Turkish authorities as a serious concern.¹⁸ According to Israel's military intelligence chief in January 2014, al-Qa`ida-linked groups allegedly have at least three bases in Turkey.¹⁹ A report in *al-Monitor* suggested that, prior to 2013, alleged fighters were thought to stay at specific hotels, such as the Ottoman and Narin hotels, in

the Turkish city of Antakya.²⁰ In July 2012, a six-minute video titled *Turkish Mujahidin Who Are Conducting Jihad in Syria*, released by a Syrian opposition organization, showed a group of fighters apparently located in Syria speaking in Turkish and calling for Muslims to fight Syrian government forces.²¹

One foreign fighter is known as “Yilmaz,” a Dutch-Turkish former soldier providing firearms training to jihadists.²² In an interview with Dutch television, he said that he conducted military service in Turkey and had been in Syria for two years fighting in a “freelance” capacity.²³

As collated by Jihadology.net, other Turkish fighters included: Ahmet Zorlu (also known as Abdullah Azzam the Turk) from Yalova, a town 105 miles south of Istanbul; Abudrrahman Koc from Adiyaman; Yakup Senates from Siverek; and Metin Ekinci from Bingol Province.²⁴ All four fighters are now deceased.

Other incidents relating to Turkish involvement in the Syrian conflict include the September 2013 indictment in Turkey of five Turkish nationals for intent to produce Sarin gas.²⁵ A Syrian man was also charged. Turkish intelligence services believe that they were trying to procure Sarin for Jabhat al-Nusra or Ahrar al-Sham, two militant groups active in Syria. At this time, intent for the attacks is unknown, as all parties involved have pleaded innocence.

20 Several of the hotels allegedly used are identified in Fehim Tastekin, “Radical Groups Operate on Turkey's Border,” *al-Monitor*, October 17, 2013.

21 Karen Hodgson and Bill Roggio, “Omar Farouk Brigade Calls on Muslims to Wage Jihad in Syria,” *The Long War Journal*, July 22, 2012.

22 “Dutch Former Royal Netherlands Army Soldier Trains Jihadists in Syria,” *Nieuwsuur*, January 27, 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWua3exa6rw#t=15.

23 “Sayfullakh's Jamaat Deny Dutch Fighter's Defection to ISIS,” From Chechnya to Syria blog, May 19, 2014.

24 “Turkish Fighters in Syria, Online and Off,” *Jihadology*, August 20, 2013.

25 Patrick J. McDonnell, “Syrian Rebel Groups Sought Sarin Gas Material, Turkish Prosecutors Say,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2013.

Motivations for Turks to Fight in Syria

Young Turkish men who come into contact with Turkey-based Syrian activists are often influenced by the latter's humanitarian work and experience in what some believe as a just Muslim war.

One such individual is Emrah, a 27-year-old man from the conservative district of Fatih in central Istanbul. He said he is not from a particularly religious family and that at university he started reading Islamic history and found that “Turkey shared much of its

“Jihadist activity in Turkey is not contained to the border region with Syria.”

history with other Muslims countries. Muslim countries are all of one body with different organs.”²⁶ He said the history taught by secular Turkish institutions established during the 20th century portrayed other Muslim countries as backward peoples that backstabbed Turkey.

Emrah said that he started compulsory military service just as the Arab revolutions were occurring in early 2011. He explained that by the time these uprisings concluded, it was becoming increasingly clear that the al-Assad regime was killing thousands of Sunni Muslim civilians. He read a book about the uprising by Syrian activist Samar Yazbek²⁷ two years ago and as a result saw a new reality. He blamed the Turkish opposition media for presenting the “wrong picture” on Syria and said that the AKP's position—support for the political and rebel opposition—was justified.

26 Personal interview, Emrah, Istanbul, Turkey, July 5, 2014. The interviewee was contacted and introduced through a Syrian activist based in Istanbul and known to the author for more than a year. The interviewee was selected because of his willingness to discuss details about his motivations for wanting to fight in Syria but not already having done so. The research value in this lies in that the interviewee presents his motivational perspective while not having been affected by the strains of combat.

27 Samar Yazbek, *A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution* (London: Haus Publishing, 2012).

11 “14-year-old Turkish ISIL Militant Found by Soldiers Near Syrian Border,” *Today's Zaman*, June 26, 2014.

12 Idris Emen, “Adiyaman – Suriye cihat hattı,” *Radikal*, September 29, 2013.

13 Ibid.; Constanze Letsch, “The Sons Feared Lost to al-Qaida in Syria,” *Guardian*, November 11, 2013.

14 Emen.

15 “UNHCR Turkey Syrian Refugee Daily Sitrep,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, July 10, 2014.

16 Ibid.

17 Daren Butler, “Turks Worry as Sons Go to Fight in Syria,” Reuters, November 26, 2013.

18 “Deputy Arinc Laments Turkish Youth Joining Radicals in Middle East,” *Today's Zaman*, July 6, 2014.

19 Dan Williams, “Israeli General Says al Qaeda's Syria Fighters Set Up in Turkey,” Reuters, January 29, 2014.

Around that time, Emrah met a Turkish friend who had been deported from Syria in 2010 where he studied Islamic studies at a mosque in Damascus. The man is now an imam in Istanbul, and he educated Emrah about how the al-Assad regime has repressed the Syrian people for decades. Emrah said that he and the imam continue to meet regularly to talk about issues related to Syria.

Emrah claimed to know around 10 Turkish people who have gone to Syria to fight the regime, all of whom are from Istanbul. As Muslims, he said both he and his fighting friends, or “mujahidin,”²⁸ in Syria “feel responsible to help Syrians being killed for no reason.”

He went to Syria in December 2012 after Syrian activist friends smuggled he and seven Turkish friends across the border at Kilis. At that time, he said, Turkish police lightly guarded the border, which is in contrast to the level of vigilance that exists now. He stayed for six days, witnessing, he claimed, the devastation of towns and villages as well as traveling to the frontlines as an observer. He himself did not engage in any fighting. He said he saw young boys suffer horrific injuries fighting against a much stronger Syrian national army. He has plans to go back to Syria, but this time to fight the regime.

“When I planned to go to Syria, first I wanted to go to the battlefields,” he said. “I wanted to know what it feels like.”²⁹ He did not say which group he would likely fight with, but feels “deep inside I want to pick up a gun and go fight the regime.”³⁰

Jihadist Activity in Istanbul

Jihadist activity in Turkey is not contained to the border region with Syria. Osman,³¹ who runs an internet café in the basement of a building in a district of Istanbul,³² said he knows

at least 10 Turkish citizens who are fighting for the al-Qa`ida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, some of whom are his friends. All are from Istanbul and all work in the same district. The following is a revealing excerpt from an exclusive interview with Osman in July 2014:

One of the Nusra fighters, Abuzer, a 28-year-old Kurd from Istanbul, was killed by a Syrian government mortar when attacking the Aleppo central prison two weeks ago. Two months ago Abuzer went to a meeting with ISIS [ISIL] in Diyarbakir to discuss problems between the two groups. (Meetings were generally held in Diyarbakir and Gaziantep.) There are around 500 Turkish men fighting with Jabhat al-Nusra, but more are leaving to join ISIS as they are deemed more successful following the Iraq offensive. Foreign fighters stay exactly a week at the safe house in Istanbul before taking a bus south to the Syria border. Once they crossed close to Antakya, the capital of Hatay Province, they are trained by Nusra for six months before they see combat. I’ve met four Germans who were later killed in Aleppo on their second day in Syria in a mortar attack, as well as one Kurd from America and two Muslim UK citizens. When they [the foreign and local fighters] come to the café they tell me to turn off the music (which I do), and they watch videos of combat in Syria. During the World Cup, I saw four British guys at the café. The jihadists meet and pray in the basement of an apartment near the Konyali mosque in Istanbul. They don’t pray at a mosque as they say it’s not a real mosque and that Turkey is not a real Muslim country because it is too liberal. The basement apartment used to be owned by an Afghani man who I haven’t seen for two years.

Since ISIS went into Iraq [in June 2014], many of these men have gone underground and haven’t been to the café, or seen sitting and drinking tea on the street, as they used to do at around 10 o’clock every night. I and other

local shopkeepers give money to the Turkish fighters to support their religious war in Syria. My friends fighting for Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria regularly send me videos of attacks on Syrian government targets in order to attach logos to the videos. This is important. They are able to send me the videos as they access e-mail via satellite phones. They [the Jabhat al-Nusra fighters] are against America more than they are against Bashar al-Assad. They think Bashar is the first step and talk about taking over Lebanon and Jordan next.

The jihadists do not smoke or drink alcohol, their apartment has many religious texts, they shave their heads and wear large beards with shaved upper lip in the style of Salafis. They break their Ramadan fast every evening 30 minutes later than local people to affirm the strength of their faith. A group of foreign Islamic students live in another nearby apartment.³³

Osman introduced this author to a neighboring shop owner who, Osman claimed, also supports the locally-based fighters with funds. According to Osman, his friends in Turkey’s police force are well aware of the activities of the above-mentioned individuals, but face little compulsion from their superiors to take action. In recent months, further reports of Istanbul-based Turks fighting with ISIL have emerged.³⁴

AKP Rhetoric

In contrast to past Turkish governments, the AKP has embraced the country’s and the wider region’s Islamic values and identities since coming to power in 2002. State and pro-government media focus on Muslims being targeted in Egypt,³⁵ Gaza and Syria, firmly portraying the suffering and victimization experienced by Muslims across the region.

²⁸ The interview subject used this word to describe his friends.

²⁹ Personal interview, Emrah, Istanbul, Turkey, July 5, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Osman asked not to be fully identified because he fears reprisals from jihadists for giving information to a foreign journalist.

³² For a map of the district, see www.goo.gl/maps/7BGS9.

[maps/7BGS9](http://www.goo.gl/maps/7BGS9).

³³ Personal interview, “Osman,” Istanbul, Turkey, July 15, 2014.

³⁴ Hasnain Kazim, “Dschihadisten aus der Türkei: Verführung zum ‘Heiligen Krieg,’” *Der Spiegel*, July 10, 2014.

³⁵ “Turkish Denounce Egyptian Injustice,” *Daily Sabab*, April 11, 2014.

A wave of laws—including restrictions on the sale of alcohol,³⁶ partially lifting the ban against wearing the *hijab* for state employees³⁷ and the prime minister's criticism of co-ed schools³⁸—have given many religious

“Jihadist blowback may already be taking shape in Istanbul.”

Turks the confidence to publicly assert their religiosity, a right denied for decades under the country's strictly secular military rule.³⁹

Turkey's president-elect Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called Bashar al-Assad a “terrorist”⁴⁰ in his public speeches, while Turkey has supported the Syrian opposition more effusively than any other government in the world.⁴¹ This has led to allegations that Ankara has supported jihadist groups, in particular Jabhat al-Nusra. Turkish police, for example, uncovered a truck suspected of carrying weapons to Syria in Adana in November 2013,⁴² but the governor of Hatay Province prevented police from searching the vehicle, which elicited further suspicion of Ankara's covert involvement in the Syrian conflict.⁴³

36 Gunes Komurculer, “Restrictions on Alcohol Sales Go into Effect Today in Turkey,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 9, 2013.

37 “Turkey Lifts Headscarf Ban, Discontinues National Oath,” *France 24*, October 31, 2013.

38 Piotr Zalewski, “Turkey's Erdogan Battles Country's Most Powerful Religious Movement,” *Time Magazine*, December 4, 2013.

39 Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred Stepan eds., *Democracy, Islam and Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

40 “Turkey's Erdogan Says Syria's Assad is a Terrorist, Not a Politician,” *Jerusalem Post*, July 10, 2013.

41 Erin Banco, “Why Turkey is Essential for the Syrian Opposition,” *The Atlantic*, May 30, 2013. Turkey's support of the opposition is ideological but is more pressingly anchored in the realm of security. It shares a 560-mile border with Syria and in May 2013 suffered its worst ever terrorist attack when 53 people were killed in a double car bombing in Reyhanli, a town on the Turkish-Syrian border. Individuals with links to the Syrian government in Damascus are thought to have been involved in that attack. For more details, see Starr.

42 “Rockets and Bombs Seized en Route to Terrorists,” *Aydinlik Daily*, November 8, 2013.

43 Fevzi Kizilkoyun, “Turkish Governor Blocks Police

The Turkish government said the truck was carrying aid to Syria. The taking of a strategic border point in Turkey's Hatay Province by Jabhat al-Nusra fighters in March 2014 was viewed as having occurred with the direct acquiescence of Ankara, as rebels attacked and overran the Syrian border point from Turkish territory.⁴⁴ In May 2013, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu even said that the U.S. decision to declare Jabhat al-Nusra “a terrorist organization has resulted in more harm than good.”⁴⁵

Yet by April 2014, Turkish authorities began building a portable wall close to Reyhanli to stop illegal cross-border activity.⁴⁶ In June, the Turkish government listed Jabhat al-Nusra a terrorist organization, indicating increased pressure from the United States and a recognition that its alleged support of the group had run its course.⁴⁷ The government said it would be cracking down on foreign jihadists entering Turkey en route to Syria. “How could we understand that some tourists from Europe are jihadists...it is not written on their foreheads,” said a Turkish security official in June. “Now, since we have an intelligence flow from European countries, we are able to stop them [foreign fighters] at our gates and send them back.”⁴⁸

A spokesman for Turkey's Foreign Ministry acknowledged that Turkish citizens have joined ISIL, but maintained Turkey's opposition to the actions of Jabhat al-Nusra and other extremist groups, pointing to the speeches of Erdogan and other government figures.⁴⁹ Since 2011, Turkey has banned around 5,300 people suspected of entering Syria to join the civil war and deported more than 824

Search on Syria-Bound Truck Reportedly Carrying Weapons,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 2, 2014.

44 Ruth Sherlock, “Turkey ‘Aided Islamist Fighters’ in Attack on Syrian Town,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 14, 2014.

45 Semih Idiz, “Why is Jabhat al-Nusra No Longer Useful to Turkey?” *al-Monitor*, June 10, 2014.

46 “Turkey Builds Portable Wall on Syrian Border,” *Today's Zaman*, April 27, 2014.

47 “Turkey Lists al-Nusra Front as Terrorist Organization,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 3, 2014.

48 Murat Yetkin, “Syria's Foreign Fighters in Turkey's Target, Too,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 7, 2014.

49 Personal interview, Tanju Biglic, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman, July 16, 2014.

foreigners believed to have links with terrorist groups.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Although Western governments have highlighted the threat of radical fighters returning home after stints in Syria,⁵¹ Turkey is the perfect location for the fueling of Islamic extremism in the years to come. The Islamist-tinged rhetoric adopted by president-elect Erdogan vis-à-vis Syria and the mistreatment of Muslims elsewhere in the region may embolden extremist groups in Turkey.

Jihadist blowback may already be taking shape in Istanbul⁵² and, as illustrated by the two firsthand accounts from Emrah and Osman, Turkey's largest city can readily claim the existence of extremist cells facilitating the movement of both indigenous and foreign fighters seeking jihad in Syria. Together with the fact that Turkey shares a 650-mile border with Syria and Iraq—the latter increasingly viewed as a failed state⁵³—suggests that Turkey's top national security concerns are likely to emanate from its southern borders in the years to come.

Stephen Starr is a journalist and author of Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising (Oxford University Press: 2014).

50 “Turkey Says Has Banned 5,300 Potential Syria Fighters,” *Today's Zaman*, June 24, 2014.

51 Richard Norton-Taylor, “Islamist Terror Threat to West Blown Out of Proportion – Former MI6 Chief,” *Guardian*, July 7, 2014.

52 “ISIL ‘Attacks Shiite Mosque’ in Istanbul,” *Today's Zaman*, July 16, 2014.

53 John Kampfner, “Why Iraq is Close to Becoming a Failed State,” *Daily Telegraph*, June 15, 2014.

Stories of Foreign Fighter Migration to Syria

By Muhammad al-`Ubaydi

THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA has served as a magnet for foreign fighters.¹ Muslims from across the world have responded to calls to fight against the Syrian regime. Some of these fighters have joined jihadist groups, including the al-Qa`ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).²

This article describes the journey of five foreign fighters, two of whom are from Saudi Arabia, one from Bahrain, and two from Europe. Their stories are narrated either by themselves, or by their companion foreign fighters. The accounts were all posted on Twitter. Historically, similar migration stories became public typically after the war ended, or through martyr biographies for jihadists killed in action. In the conflict in Syria, however, some foreign fighters are narrating their own stories in real time, and revealing information that includes details related to their motivations, the source of their financing, and the routes they took to reach Syria. It is not clear whether this trend is due to the increased use of social media networks, which permits an individual to tell his story without having to rely on the administrators of jihadist websites, or whether foreign fighters are simply sending a message to other “hesitant Muslim youth” that the trip to “the land of jihad” is not impossible as “the infidels’ media is trying to convince you.”³

The Saudi Foreign Fighter Al-Muhajir al-Rimi

On May 24, 2014, the Saudi al-Muhajir al-Rimi, who also uses the name al-Harith al-Qahtani on his Twitter account,⁴ began to post messages on Twitter telling the story of his migration to Syria. Shortly after this series of

posts, the tweets were compiled and posted on justpaste.it.⁵

The story was quickly “retweeted” by a large number of ISIL activists on Twitter, and received a tremendous amount of positive feedback. Unlike other stories of jihadists, al-Rimi decided not to tell much about his previous life, how he was radicalized or why he was in a Saudi prison prior to his trip to Syria. He made sure, however, to document many details about his journey from Saudi Arabia to Syria.

Al-Rimi began his account by acknowledging that he was determined to migrate and participate in jihad in Syria as soon as he was released from prison. He went directly to his friend “al-Azdi” and asked him to find a way to travel to Syria. He did not have enough money to accomplish his trip, but “in a few days, the brothers were able to collect the sum of 20,000 SR” (about \$5,000). Al-Rimi’s story is unique for two reasons: the long route he and his friends took to reach Syria, and the number of details he chose to reveal, including the aliases of those who accompanied him, the amount of money used, and the time spent on each part of their trip.

Al-Rimi and three other “brothers”—al-Azdi, Thabbah and Waqid—purportedly crossed the southern borders of Saudi Arabia to Yemen with the help of a smuggler. As stated by al-Rimi,

After we crossed the Yemeni borders, we went through a number of checkpoints and we were able to cross them all by paying a small amount of money [bribes] to their members about 15 SR (about \$4)...two Yemeni brothers and seven more Saudi brothers joined us, and they waited for a couple of nights until it was safe to sail in the Red Sea using a small boat. That small boat was supposed to take us to a small island in the sea, and from this island

another smuggler will take us in a bigger boat to the Sudani shores. Although the initial agreement was to pay that smuggler the sum of 30,000 SR (about \$7,500), he requested an extra 10K SR which eventually we agreed to pay. On the evening of the third night in the sea, one of the two engines of the boat got broken, and at night we saw what we thought was an American barge. We shut down the only working engine and all the lights, and the barge went by without noticing us.⁶

It took them four nights to cross the sea, and another four days in Sudan before they were smuggled across the Sudan-Chad border. Another “Egyptian brother” joined them before they crossed the Sahara toward Libya, riding in the back of a pickup truck. He described their experiences passing through

“It is noteworthy that these narratives are not imbued with sectarianism, and yet all five joined ISIL, the most sectarian jihadist group in Syria.”

three checkpoints that belonged to armed militias in Sudan.⁷ Al-Rimi did not provide much detail about the time they spent in Libya, how they crossed the Mediterranean toward Turkey or the route they took to reach their final destination from Turkey to Syria. What he did reveal is that they rented a house for four days in Libya before they were “transported in several batches to the Levant.”⁸

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Al-Rimi mentioned that they had to go through “three checkpoints that belong to armed militias in Sudan.” They “negotiated with the members of the first checkpoint, and agreed on a certain amount of money.” The members of the second one were so greedy and “asked for a lot of money,” and they were forced to pay them to escape the poor treatment they received. They decided to not stop by the third checkpoint, and drove through it as fast as they could.

⁸ Ibid.

¹ The author would like to thank Nelly Lahoud for key insights that contributed to this article.

² In June 2014, ISIL declared a caliphate in Syria and Iraq and shortened its name to the “Islamic State.”

³ Many jihadist activists on Twitter post similar provocative statements to encourage Muslims to join jihad in Syria.

⁴ His Twitter account can be accessed at www.twitter.com/mmjjhdd9943.

⁵ Justpaste.it is a website that allows users to share longer passages of text for free. This particular migration story, “Qissat Nafir Akhina Al-Muhajir al-Rimi,” was available at www.justpaste.it/fnd6.

According to al-Rimi, Abu `Antara, the Egyptian “brother” who joined them in Sudan, and one of the Saudis were later killed in Syria. Al-Rimi is still alive, and active on his Twitter account, posting news about ISIL in Syria and defending the movement against criticism.

The Bahraini Foreign Fighter Abu Thar al-Bahrini

Abu Thar al-Bahrini, from Bahrain, began his story by discussing how he was “not religiously committed” in high school, although he knew that this was “wrong.” After he graduated high school with high grades, his family assumed he would go to medical school. Al-Bahrini, however, had different ideas, as he thought that this was his chance to “repent” and the best way to do that was by joining a Shari`a school in Saudi Arabia. He changed his mind, however, after deciding that the path of studying Shari`a was too long, so he made a decision to join jihad in Syria instead. At the start, al-Bahrini mentioned that he did not “differentiate between the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) or ISIL.” His main concern was finding a coordinator to show him the way to Syria, and collecting enough money to cover the expenses of his trip. He started to post photos of the FSA, JN and ISIL on his Instagram account, and during that time he was able to meet with a coordinator in Bahrain who linked recruits with the FSA. At this point, al-Bahrini had only 50 Bahraini dinar (about \$130), and the coordinator told him that he needed at least 200 dinar (about \$520) to cover his expenses. Al-Bahrini was able to convince only one of his friends to appeal to a wealthy individual on his behalf, and the affluent man agreed to cover all his expenses. For some unidentified reason, the agreement between the coordinator and al-Bahrini fell apart, so he decided to travel to Turkey alone.⁹

“I didn’t know the route to take, didn’t have any recommendation letter, and didn’t know anything about my journey,” al-Bahrini said. “All what I knew is that I should fly to Istanbul airport, from there fly to one of the villages near the

[Turkish-Syrian] borders, and then a car would take me from there to enter Syria.”¹⁰

He flew to Istanbul as planned, purchased a ticket to a “bordering city,” and while he was waiting for the plane he saw “a man with a beard reading the Qur’an, and I knew that he was going to Syria.” Without hesitation, al-Bahrini approached the man, and said to him confidently: “you are going to Syria and I’m going with you.” After a short discussion, al-Bahrini convinced the man to help him. “The man was in touch with coordinators from the Free Syrian Army,” who were supposed to smuggle him into Syria to join JN. They went to a house used by the FSA as a clinic in Turkey, and on the second day a “brother from ISIL came to that house to visit his friends,” al-Bahrini explained. “We told him that we are going to join JN in Idlib, and he offered to take us to JN after we enter Syria.”¹¹

Two days after they entered Syria, the same person from ISIL came to them, explained the tensions between the two groups, and suggested they join ISIL instead of JN. They found the explanation complicated, as they knew little about the mujahidin, Usama bin Ladin or any basic jihadist issues, so he took them to one of ISIL’s headquarters so they could learn more about jihad in general and ISIL in particular. After a short interview with the group’s *amir* of that area, al-Bahrini was sent to a training camp and took military courses and a Shari`a class where he learned “the correct creed.”¹²

Al-Bahrini’s parents were religiously committed, but in his opinion they “were not following the correct creed” because they believed that “jihad now is selective duty and not an individual duty.” Therefore, al-Bahrini decided not to inform them about his intentions to travel to Syria. Once he arrived at the Istanbul airport, al-Bahrini posted a scanned copy of his “ticket and passport on his Instagram account to inform his family about his real intentions to migrate to Syria.” Despite his family’s best efforts, they could not convince him to return

to Bahrain. Al-Bahrini concluded his story by acknowledging that his mother and brother, who was a soldier in the Bahrain army, later visited him and were both convinced to join ISIL’s ranks in Syria.¹³

Al-Bahrini appeared in the recently released ISIL video *Salil al-Sawarim 4* (Sound of the Swords Clashing 4),¹⁴ in which he delivered a short and powerful speech followed by him ripping up his Bahraini passport and promising to “return to Bahrain not with this useless passport, but marching with ISIL army to liberate all Muslim lands.”¹⁵

The Saudi Foreign Fighter Abu Thabit al-Jazrawi

Abu Thabit al-Jazrawi, a Saudi foreign fighter, did not mention many details about the route he took to reach Syria; instead, he preferred to reveal more information about his path to radicalization. According to his account,

When I was 15, I used to think of Usama bin Ladin as the person who transferred the reality of this *umma* to a nightmare. He is the reason behind all the problems of the Islamic world. Although I used to like Khattab¹⁶ and the old day of jihad, but I never supported the Manhattan raid [the 9/11 attacks]. During the events that took place in Saudi Arabia when al-Miqrin¹⁷

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ This video was produced by al-Furqan Media Center, the media wing of ISIL, and posted on the al-I`tisam Twitter account on May 27, 2014. The video served as part of ISIL’s psychological warfare campaign prior to their military offensive in June.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ A famous Saudi foreign fighter, Khattab joined jihad in Afghanistan in 1988, and later became the leader of Arab Ansar in Tajikistan and later Chechnya. Russian intelligence killed him with a poisoned letter in 2002.

¹⁷ `Abd al-`Aziz al-Miqrin became the *amir* of the first version of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) that was based in Saudi Arabia after he succeeded Yusuf al-`Uyayri, the founder of the organization. He started his jihadist journey at the age of 17 in Afghanistan and received his training in an al-Qa`ida camp before he moved to Algeria to fight alongside the insurgency there. He also fought in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia before he was arrested by Ethiopian forces and deported to Saudi Arabia. After his release from Saudi prison, he traveled to Afghanistan again, and then returned to Saudi Arabia to lead the Saudi AQAP. His group was in charge of ex-

⁹ A number of tweets were compiled in the justpaste.it link entitled “Abu Thar al-Bahrini Tells the Story of His Own Migration [for the land of jihad],” available at www.justpaste.it/fihm.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

waged his campaign, I believed that we had to expel terrorists [out of Saudi Arabia]. Later, I was visited by one of my friends who started to show me mujahidin releases. I pretended that I was touched with what I saw, but deep inside me I didn't want to be involved in jihad, moreover, I wasn't even a committed Muslim as I used to shave my beard. This friend kept his attempts with me, until I was guided to the right path in 2009, and gradually I became more committed until the events of the Levant took place. I wasn't really aware of the events there, until my friend approached me in the mosque, and provided me with names of people whom I knew joined jihad. I was shocked with that news, and it was like eyes opening to me, as I started to hear the news about many other youth I knew went to Syria while I'm sitting here. Months went by; I got involved in work and in a daily routine life, however, I kept watching mujahidin videos. In one of these days, and after I returned from work at night, I watched a YouTube video that was released by JN...this video has changed me forever.¹⁸ This video was like a lightning that hit my heart in a way that brought it to life again. I finally realized that Qur'an and the sword [should work] together.¹⁹ The following day,

cutting a number of operations including the kidnapping and beheading of the American engineer Paul Johnson in 2004. He was killed by Saudi authorities in 2004.

18 Al-Jazrawi revealed later on his Twitter account that this video was delivered by `Abd al-Majid al-`Utaybi (also known as Qarin al-Klash), and produced by al-Manara al-Bayda', the media wing of JN, in February 2013. The video can be accessed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y7wLzHsNVs&feature=youtu.be. Al-`Utaybi was a Saudi foreign fighter, one of ISIL's field commanders and Shari`a officials, and he had two Twitter accounts on which he was very active. He was killed on June 24, 2014, while fighting against Jaysh al-Islam, one of the founding factions of the Islamic Front, in al-Ghuta, just outside Damascus. Al-`Utaybi was added to the Saudi list of 47 most wanted terrorists that was released in January 2011.

19 This is a famous slogan used by jihadists in general, and ISIL in particular, stating that *da`wa* (religious propagation) does not serve Islam by itself. Both peaceful means (*da`wa*) and violent ones (jihad) should work hand-in-hand to achieve the mujahidin's ultimate goal

one of the brothers visited me at my work (at that time he was just returning from Syria and now he is back to the Levant), and asked me to meet with him privately ASAP. In our meeting, he started talking to me about jihad, its benefits, its priority in Islam...etc, and time by time I was convinced finally to participate in jihad.²⁰

Al-Jazrawi's only obstacle was collecting the money required for his journey. Without identifying his source, however, al-Jazrawi said that "the money was collected, a recommendation letter was obtained,²¹ and my passport was issued. My trip to the Levant was the fastest one I had done in my life; as I departed my city at 10:30 PM, and reached Idlib in the Levant at 6:00 PM the following day." Al-Jazrawi concluded: "I used to fear death and always wondered about the way I'm going to die, but now, after my migration to the land of jihad, I don't care when or how I'm going to die; as long as my death is going to be for the sake of God."²²

Two Stories of Anonymous European Foreign Fighters

Some of the stories revealed on Twitter contained few details about the fighters' previous life, their alias name, country of origin, or group they joined. More details, however, were revealed about their journeys to the "land of jihad."

One of these stories was about a "European brother" who was poor, and had to work in a restaurant to collect the price of his first train ticket that took him from his city to the next station in his trip. He kept

of conquering Islamic land and implementing Shari`a on it.

20 This is from a number of tweets compiled by Abu Thabit al-Jazrawi and posted on justpaste.it, entitled "How Did I Migrate to the [Land] of Jihad," available at www.justpaste.it/f2tm.

21 Usually, most of those who wish to join jihad in general, and a certain jihadist group in particular, seek to obtain recommendation letter(s) from individuals or entities that have ties with that jihadist group. This is a vetting procedure that helps to ensure they are trustworthy.

22 This is from a number of tweets compiled by Abu Thabit al-Jazrawi and posted on justpaste.it, entitled "How Did I Migrate to the [Land] of Jihad," available at www.justpaste.it/f2tm.

working in each city he stopped at to afford traveling to the next stop on his route. According to `Iqab Mamduh al-Marzuqi, the narrator of the story, "it took him six months to cross the [Turkish-Syrian] borders and achieve his dream. Shortly after, he joined ISIL."²³

Mus`ab al-`Iraqi tweeted about another "brother who joined the ranks of ISIL," and chose to use an easier method to collect the required money to cover his trip expenses: "he went online and hacked some Israeli credit cards and purchased his ticket" to fly to an unidentified country. "At the airport of that country, he needed more money to purchase another ticket to Turkey, so he opened his laptop and collected the price of his ticket using the same method he used previously," the narrator claimed.²⁴

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that these narratives are not imbued with sectarianism, and yet all five joined ISIL, the most sectarian jihadist group in Syria. What makes ISIL more appealing to foreign fighters than other jihadist groups? Is it because ISIL is more welcoming of foreign fighters, or is it because other groups prefer to rely on Syrian fighters rather than foreigners?

It is also possible that a new wave of foreign fighters will be attracted to ISIL's unbounded enthusiasm and seemingly unstoppable "victories." A key question is whether the declaration of a caliphate by ISIL's *amir*, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and his call for all Muslims to migrate to Syria and Iraq will further mobilize foreign fighters.²⁵

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The viewpoints expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.

23 This story is available at www.justpaste.it/dmy8.

24 See the following link: www.twitter.com/hashtag/%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%A9%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1?src=hash.

25 Al-Baghdadi stated: "O Muslims everywhere, whoever is capable of performing *hijra* (emigration) to the Islamic State should do so, for *hijra* to the land of Islam is obligatory."

Brazil's Police Struggle to Pacify Gang-Run Slums

By Ioan Grillo

THE SOCCER WORLD CUP in Brazil in the summer of 2014 put a spotlight on the country's campaign to secure its violent slums, known as *favelas*, where police have long fought drug gangs in a conflict resembling an urban war. While gangs operate across Brazil, this conflict has been particularly acute in the state of Rio de Janeiro, where more than 57,000 people have been murdered in the last decade.¹ Amid this violence, Rio's elite police units have developed some of the world's most experienced officers in close urban combat, fighting gangs such as the Red Command (Comando Vermelho) in narrow streets snaking up the mountainside.

Since 2008, Rio's police have been backed by the military in a so-called pacification program, in which they enter *favelas* with overwhelming force and establish a permanent presence.² Spurred on by plans to host this year's World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, the program helped reduce Rio state's homicide rate by 25% between 2008 and 2012.³ Pacification, however, has faced challenges as the Red Command and other gangs have moved their operations from the city center to outlying suburbs, and Rio's murder rate rose 18% in 2013.⁴ Furthermore, this year police occupying *favelas* shot dead several residents, sparking a series of protests and riots.

This article examines the challenges to Rio's police in their offensive to secure gang-run slums, a struggle that many governments also facing violent drug gangs are watching. It looks at the nature of the Red Command and other gangs and posits why they pose such a resilient threat. It examines the tactics

and strategies of Rio officers, from the pacification program to their urban combat techniques.

The Red Command

In the Antares *favela*, a flat dusty slum in the far west of Rio de Janeiro, the control of the Red Command remains intact and blatant. Guarding all the entrances to the *favela* are criminal lookouts carrying radios and pistols.⁵ On the *favela* streets, the Red Command operatives sell drugs openly at several known points, called *bocas*, where bags of cocaine, marijuana and crack are displayed on tables with labels marking their prices. Red Command operatives drive between the *bocas* on motorcycles, bearing arms such as Kalashnikovs with grenade launchers.⁶ At a recent Antares music event known as a Baile Funk party hosted by the Red Command on a Friday night, the gangsters even danced holding their rifles in the air.⁷

These remarkable scenes of gangsters operating so brazenly reflect the history of Rio's *favelas* and their relationship to organized crime. *Favelas*, or communities founded on squatted land, date back to the late 19th century founded chiefly by former slaves. Brazil only abolished slavery in 1888, two decades after the United States.⁸ Throughout the 20th century, *favelas* swelled with migrants from the countryside while remaining largely outside the law and often lacking in basic services such as running water. Today, the *favelas* are home to more than 11 million of Brazil's 200 million people.⁹

With high unemployment, criminals such as street assailants and bank robbers long operated out of *favelas*. Under Brazil's military dictatorship in the 1970s, the most violent of these delinquents were incarcerated on the Ilha Grande prison island alongside leftist guerrillas and political

prisoners, who they might have beaten and intimidated.¹⁰ The *favela* gangsters, however, united with the educated leftists and founded the Red Command in 1980.¹¹ The command took on the guerrillas' rhetoric of

“Rio's elite police units have developed some of the world's most experienced officers in close urban combat, fighting gangs such as the Red Command in narrow streets snaking up the mountainside.”

fighting the government and cell-like organization—a structure that has made it so difficult to dismantle. While the military dictatorship ended in 1985 and most of the political prisoners were pardoned and freed, the Red Command spread through the prison system and into the *favelas*.¹²

With its base in the Rio slums, the Red Command built an extensive international drug trafficking network, providing it with hundreds of millions of dollars to buy weapons and pay thousands of gunmen, whom it calls “soldiers.” It forged strong links with the Colombian traffickers and guerrillas from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), helping them move cocaine toward the United States and Europe.¹³ Brazilian Red Command leader Luiz Fernando Da Costa was indicted by a U.S. federal grand jury and sanctioned under the Kingpin Act for trafficking to the United States and was arrested in Colombia in 2001.¹⁴ The Command also nurtured an exceptionally profitable domestic market; Brazil is now the second biggest consumer of cocaine in the world after the United States, with about four

1 Official homicide figures for the state of Rio de Janeiro are published by the Instituto de Secretaria de Segurança Pública at www.isp.rj.gov.br/Conteudo.asp?id=150.

2 “Organized Crime in Brazil: Conquering Complexo do Alemão,” *Economist*, December 10, 2010.

3 Official homicide figures for the state of Rio de Janeiro published by the Instituto de Secretaria de Segurança Pública.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Personal observations, Antares *favela*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 29, 2014, and May 4, 2014.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Personal observations, Antares *favela*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 4, 2014.

8 Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 253.

9 “2010 Census: 11.4 Million Brazilians (6.0 Percent) Live in Subnormal Agglomerates,” Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, December 21, 2011.

10 Carlos Amorim, *CV PCC, Primeira Parte, Aprisionados* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2003).

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 Juan Forero, “Colombian Army Says Rebels Helped Captured Drug Lord,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2001.

14 “Fact Sheet: Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act,” The American Presidency Project, May 31, 2002.

million Brazilians estimated to have taken the drug at least once.¹⁵

The vast profits from this trade caused Red Command bosses to fight among themselves and the organization splintered, with rivals Amigos dos Amigos emerging in 1998 and the Pure Third Command in 2002.¹⁶ This caused a series of bloody territorial battles between gunmen from the various commands, increasing the homicide rate.¹⁷ The Red Command also carries out executions inside its territory against alleged thieves or

“Red Command operatives drive between the bocas on motorcycles, bearing arms such as Kalashnikovs with grenade launchers.”

rapists, with gangsters holding “trials” before discharging their sentences. This alternative “justice system” poses a serious challenge to the power of the government in areas where many distrust the police. “The Command is an absolute power in these communities,” said Andre Fernandes, a Brazilian journalist who heads a *favela* news network. “They are arbitrators of life and death. They decide everything.”¹⁸

An Antares drug seller called Lucas, 28-years-old, described how he first joined the Red Command when he was 12-years-old, which is typical of many recruits. “I wanted fame at that time,” Lucas said. “I was never scared. I am not frightened of gunfights. I love the adrenaline.”¹⁹ Lucas now runs a drug selling point, working 24-hour shifts and making a commission based on sales. Long lines at the drug points on two visits suggested that business was

doing well.²⁰ Lucas described how the Red Command will ambush police if they enter the *favela*, with spies calling on the radio to signal the police positions. Red Command gunmen then use higher ground such as hills or rooftops to fire on the officers.

To win over residents, the Red Command will pay for some services, such as water and sewage systems, buy medicine for the sick and finance free dance parties, Lucas said. “The city doesn’t do anything for us,” he complained. “So we have to do it ourselves.”²¹ Police informants also risk a death sentence, Lucas said.

Urban War

Fighting the Red Command are police units including the Coordenadoria de Recursos Especiais (CORE), an elite group similar to a SWAT team, with a logo of a skull with a knife though it. CORE commander Rodrigo Oliveira is a former soldier who has been in the unit for 20 years and served in hundreds of firefights.²² In one, he was shot, and part of the bullet remains embedded in the back of his head. Following that shooting, he was in the hospital for two days but back at work within a week.²³

“There is a reason for that,” Oliveira said. “If you stop, you are going to be afraid the next time. You can’t stop. Every day we go to the *favelas* we are under fire. Nowadays the guys from the (Brazilian) army come here to train with us. Instead of police learning from the military it is the military learning from the police.”²⁴

The narrow streets of *favelas* often force CORE officers to abandon their armored vehicles. They move in pairs, covering each other and the following pair in a form of a chain, a tactic that is heavily drilled, Oliveira said.²⁵ A constant challenge is to be on higher ground than the Command gunmen. To try to avoid being outflanked, officers work out routes through many of the maze-like slums and rely on helicopters flying overhead.

The CORE officers face high caliber firearms that are often stolen from the armies of Bolivia and Paraguay, where poorly paid soldiers often take part in thefts and arrive in Brazil over porous borders, according to Oliveira. Traffickers also use homemade explosives that are dangerously unpredictable and sometimes blow fingers or limbs off the CORE bomb unit. Oliveira explained that the CORE strategy is to use intelligence to launch raids on the safe houses stashing the guns and bombs, and to go after the most violent criminals.

Oliveira said that work by the CORE and other police units helped reduce violence in Rio state even before the pacification program began, from a peak of 8,321 homicides in 2002 to 6,313 in 2007.²⁶ It remains dangerous work, however. From January to mid-August 2014, 179 officers in Rio have been shot, 49 of whom died.²⁷

Nevertheless, human rights defenders argue that the officers use their guns too freely. Brazil’s police kill about 2,000 people across the country every year for allegedly resisting arrest, according to Amnesty International.²⁸ Oliveira said they try hard to avoid civilian deaths, but the criminals choose to attack in heavily populated areas. “We are in a war,” he said. “The drug gangs compete in an arms race and bring weapons of war into the city. The population is in the middle of this combat.”²⁹

Pacified Favelas?

The pacification program aims to break out of this deadlock by establishing a permanent police presence in the form of Police Pacification Units (UPPs). To establish UPPs, police announce they will make an incursion on the radio and television, then enter the *favela* backed by soldiers, armored vehicles and helicopters.³⁰ With officers having a

15 “Informe Brasileiro Sobre Drogas,” Secretaria Nacional De Políticas Sobre Drogas, Presidência de la República, Brasil, 2009.

16 Carlos Amorim, *CV PCC, Primeira Parte, Aprisionados* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2003).

17 Ibid.

18 Personal interview, Andre Fernandes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 1, 2014.

19 Personal interview, Lucas, Antares *favela*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 29, 2014.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Personal interview, CORE commander Rodrigo Oliveira, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 30, 2014.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Official homicide figures for the state of Rio de Janeiro published by the Instituto de Secretaria de Segurança Pública.

27 Roberta Trindade, “Estatística de Policiais Mortos y Baleados em 2014,” *Pauta Do Dia*, August 12, 2014.

28 “Brazil: Police Still Have Blood On Their Hands,” Amnesty International, July 24, 2014.

29 Personal interview, CORE commander Rodrigo Oliveira, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 30, 2014.

30 Janaina Carvalho, “Conjunto de Favelas da Mare e

constant presence inside these pacified *favelas*, gangsters can no longer brazenly display guns, reducing the turf wars and killings. Residents are also shown that the government, not the commandos, controls their area.

By August 2014, police have established 39 UPPs serving hundreds of thousands of residents in more than 100 of about 600 *favelas* in the metropolitan area.³¹ Pacified areas include the largest *favelas* and almost all the slums near the city center

“The pacification program aims to break out of this deadlock by establishing a permanent police presence in the form of Police Pacification Units (UPPs).”

where tourists might venture. The Rio state government claims that homicides inside the pacified *favelas* have dropped 65% and investments in businesses such as restaurants have been encouraging.³²

The program, however, faces two major obstacles. First, with the pre-deployment public warning, gangsters can simply move to other areas such as Antares on the outskirts. The majority of the 1.7 million *favela* dwellers in Rio still live in unpacified areas.³³ “You just transfer the problem from one area to another area,” Commander Oliveira acknowledged. “If I tell a criminal that I am going to his house tomorrow, is he going to stay in his house? Of course not. And that is what has happened. Now the problem has gone from the middle of the city to the periphery.”³⁴

Ocupado Para Instalacao de UPP,” *El Globo GI*, March 30, 2014.

31 Ibid.

32 Robert Muggah and Ilona Szabo de Carvalho, “Fear and Backsliding in Rio,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2014.

33 “2010 Census: 11.4 Million Brazilians (6.0 Percent) Live in Subnormal Agglomerates.”

34 Personal interview, CORE commander Rodrigo Oliveira, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 30, 2014.

Second, police have struggled to win the support of residents, especially when they have been drawn into firefights. In April 2014, well-known dancer Douglas Rafael da Silva was shot dead in the Pavao Pavaozinho *favela*, close to the famous Copacabana beach.³⁵ Da Silva was a success story who had danced on a popular television show and his death provoked protests that turned into riots.³⁶

Police claim they returned fire with drug traffickers and were not sure whose bullet hit Da Silva. Yet witnesses say that police fired at unarmed youths because they were smoking marijuana, and one of the bullets hit the dancer.³⁷ “Police are totally unprepared for working in this community,” said Paulo dos Santos, a neighbor and actor, who had worked with Da Silva. “They are the law, but they don’t respect it. We don’t want these type of cops.”³⁸

Other residents still support the police incursion despite the deaths. “At least there are less gangsters with guns now,” said Leandro Matus, who owns a bicycle shop next to where Da Silva was shot. “I don’t trust the police but they are the lesser of the two evils.”³⁹

Commander Oliveira admits that to win over residents, the Rio government needs to invest more in social programs. While Brazil has expanded the middle class in recent years, about 16 million people still live in extreme poverty, including many of those in the *favelas*.⁴⁰ Illiteracy among black Brazilians, who are the majority in the *favelas*, is also almost three times that of white Brazilians.⁴¹ “The only part of the state that goes inside these areas is the police,” said Oliveira. “Other parts of the state have to go inside the *favelas* as well. We need investment in education

35 Jonathan Watts, “Death of Dancer Prompts Deadly Clashes in Rio,” *Guardian*, April 23, 2014.

36 Ibid.

37 Personal observations, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 1, 2014.

38 Personal interview, Paulo dos Santos, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 1, 2014.

39 Personal interview, Leandro Matus, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 1, 2014.

40 “8.5 Percent of Brazilian Population Live In Extreme Poverty: Minister,” Xinhua, May 4, 2011.

41 Joe Leahy, “2010 Census Shows Brazil’s Inequalities Remain,” *Financial Times*, November 17, 2011.

and in health. But it’s not happening. It is just police officers. This way, we are not going to win this war.”⁴²

Conclusion

Brazilian police have made some notable advances in securing gang-run *favelas*, but they still face serious challenges. Even before the pacification program began, the operations of elite units such as CORE targeting guns and violent groups helped reduce overall homicides. These tactics, however, inevitably lead to police killings, which alienate communities that have historically been on the margins of society.

The pacification program is an important counterweight to gangs, as these criminals are a serious challenge to government power with their use of proxy trials and brazen display of high-powered guns. The technique of announcing incursions and setting up UPPs deep inside neighborhoods provides a worthwhile model that could be adapted to other countries in South America, Central America and the Caribbean where gangs dominate. Yet because criminal gangs such as the Red Command have such deep roots in many communities, it is vital that the government invests more in focused programs to further reduce poverty and improve education to win the hearts and minds of the population as well as the turf.

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42 Personal interview, CORE commander Rodrigo Oliveira, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 30, 2014.

The Pakistani Taliban's Campaign Against Polio Vaccination

By Animesh Roul

PAKISTAN HAS STRUGGLED to cope with the spread of polio, a debilitating viral disease. Human infections are frequently reported despite government and international agencies' efforts to eliminate the disease.¹ According to a World Health Organization (WHO) estimate, at least 72 polio cases were recorded in Pakistan in 2013, compared to 58 cases in 2012.² In 2014, the number of infected children had already reached 115 through August.³ The most affected provinces of Pakistan are Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP). One key reason behind this spread is the Pakistani Taliban's propaganda campaign against receiving polio vaccinations, as well as their direct attacks on polio vaccination workers.

This article reviews the Pakistani Taliban's offensive against the polio immunization program in Pakistan, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and KP, and it highlights how Pakistani Taliban militants—as well as sectarian militant groups—have unleashed a sustained armed campaign against the health workers and the security personnel who escort them. The article also discusses various regional biases against the vaccination programs, while examining Taliban decrees that denounce them.

Attacks on Vaccination Workers

Frequent attacks on anti-polio campaign volunteers and vaccination teams in Pakistan have become increasingly common since the Pakistani Taliban leadership began issuing religious edicts (*fatwa*) against the government vaccination program and against female health volunteers who have been the core workforce for health

care programs. At least 56 individuals, mostly female health workers and security personnel aiding the anti-polio campaign in Pakistan, were reportedly killed in attacks since June 2012 when the Pakistani Taliban reiterated its ban on the ongoing vaccination program.⁴

The most deadly incidents occurred in mid-December 2012, when Pakistani Taliban militants executed a string of attacks in Karachi, Peshawar, Charsadda and Nowshera. The attacks disrupted a three-day national polio vaccination campaign. The militants killed at least nine anti-polio health workers, including five female volunteers.⁵

While attacks on anti-polio workers and their security details continued during various phases of anti-polio drives throughout 2013, a major assault took place on October 7, when Islamic militants targeted a medical distribution camp in the Suleman Khel area in Peshawar, the provincial capital of KP. At least seven people, including four security personnel, were killed in that incident.⁶

In 2014, January and March saw a spike in assaults on anti-polio health workers and their support staff. Six police officers and a child were killed in a bomb blast near a police vehicle in Sardheri market of Charsadda Town in KP on January 21 when security officials were on their way to provide security to a polio team.⁷ On March 1, 11 Khyber Khasadar Force personnel—government-backed local tribal militias—who were providing security to a polio team were killed in two separate blasts in the Lashora area of Jamrud in northwest Pakistan.⁸

Intermittent attacks targeting polio vaccination programs continued, and the intimidation and abduction of health workers and officials became increasingly frequent. The most brutal

incident took place when female polio vaccinator Salma Farooqi, who was part of the "Sehat Ka Insaf" anti-polio campaign of the KP government, was abducted, tortured and killed by armed militants on March 24.⁹

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for most of these attacks. The TTP's affiliates such as Jundullah and Lashkar-i-Islam also claimed credit for some of the violence.¹⁰ Occasionally, the TTP distanced itself from specific attacks.¹¹ In April 2013, the TTP announced that it would support anti-polio vaccination drives on the guarantee that they are not used by the United States as a cover for espionage and that proof be provided showing that orally-administered polio vaccination drops are in accordance with Islamic tenets.¹² According to TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan, "If they can convince us that these polio drops are Islamic and the spy agencies are not using it to kill our fighters, we would have no objection to any vaccination drive which is in the public interest." Despite these statements, the Pakistani Taliban continued its violence against polio vaccinators in the pursuant months.

The Pakistani Taliban's Propaganda Campaign

Islamist-led propaganda campaigns against government-backed health projects, especially polio vaccination programs, began in Swat and Malakand regions in 2006. Maulana Fazlullah, the present TTP leader, spearheaded the effort. At the time, he was a radical cleric

9 "Polio Vaccinator Kidnapped, Killed," *Dawn*, March 25, 2014.

10 Jundullah's spokesman, Ahmed Marwat, claimed responsibility for an attack on polio workers in early October 2012, saying that "Jews and the United States want to stamp out Islamic beliefs through these [polio] drops." Also, the Lashkar-i-Islam militant group has perpetrated violent attacks against the vaccinators and abducted anti-polio workers in the past. See, for example, "Pakistan Militants Kidnap 11 Teachers in Polio Vaccination Campaign," Reuters, November 23, 2013; "Blast Near Polio Workers Kills Two in Pakistan's Peshawar," Reuters, October 7, 2013.

11 One of the attacks for which the TTP rejected responsibility occurred when the TTP was reportedly in consultations with clerics about the efficacy of the vaccination drives.

12 "Taliban Militants Announce 'Conditional Support' for Anti-Polio Drive," *Dawn*, April 12, 2013.

1 "WHO Statement on the Meeting of the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee Concerning the International Spread of Wild Poliovirus," World Health Organization, May 5, 2014.

2 "Pakistan Records 72 Polio Cases in 2013: WHO," *The News International*, December 4, 2013.

3 "Four New Polio Cases Emerge in Pakistan in One Day," *Dunya News*, June 28, 2014. Also see the Global Polio Eradication Initiative at www.polioeradication.org.

4 *Ibid.*

5 "Taliban Militants Kill 8 Anti-Polio Workers," Central Asia Online, December 19, 2012.

6 "Bomb Blast at Polio Team Kills 7, Injures 8 in Peshawar," *The News International*, October 7, 2013.

7 "Blast Targets Polio Security Team in Charsadda, Seven Killed," *Pakistan Today*, January 22, 2014.

8 "Blasts Targeting Polio Team Kill 11 in Khyber Agency," *Dawn*, March 2, 2014.

leading another banned organization, Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law, TNSM). Fazlullah and his followers carried out a propaganda campaign encouraging people to adopt an ultra-conservative lifestyle. He propagated primarily against entertainment such as music, dance, and television, but he also preached against female education. He criticized the polio vaccination program in KP (then known as the North-West Frontier Province, NWFP) through his illegal FM radio sermons and Friday prayers at the local mosques. He also alleged that the polio eradication campaign was part of a “conspiracy of Jews and Christians to make Muslims impotent and stunt the growth of Muslims.”¹³

Pakistani Taliban *fatwa* against female health workers in Swat and Malakand sheds some light on the prevailing mindset of the Taliban. One such decree called the presence of women in public spaces a form of indecency, and instructed that it “was a Muslim man’s duty to kidnap the women health workers when they paid home visits, to marry them forcibly even if they were already married women, or to use them as sexual slaves.”¹⁴ Another similar Taliban decree declared that it was morally illegal for Muslim women to work for wages.¹⁵

For a brief period after May 2007, the situation improved in the region when the NWFP provincial government signed a peace deal with Fazlullah’s TNSM, which agreed to support the polio vaccination campaign and education for girls, as well as government efforts to establish law and order.¹⁶ Fazlullah then joined the TTP by merging the TNSM into the larger Pakistani Taliban conglomerate, and signed a 16-point peace deal with the NWFP government. The Taliban in Swat and Malakand agreed not to oppose vaccination against polio,

measles, smallpox and tuberculosis, including all those administered to children, and would not obstruct women’s education.¹⁷

The situation deteriorated, however, following a continuous army offensive against the Pakistani Taliban in the region. By early 2009, the TTP returned to its original campaign against women’s education and vaccination along with criticism of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). TTP spokesman Muslim Khan reportedly told the media that “the TTP is against polio vaccination because it causes infertility.”¹⁸ He also charged that the vaccine could not be trusted since it was imported.¹⁹ Khan said that the vaccination program is a U.S. tool to reduce the Muslim population, and that it is un-Islamic to “take a medicine before the disease [is contracted].”²⁰

Fazlullah and his faction were the first Islamists to tag anti-polio campaigns as part of Western espionage against the Muslim community, much before the CIA-sponsored hepatitis vaccination program that was believed to have helped track down and kill Usama bin Ladin at his hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011.²¹ The judicial trial of Shakil Afridi, the Pakistani doctor involved in the false vaccination program, was given a 33-year prison term in Pakistan after being arrested for helping the CIA track Bin Ladin. The CIA’s actions likely made the Taliban leadership in Pakistan all the more suspicious about the vaccination programs, and it contributed to a renewed armed backlash against polio immunization workers in the country.²²

17 “Govt Inks Peace Deal with Swat Militants, Fazlullah, Comrades Given Amnesty?” *The News International*, May 22, 2008.

18 “PAKISTAN: ‘NGOs Should Leave Swat’ - Insurgent Leader,” Integrated Regional Information Networks, March 22, 2009.

19 “Crippled and Blind,” *The News International*, March 24, 2009.

20 “Taliban Blocks UN Polio Treatment in Pakistan,” *Telegraph*, March 27, 2009.

21 Mark Mazzetti, “Vaccination Ruse Used in Pursuit of Bin Laden,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2011.

22 There were virtually no attacks against polio health workers in 2010 and 2011. Following the revelation of the false hepatitis vaccination program in July 2011, an infuriated Taliban vowed to avenge the deception and imposed a ban on legitimate vaccination programs in-

cluding polio. In June 2012, the Taliban blocked polio vaccination in North Waziristan, issued *fatawa* against polio vaccination and carried out attacks. See Declan Walsh, “Taliban Block Vaccinations in Pakistan,” *New York Times*, June 18, 2012; “Polio Resurgence in Pakistan Following Backlash from CIA Vaccination Ruse in Hunt for Osama bin Laden,” ABC News, May 27, 2014.

The Drone Justification

Even though anti-polio efforts in Pakistan continued amid fierce opposition from the Pakistani Taliban in Swat and Malakand, the drive received a fresh setback when radical Islamic clerics and Taliban commanders issued fresh *fatawa* against the vaccinations in June 2012. Hafiz Gul Bahadur, the Taliban commander in North Waziristan, announced a ban on polio vaccinations.²⁴ Days before his call, radical Islamic cleric Maulvi Ibrahim Chisti declared the polio campaign “un-Islamic” in the rural Khan Pur Bagga Sher area of Muzaffargarh (located in southwestern Punjab Province) and announced at the local mosque that jihad should be carried out against the visiting polio vaccination team.²⁵

This time, however, the Taliban added a new reason for being against the vaccination campaign. According to Gul Bahadur, the vaccination campaign should be suspended until the United States ceased drone strikes in the Waziristan region. Gul Bahadur’s *fatwa* pamphlet, printed in Urdu, was distributed on June 16, in Miranshah, the capital of North Waziristan, and threatened anyone involved in the polio vaccination campaign in the troubled region. “We announce a ban on polio vaccination campaign from today,” the pamphlet read. “Anybody who disrespects this order will not have the right to complain

cluding polio. In June 2012, the Taliban blocked polio vaccination in North Waziristan, issued *fatawa* against polio vaccination and carried out attacks. See Declan Walsh, “Taliban Block Vaccinations in Pakistan,” *New York Times*, June 18, 2012; “Polio Resurgence in Pakistan Following Backlash from CIA Vaccination Ruse in Hunt for Osama bin Laden,” ABC News, May 27, 2014.

23 Hafiz Gul Bahadur’s *fatwa* pamphlet, June 15, 2012.

24 “No Polio Drives in N Waziristan Unless Drone Strikes Stop: Hafiz Gul Bahadur,” *Express Tribune*, June 16, 2012.

25 “Cleric Declares Jihad Against Polio Campaign,” *Express Tribune*, June 13, 2012.

13 Sadia Qasim Shah, “Peshawar: Cleric Mounts Drive Against Polio Vaccine,” *Dawn*, December 1, 2006.

14 Cited in Iftikhar Ud Din, Zubia Mumtaz and Anushka Ataullahjan, “How the Taliban Undermined Community Healthcare in Swat, Pakistan,” *British Medical Journal* 344 (2012).

15 Ibid.

16 “Crackdown on TNSM Likely,” *Daily Times*, July 10, 2007.

about any loss or harm.”²⁶ According to the pamphlet, “till such time the continuous attack of the drones is not stopped in Waziristan, the restriction on polio drops will remain imposed... Because [we] have nothing to gain from the sympathy of such well wishers (the Americans) who spent billions of rupees on polio drops for eradicating a disease that affects one or two in a million people.” It further added: “the well-wishers (the Americans), with the help of their slaves (Pakistanis), are carrying out drone attacks in Waziristan as a result of which hundreds of innocent child, senior citizens and women have died. And the continuous (day and night) drone flying has driven the people of Waziristan mentally ill or imbalanced and such cases are on the rise. The condition is even worse than polio.”²⁷

Arguably, Gul Bahadur’s call prompted other Taliban leaders in KP and South Waziristan to impose a ban on the polio vaccination drive in their respective spheres of influence. A similar pamphlet distributed in Wana, South Waziristan Agency, by the Mullah Nazir faction of the Pakistani Taliban a week later warned health workers to stay away from polio vaccination campaigns or else face dire consequences. Using a similar argument against drones, the pamphlet said, “Polio and other foreign-funded vaccination drives in Wana subdivision would not be allowed until U.S. drone operations in the agency are stopped.”²⁸

During that time, U.S. drone attacks intensified on Taliban targets in North and South Waziristan and successfully killed many militant leaders including top al-Qa`ida operative Abu Yahya al-Libi at a hideout in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, in early June 2012.²⁹ These drone strikes, however, were not free from collateral damage and reportedly caused civilian casualties as well, which gave a further excuse to the Taliban to link the two issues.³⁰

26 Hafiz Gul Bahadur’s *fatwa* pamphlet, June 15, 2012.

27 Ibid.

28 “Another Militant Group Bans Polio Vaccination, Seeks End to Drone Strikes,” *Dawn*, June 25, 2012.

29 “Al Qaeda Confirms Death of Bin Laden Confidant Libi,” Reuters, September 11, 2012.

30 Even though the drone strikes killed senior al-Qa`ida

In contrast to the TTP’s position on the vaccination campaign, many influential Islamic clerics opposed the ban. In late October 2013, senior religious scholar Maulana Sami-ul-Haq, the head of the Dar-ul-Uloom-Haqqania Islamic seminary and chief of Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam-Sami (JUI-S) and considered to be a spiritual leader of the Taliban,³¹ issued a counter *fatwa* urging parents to immunize their children against polio and other fatal diseases such as measles, tetanus and tuberculosis. He further added that the vaccinations comply with Islamic Shari`a.³² A small Taliban off-shoot, Ansar-ul-Mujahidin, was quick to threaten both Sami-ul-Haq and politician Imran Khan for supporting Pakistan’s polio vaccination campaign.³³

Perhaps Sami-ul-Haq’s contentions, coupled with public support for immunization drives as well as sustained government efforts for the vaccination and health programs, forced the TTP leadership to change their position for now. In January 2014, they distanced themselves from some of the violent attacks on anti-polio health workers in Manshera and Karachi. TTP spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan said subsequently that in principle the TTP was not targeting polio workers, even though they have strong reservations against polio vaccines because they are un-Islamic and bad for health. He further added, “We have been holding detailed deliberations on the polio issue for some time and have been consulting trustworthy Muslim medical experts. Some of our doubts have been removed.”³⁴ Despite this claim, the grim situation prevailed as attacks continue against anti-polio personnel.

and Taliban militant leaders, the strikes have also caused civilian deaths and damaged property. For a detailed study, see Alice K. Ross and Jack Serle, “Drone Strikes in Pakistan: Most US Drone Strikes in Pakistan Attack Houses,” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, May 23, 2014; “Pakistan Furious as US Drone Strike Kills Civilians,” *Express Tribune*, March 18, 2011.

31 “Samiul Haq Believes Taliban are Patriots,” *Pakistan Today*, May 21, 2014.

32 “‘Father of Taliban’ Backs Polio Vaccines in Pakistan,” *Dawn*, December 10, 2013.

33 “Militants Warn Khan, Haq Against Polio Campaign,” *Newsweek*, December 19, 2013.

34 “Taliban’s Change of Heart on Polio Vaccination,” *Dawn*, January 22, 2014.

Conclusion

The Pakistani Taliban’s continued attempts to block polio vaccination through violence against health care workers, security escorts and other civilians in the tribal areas largely jeopardizes Pakistan’s effort for complete polio eradication. Many anti-polio volunteers have left the immunization campaign due to fear of the Taliban.³⁵ Even though the government engaged thousands of vaccinators, mostly women for door-to-door campaigns, and deployed security forces as escorts, past violent events have deterred many health workers.

Pakistan’s next vaccination campaign began on August 25, 2014, and it will focus on the obvious highest risk districts. Further anti-polio activities are planned for September and October. The militant hostility against the vaccination program demonstrates both the central and provincial governments’ failure to engage the Taliban leadership for a peaceful immunization campaign. It remains to be seen whether the Pakistani Taliban have had a true change of heart when it comes to the immunization campaign, or if they will continue their violent attacks throughout 2014.

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35 “Polio: 400 Volunteers Turn Back on Vaccination Drives,” *Express Tribune*, December 24, 2013.

The Death Knell for Foreign Fighters in Pakistan?

By Raza Khan

FOR THE PAST decade, the presence of foreign militant groups and fighters in Pakistan's border region with Afghanistan has been a key challenge to the security of the Pakistani state. These foreign fighters—primarily from Arab, Central Asian and European countries—established themselves in Pakistan after the ouster of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001.¹

Although U.S. drone strikes have inflicted heavy losses on foreign fighters in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), they remained an active fighting force due to the support and protection of local militant groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), as well due to the Pakistani military's prior reluctance to launch an operation in North Waziristan.² Yet on May 22, 2014, the Pakistani military began taking punitive action against militants in North Waziristan,³ killing 60 fighters in pre-dawn airstrikes and shelling by attack helicopters in Mir Ali and Land Mohammadkhel areas.⁴ Five days later, on May 27, infighting among factions in the TTP caused the group to split,⁵ with one faction rallying

behind TTP South Waziristan chief Khalid Mehsud (also known as Khan Said Sajna) and the other behind TTP leader Maulana Fazlullah.⁶ On June 15, Pakistan launched a full-scale military offensive in North Waziristan, titled Zarb-e-Azb,⁷ and reportedly involving 25,000-30,000 troops.⁸ Some analysts believe that these new developments—the split of the TTP and the ongoing Operation Zarb-e-Azb—will finally force the remaining foreign fighters out of Pakistan's tribal areas.

This article examines foreign fighters in FATA, particularly in North and South Waziristan. It also discusses the options for foreign fighters going forward in the face of an increasingly constrained operating environment. It finds that the remaining foreign fighters in Pakistan, who are thought to number in the hundreds, will likely be forced either across the border to Afghanistan, or to other jihadist conflicts such as in Syria and Iraq.

Background

After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, a number of foreign Islamist groups fled to Pakistan. These groups included the Chinese East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the German-Turkish Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and al-Qa`ida.⁹ The presence of these foreign fighters may have contributed to the rise of the Pakistani Taliban movement, which later coalesced into Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).¹⁰ According to Naila Aman Khan from the University of Peshawar,

the al-Qa`ida leadership in FATA provided isolated Pakistani Taliban groups the motivation,

strategy, militant training and finances to organize and launch the TTP. The purpose of the TTP was to stage large-scale terrorist attacks in Pakistan and support Afghan Taliban and surrogates fighting NATO forces in Afghanistan and cultivate al-Qa`ida's local support and acceptance.¹¹

In July 2008, the Pakistani government estimated the number of foreign fighters in FATA at 8,000.¹² Some of these foreign fighters proved instrumental in convincing Pakistani militants that the jihad was not confined to India or Afghanistan, but that the Pakistani government itself should be targeted.¹³

Since the formation of the TTP in 2007, Pakistan has suffered from constant domestic terrorist attacks, most of which were spearheaded by the TTP, its foreign affiliates such as the IMU, and sectarian jihadist outfits, such as Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. An estimated 50,000 Pakistanis have lost their lives due to jihadist attacks in Pakistan since 2001.¹⁴ Although Pakistani Taliban militants executed the bulk of these attacks, foreign fighters have been responsible for some of the most significant attacks in the region. For example, following the attack by Jordanian al-Qa`ida operative Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi on a Central Intelligence Agency post in Khost, Afghanistan, on December 31, 2009, a pre-recorded "martyrdom" video showed al-Balawi with the then head of the TTP, Hakimullah Mehsud. At one point, al-Balawi said in the video: "We will never forget the blood of our [TTP] *amir* Baitullah Mehsud, God's mercy upon him."¹⁵

1 Syed Arfeen, "Who are the Uzbeks Launching Terrorist Strikes in Pakistan?" *The News International*, June 15, 2014.

2 Pakistan's military previously claimed that an operation against militants in North Waziristan would be dangerous, as troops felt overstretched fighting militants along the 2,400-kilometer Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Independent analysts, however, long suspected that Pakistan's reluctance to conduct an offensive in North Waziristan stemmed from its alleged protection of the Haqqani network and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur-led Taliban faction. These groups have been dubbed the "Good Taliban" because they conduct attacks in Afghanistan, not in Pakistan. This stands in contrast to Pakistani Taliban groups responsible for terrorist attacks in Pakistan.

3 Chinese Uighur separatists seemed to be the apparent target of the Pakistani offensive after China's President Xi Jinping reportedly pressed Islamabad to take action against the separatists. See "Pakistan Pounds Insurgent Hideouts for Third Day," *Agence France-Presse*, May 24, 2014.

4 Mushtaq Yusufzai, "Military Launches Ground Operation in North Waziristan," *The News International*, May 23, 2014.

5 Zahir Shah Sherazi, "Key Pakistani Taliban Faction

Breaks Away," *Dawn*, May 28, 2014.

6 *Ibid.*

7 "Pakistan Launches 'Zarb-e-Azb' Military Operation in N Waziristan," *Dawn*, June 15, 2014. The offensive has resulted in the displacement of basically the entire population of North Waziristan, numbering more than 900,000 people.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Hamid Mir, "8,000 Foreign Fighters in Fata Ring Alarm Bells in Islamabad," *The News International*, July 21, 2008.

10 Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking Press, 2008).

11 Personal interview, Naila Aman Khan, a political sociologist working at the Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan, August 6, 2014.

12 Mir.

13 See, for example, Erich Marquardt and Abdul Hameed Bakier, "An Ideological and Operational Threat: Abu `Amr Shaykh `Isa," *CTC Sentinel* 1:8 (2008).

14 Shaun Waterman, "Heavy Price: Pakistan Says War on Terror has Cost Nearly 50,000 Lives There Since 9/11," *Washington Times*, March 27, 2013.

15 Paul Harris, "CIA Bomber's 'Martyrdom' Video Urges More US Attacks," *Observer*, January 9, 2010.

Yet the fate of foreign fighters is in the balance due to persistent U.S. drone strikes, Pakistan's large offensive in North Waziristan, and the May 2014 split in the TTP. The split in the TTP seems to have affected the relationship between the Fazlullah-led faction and the influential Haqqani network.¹⁶ According to Dr. Ashraf Ali, president of the FATA Research Centre in Islamabad, "we have not heard of any significant attacks inside Afghanistan jointly made by the Haqqanis and the Fazlullah-led TTP."¹⁷ Yet when Hakimullah led the TTP, the group launched a number of joint operations with the Haqqani network. Moreover, some suspect that Fazlullah is now operating with some level of support from Afghan intelligence, which, if true, would put him at odds with the Haqqani network.¹⁸ Regardless of the veracity of these allegations, Fazlullah does appear to be operating out of Afghanistan and seems to focus all of his attacks on Pakistan, which could complicate his relationship with more Afghan-focused Taliban factions.¹⁹ These tensions might escalate now that the Pakistani military has sent ground forces into North Waziristan. On the other hand, if Pakistan drives the Haqqani network into Afghanistan, and tries to prevent their return to the tribal areas, there is the possibility that the Haqqanis could turn against Pakistan.

According to journalist Mushtaq Yusufzai, who has covered the region since 2011,

Already the U.S. drones, financial problems, Pakistani military operations and precision air strikes caused serious problems for the foreign militants. Due to these compulsions, a large but unknown number of foreign fighters have abandoned the

¹⁶ Fazlullah has been aggressively anti-Pakistan since his expulsion from the country in 2009. The Haqqani network does not share that position, at least not to that extent. With Fazlullah assuming the mantle of the TTP leadership, there are likely to be increased disagreements between the TTP and the Haqqani network.

¹⁷ Personal interview, Dr. Ashraf Ali, president FATA Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan, August 14, 2014.

¹⁸ Yaroslav Trofimov, "Mullah Fazlullah's Rise Complicates Ties Between Kabul, Islamabad," *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2013.

¹⁹ Ibid.

region. The TTP split and Operation Zarb-e-Azb will inflict irreparable loss on the foreign fighters in Waziristan.²⁰

By early August 2014, Pakistani military authorities claimed to have killed more than 500 militants, mostly foreign fighters in North Waziristan, as part of the ongoing military operation.²¹

Exodus of Foreign Fighters in Pakistan

Options are limited for the remaining foreign fighters, who are thought to only number in the hundreds.²² They must either relocate to other parts of FATA, scatter across Pakistan, shift to Afghanistan, return to their countries of origin, or fight to the death. "They cannot stay in their places because the local support they have had from the TTP, Hafiz Gul Bahadur-led group and the Afghan Haqqani network is no longer there," said one political and security analyst based in Dera Ismail Khan.²³ Many of the foreign fighters had fled even before the start of Operation Zarb-e-Azb.²⁴ As the TTP network is not as elaborate or strong in the rest of the five agencies of FATA, and while Pakistani security forces have gradually restored a government presence there, it would be dangerous for foreign fighters to relocate to other parts of FATA.²⁵

Scattering across the length and breadth of Pakistan is a viable, but risky option.²⁶ In comparison to the remote and largely inaccessible tribal

²⁰ Personal interview, Mushtaq Yusufzai, Peshawar, Pakistan, June 9, 2014. Yusufzai has had face-to-face interviews with a large number of Pakistani and foreign militant organizations including with Siraj Haqqani, the head of the Afghan Haqqani network.

²¹ "Zarb-e-Azb: 30 More Terrorists Killed in Fresh Air Strikes," *The Nation*, August 5, 2014.

²² Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Uzbek Fighters Remain an 'Unknown Quantity' in Pakistan," Central Asia Online, February 2, 2010.

²³ Personal interview, Imran Wazir, a political and security analyst based in Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, Pakistan, June 17, 2014.

²⁴ Ismail Khan, "80 pc of Miramshah Cleared: Military," *Dawn*, July 10, 2014.

²⁵ Personal interview, Syed Shakeel Ahmed, lecturer of Political Science at Islamia College University, Peshawar, Pakistan, June 8, 2014. Ahmed is carrying out research on Arab fighters in Pakistan.

²⁶ Ibid.

areas, the Pakistani state has a strong presence in the rest of Pakistan. Militants could, however, try to establish sanctuaries in the sparsely populated province of Baluchistan²⁷ or could conceal themselves in major cities.²⁸

Fleeing to Afghanistan is the most practical option, considering that the United States is planning to withdraw its troops from the country this year. Moreover, TTP chief Fazlullah is reportedly operating from Afghan territory, and foreign fighters could seek refuge under him. Even cadre from the Haqqani network is thought to have moved operations across the border into Afghanistan in early June, shortly before the start of Operation Zarb-e-Azb on June 15.²⁹

According to Ijaz Khan, a professor of International Relations at the University of Peshawar, "The fleeing foreign militants could take advantage of the loopholes and lack of capacity of Afghanistan National Security Forces. In this scenario, the foreign militants could strengthen the Afghan Taliban."³⁰ The June 2014 security report of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) disclosed the significant presence of Chechen and Uzbek fighters in Afghanistan.³¹ According to Khan, "Once the foreign militants place themselves in a strategically located area, there could be more attacks on the U.S. and allied troops."³²

Indeed, after the planned U.S. withdrawal, both the Afghan Taliban and foreign fighters might escalate attacks to create an impression that they won the war.³³ According to the UNSC, al-

²⁷ Malik.

²⁸ Personal interview, Ijaz Khan, professor of International Relations at the University of Peshawar, Pakistan, June 13, 2014.

²⁹ Haqqani network cadre also reportedly moved further north in Pakistan. See Saeed Shah, Safdar Dawar and Adam Entous, "Militants Slip Away Before Pakistan Offensive," *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Al Qaeda Affiliates a Long-Term Threat in Afghanistan: UNSC," *The News International*, June 14, 2014.

³² Personal interview, Ijaz Khan, professor of International Relations at the University of Peshawar, Pakistan, June 13, 2014.

³³ Personal interview, Syed Shakeel Ahmed, lecturer of

Qa`ida affiliates, “therefore, present a worrying, long-term security threat emanating from Afghanistan into the region and beyond.”³⁴ Large-scale Afghan Taliban attacks after the launch of Operation Zarb-e-Azb might indicate that fighters from Pakistan have augmented the ranks of Afghan insurgents.³⁵

Returning to their home countries would be nearly impossible for the remaining foreign fighters. According to Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Those who could have done so, already have.”³⁶ Most of these include Arab al-Qa`ida fighters who went to Yemen and Egypt as well as other battlefronts in the Middle East or North Africa.³⁷ The Arab fighters were able to return when pressure mounted in Pakistan because of the relatively open routes to their countries. The lack of viable return routes and repressive governments back home prevent Uzbek, Chinese and Chechen militants from returning.³⁸ It is possible that more foreign fighters may go to the Syrian war theater where Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are fighting against the Bashar al-Assad regime. “Syria is a natural destination for fleeing al-Qa`ida and associated group militants, as Operation Zarb-e-Azb has made conditions worse, which were already extremely difficult due to US drone attacks,” said Imran Wazir.³⁹ Indeed, U.S. intelligence indicated a flow of fighters from Pakistan to the Syrian war theater in March 2014.⁴⁰

Political Science at Islamia College University, Peshawar, Pakistan, June 8, 2014.

34 “Al Qaeda Affiliates a Long-Term Threat in Afghanistan: UNSC.”

35 Sami Yousafzai, “Kabul Airport Attack Comes as Pakistani Fighters Join Afghan Taliban,” *Daily Beast*, July 17, 2014.

36 Personal interview, Mushtaq Yusufzai, Peshawar, Pakistan, June 9, 2014.

37 Ibid.

38 Uzbekistan borders Afghanistan and not Pakistan, and the militants would have to travel across Afghanistan, mostly through Northern Alliance areas, to reach Uzbekistan, which would be risky. Also, the draconian regimes of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, the Communist Party of China and iron-fisted administration of Russian leader Vladimir Putin have little tolerance for foreign trained jihadists.

39 Personal interview, Imran Wazir, a political and security analyst based in Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, Pakistan, June 17, 2014.

40 Eric Schmitt, “Qaeda Militants Seek Syria Base, U.S.

The reluctance and inability of foreign militants and terrorists in Pakistan to return to their home countries is a serious concern for Pakistani and Afghan security forces, as it suggests they might fight to the death. The IMU claimed the attack on Karachi Airport in the second week of June 2014, and the attack could be interpreted as an attempt by foreign fighters to warn the Pakistani government that offensives in the tribal areas will be met by terrorist attacks on vulnerable targets in Pakistan.⁴¹ Nevertheless, there has not yet been an increase in attacks in Pakistan since the start of Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

Conclusion

Due to the TTP split, as well as the massive offensive undertaken by the Pakistani military in North Waziristan, foreign fighters in Pakistan are under severe pressure. It is possible that a large number of foreign fighters have found new sanctuaries in Afghanistan, which could result in either aggressive cross-border attacks against vulnerable targets in Pakistan, or more spectacular attacks in Afghanistan as the United States prepares to withdraw its forces from the country.

Nevertheless, the number of foreign fighters has greatly diminished over the years. U.S. drone strikes have whittled away their ranks, and the changing nature of the global landscape appears to have caused many of these fighters to join jihadist conflicts elsewhere, such as in North Africa,⁴² or in Syria and Iraq.

Dr. Raza Khan is a political analyst and independent researcher, who holds a doctorate degree in International Relations. The topic of his doctoral dissertation was “Extremism-Terrorism in the Name of Islam in Pakistan: Causes & Counterstrategy.” He specializes in the areas of radicalization, terrorism, governance and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

Officials Say,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2014; Zia Ur Rehman, “Pakistani Fighters Joining the War in Syria,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:9 (2013).

41 “Uzbek Militant Group IMU Claims Involvement in Karachi Airport Assault,” Associated Press, June 11, 2014.

42 Jason Burke, “Al-Qaida Leadership Almost Wiped Out in Pakistan, British Officials Believe,” *Guardian*, December 25, 2011.

Recent Highlights in Political Violence

July 2, 2014 (GLOBAL): Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a key Jordanian jihadist ideologue, denounced the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’s declaration of a caliphate. – *AFP, July 16*

July 2, 2014 (UNITED STATES): U.S. authorities arrested Adam Dandach at Orange County’s John Wayne Airport, as the suspect allegedly told federal agents that he was trying to reach Syria to help the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Dandach, also known as Fadi Fadi Dandach, also allegedly said that the killing of U.S. soldiers is justified. – *Los Angeles Times, July 18*

July 2, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on foot attacked an Afghan air force bus in Kabul, killing eight military personnel. – *Los Angeles Times, July 2*

July 3, 2014 (SYRIA): The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant seized control of Syria’s largest oil field, al-Omar, from Jabhat al-Nusra. Jabhat al-Nusra took control of the field in November 2013, and claimed to be producing around 10,000 barrels of oil per day. – *Reuters, July 3*

July 4, 2014 (IRAQ): The leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, purportedly led prayers at Mosul’s Great Mosque, according to video footage. According to the *Telegraph*, “The notoriously secretive jihadi, who has never before been seen in public, chose the first Friday prayer service of Ramadan to make an audacious display of power in the city that the Sunni Islamists have now controlled for three weeks.” – *Telegraph, July 5*

July 4, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants set fire to dozens of fuel trucks on the outskirts of Kabul, claiming that the trucks were used to supply foreign troops in Afghanistan. – *news.com.au, July 5*

July 4, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed two people near a mosque in the Saddar area of Karachi. – *Pakistan Today, July 4*

July 5, 2014 (SOMALIA): An al-Shabab suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed at least five people outside the parliament building in Mogadishu. - *Voice of America, July 5*

July 7, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): The Afghan Taliban announced a ban on polio vaccinations in Helmand Province, accusing the health workers of spying. - *Wall Street Journal, July 7*

July 8, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 16 people, including four Czech soldiers, in an attack near a clinic in Parwan Province. - *AP, July 8*

July 8, 2014 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab militants fought their way into the presidential palace in Mogadishu, exchanging gunfire with Somali troops inside. The fighting inside the heavily-fortified compound lasted for at least two hours before the Somali government said that the area was secure. - *AP, July 8*

July 9, 2014 (GLOBAL): U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel warned that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) should not be underestimated. According to Hagel, ISIL is a serious threat to the United States. "This is a force that is sophisticated," he said. "It's dynamic. It's organized. It's well financed. It's competent." - *Voice of America, July 9*

July 9, 2014 (FRANCE): According to a report in *Le Parisien*, an Algerian citizen living in France, who was in contact with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), suggested attacking the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower and a nuclear plant in France. French security services disrupted the plot, and arrested the French resident, after decrypting messages passed between the two on the Shumukh al-Islam forum. - *RT, July 10*

July 10, 2014 (UNITED STATES): Gufran Ahmed Kauser Mohammed, a naturalized U.S. citizen who once lived in California, faces up to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to providing material support to al-Shabab and Jabhat al-Nusra. Mohammed, as well as co-defendant Mohamed Hussein Said, was charged

with conspiring to provide a combined total of \$25,000 to terrorist groups. The two were arrested in Saudi Arabia and brought back to Miami for trial. - *Miami Herald, July 11*

July 11, 2014 (SYRIA): Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Syria, said that it is establishing an Islamic emirate in the rebel-held parts of Aleppo. - *McClatchy Newspapers, July 12*

July 12, 2014 (MALAYSIA): Eight gunmen in military fatigues attacked the Mabul Water Bungalows Resort at Mabul Island, a diving haven popular with Westerners. One police officer was killed in the attack, but no tourists were injured. The militants approached the luxury resort by boat. Authorities suspect that the Abu Sayyaf Group was responsible. - *Huffington Post, July 13; Free Malaysia Today, July 13*

July 13, 2014 (NIGERIA): In a new video, Boko Haram chief Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for two attacks that occurred on June 25, one of which was a bombing in Lagos. Nigerian authorities previously said that the explosion in Lagos was a result of a cooking gas explosion, but Shekau accused them of trying to cover up the attack. In the video, Shekau also expressed support for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. - *AFP, July 13*

July 14, 2014 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) released a statement rejecting the caliphate that was established by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Confirming its allegiance to al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, AQIM criticized ISIL for failing to consult with jihadist leaders before declaring the caliphate. - *Reuters, July 14*

July 14, 2014 (SYRIA): The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) expelled rival rebel groups from Deir al-Zour, including Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "the Islamic State [ISIL] is now in control of the entire Deir al-Zour Province apart from a few areas and the military airport that the government is in control of." - *Reuters, July 14*

July 14, 2014 (MALI): A suicide bomber killed a French soldier in Gao, northern Mali. It marked the ninth death of a French Foreign Legion soldier since the French intervened in Mali to halt the advance of al-Qa`ida-linked militants in January 2013. - *Reuters, July 15*

July 15, 2014 (GLOBAL): The U.S. State Department added a Norwegian citizen, who was allegedly trained as a bombmaker by al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), to its list of designated terrorists. Anders Cameroon Ostensvig Dale traveled to Yemen in 2008, where he was trained by AQAP to "make bomb-belts, improvised explosive devices, and larger explosives used in car bombs." - *ABC News, July 15*

July 15, 2014 (GLOBAL): Jordanian cleric Abu Qatada, who is being tried on terrorism charges in Jordan, said that the "announcement of a caliphate by the Islamic State [ISIL] is void and meaningless because it was not approved by jihadists in other parts of the world...This group does not have the authority to rule all Muslims and their declaration applies to no one but themselves." - *AFP, July 16*

July 15, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed at least 89 people near a busy market and a mosque in Paktika Province. It marked the deadliest insurgent attack on civilians since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. - *AP, July 15*

July 15, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed two employees from the Afghan presidential palace in Kabul. - *Guardian, July 15*

July 15, 2014 (CAMEROON): Suspected Boko Haram gunmen kidnapped two teenage sons of one of Cameroon's most influential Muslim clerics, Bieshair Mohaman. The children were abducted from Limani, a town that borders Nigeria's Borno State. - *Voice of America, July 15*

July 17, 2014 (IRAQ): An 18-year-old Australian suicide bomber killed three people outside a Shi`a mosque in downtown Baghdad. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility. The Australian

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

government said that the bomber was from Melbourne. – *Reuters, July 17; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, July 21*

July 18, 2014 (KENYA): Al-Shabab stopped a bus and sprayed its passengers with bullets, killing seven people. The incident occurred near Witu in Lamu County, which is near Kenya's coast. – *al-Jazeera, July 19*

July 19, 2014 (IRAQ): Four car bombs exploded simultaneously in Baghdad's Abu Dsheer, al-Baya, al-Jihad and Hurriya neighborhoods, killing at least 12 people. – *al-Arabiya, July 19*

July 19, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A U.S. drone reportedly killed four Taliban fighters in Kunar Province. – *The News International, July 20*

July 19, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone reportedly killed 11 Punjabi Taliban militants at a compound in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Daily Times, July 20*

July 22, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorbike killed at least four foreigners inside a compound in Kabul. – *AFP, July 22*

July 22, 2014 (LIBYA): A double suicide bombing on a military base in Benghazi killed at least four Libyan soldiers. – *AFP, July 22*

July 22, 2014 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula announced that it is preparing to establish an Islamic emirate in eastern Hadramawt Province. On July 11, Jabhat al-Nusra, another al-Qa`ida affiliate, said that it was establishing an Islamic emirate in the rebel-held parts of Aleppo in Syria. – *Voice of America, July 22*

July 22, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed at least 21 people in Baghdad. – *BBC, July 22*

July 23, 2014 (UNITED STATES): U.S. prosecutors charged two women in the United States with funneling money to al-Shabab in Somalia. Muna Osman Jama, of Reston, VA, and Hinda Osman Dhirane of Kent, WA, were charged with 20 counts each of providing material support to a foreign terrorist group. – *AP, July 25*

July 26, 2014 (UNITED STATES/SYRIA): Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Syria, released a video of an American suicide bomber who blew himself up at a Syrian army post in May 2014. The man, Moner Mohammad Abu Salha, is believed to be the first U.S. national to conduct a suicide bombing in Syria. It was also revealed that after training with Jabhat al-Nusra, Salha returned to the United States for months before traveling back to Syria to conduct his suicide attack. – *al-Arabiya, July 26; ABC News, July 31*

July 29, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber assassinated Hashmat Khalil Karzai, the politically influential cousin of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The explosives were hidden in the bomber's cap. – *Los Angeles Times, July 29*